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The Female Nude's Relationship with Feminist Art and Criticism: From Second Wave to Para-Feminism

Synopsis

This dissertation asks: Have the criticisms surrounding 70s feminist art negatively impacted contemporary female artists' approaches when engaging with the female nude? Chapter one draws upon key writings by Lynda Nead, Linda Nochlin, Whitney Chadwick and Hilary Robinson to examine criticisms of a range of artworks that provoked a strong feminist reaction during the period of second wave feminism, primarily focusing on the work of Hannah Wilke. In doing so an overview of the social and political agendas behind female artists' work dealing with the nude during the feminist era of the 70s is provided. This creates a context for Chapter two in which to explore the various relationships contemporary female artists have to the category of feminist art, focusing on artists Vanessa Beecroft, Cecily Brown and Pipilotti Rist. The first two case studies analyse selected works which reveal the problematic 'post-feminist' rhetoric in which the rejection of feminism is deemed necessary in the creation of 'successful' art. Discussed in parallel with key texts by Ariel Levy and Amelia Jones, it is revealed how feminist content, including emotion are often side-lined in favour of masculinist objective readings. The main concern of this dissertation is to uncover the problematic nature of combining theory and practice when depicting the nude, and conclusively proposes that, despite these issues, a continual engagement and development of feminist theory (defined as 'para-feminism') is necessary for contemporary female artists such as Pipilotti Rist to positively contextualise their work in a clear and unrestrictive manner.

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Introduction

This dissertation examines whether or not feminist criticisms surrounding female artists' depictions of the female nude during the 1970s Women's liberation movement have negatively influenced contemporary female artists' approach to the nude. By discussing prominent 70s feminist artist Hannah Wilke and in particular her examples of body art, supplemented with examples of work by her counterparts within the movement, the first objective of this dissertation is to explore how feminist criticisms have overridden the subjectivity of certain 70s feminist artworks. The Women's Movement created a contested territory, where it was difficult for women artists to negotiate their own practice in relation to the burdens of feminist theory, which arguably, has resulted in a level of avoidance of an involvement with it by contemporary female artists. Have the rigorous concepts and conflicting opinions within feminist theory regarding how the nude should be presented in art, dominated over the positive aspects of 70s feminist art, such as the subversion of objective 'feminine' stereotypes through reclamations of the female body? If this is the case, has feminist theoretical criticism gone against its own ideals by attacking women artists' practice and subject matter, resulting in a situation where contemporary female artists seek liberation by embracing a 'post-feminist' approach? An analysis of the correlation between female artists depicting the nude and existing theoretical literature surrounding the topic is imperative to my own studio practice as a contemporary female artist exploring themes of the female body in my work.

Included is a discussion of the historical significance of the representation of the nude by female artists in the 70s and why the subject matter became so prominent socially and politically. During the era of second wave feminism, ways in which female artists were able to make work were revolutionised. Notions of a patriarchal cultural framework designed to favour male dominated concepts of aesthetic value were being challenged. Women artists shifted the purpose of the nude in art by simultaneously liberating the female body whilst making audiences aware of the cultural prejudices and identities projected onto it. To introduce the precarious nature of female artists' position as both subject and object I will refer to Laura Mulvey's well-known essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' (written in 1973 and published in 1975), in which she explains the cultural construction of gender in relation to the Male Gaze. Art historian and scholar Whitney Chadwick questions how female artists are supposed to renegotiate their own overlooked emotional subjectivity when the work is only recognised for its feminist and political overtones:

> [T]o identify woman as a subject of representation and not as an object of representation is a long and difficult process; to renegotiate cultural paradigms is often perceived as threatening by the dominant cultural group. Appropriating codes which have great social power, deconstructing them to expose their inconsistencies and ideology, using fragments and refusing wholeness, artists reveal the ways that codes of meaning are entrenched in the dominant culture.[1]

To gain a further understanding of related concepts, I will explore how the construction of general feminist art theory ultimately seeks to enlighten and provide a feminist context in which a female artist's work can exist, referring to key texts by feminist theorists: Griselda Pollock, Judith Butler, Hilary Robinson, Lynda Nead and Linda Nochlin and Rosemary Betterton. However, the main parameters of my discussion lie in what happens when ideologies between these different theories clash and the impact this can have on the artist's subject matter 'doing justice' to the movement. Through a discussion of Hannah Wilke, and the varying criticisms of her work, I will highlight the inconsistencies contained within feminist criticisms: some argue that her work is exploitative and narcissistic whereas others deem her own subjectivity necessary for the work's success. The extensive and varying feminist reactions evoked by Hannah Wilke's work are crucial to the feminist art discussion surrounding the nude and the prospect of creating a new female visual language.

This raises questions about the contentions of the nude: Are a younger generation of female artists simply regurgitating previous concepts from the 70s because they have been denied knowledge of this movement, or because some of the same issues are still as relevant today? My proposal is both, but more prominently the latter. If this is the case, it is important to question: if today's female artists approach the subject matter differently from those in the 70s, is it due to the implications of feminist theory? As a practicing artist attempting to implement an effective feminist approach in engaging with the female body it is crucial to ask: has the problematic nature of the way feminist theory appears to confuse image with content had a negative implication on the way female artists now approach the female nude?

In relation to key texts by Ameila Jones and Ariel Levy, I will discuss how the problematic term 'post-feminism' has been embraced by contemporary female artists Vanessa Beecroft and Cecily Brown and if this is due to the fact that 'feminist art' as a category has lacked visibility in a universally male dominated 'universal' culture, which still controls how images are interpreted. Both artists attempt to bypass the gender-based subordination which affixes the term 'woman' before 'artist' through their depictions of the female nude. However, are their attempts to 'make it in a man's world,' overcoming or simply reiterating their partiality *within* it? If a continual subservience to the 'male' is

[1] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990) p.365.

the case, is this due to the prefix 'post' which implies that feminist politics is an outmoded phenomenon, despite feminism's ultimate goal of allowing women their own subjectivity?[2] Outlined is that a new feminist position needs to come into articulation in a contemporary setting in order to advance its discussions. This will be considered in relation to Amelia Jones's concept of 'para-feminism' and in parallel with the artwork of Pipilotti Rist, which attempts to restructure perspectives of the female body.

1. The Female Nude in Feminist Art Theory and Practice

1.1 Historical Overview

Western fine art practice has predominantly existed in a patriarchal framework in which the male artist enjoys a dominant position in relation to both the production and consumption of fine art. The female nude has held a central position as subject matter and subsequently has existed in the confines of this cultural sphere. In highly regarded artworks such as Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1486) to Cézanne's *The Large Bathers* (1906), the female nude has served as a symbolic object to be viewed and enjoyed by the spectator. Thus it is not surprising that the 1970s Second Wave Feminist Liberation Movement provoked new examinations into how the nude has so far been perceived in western art, or more importantly, the supposed lack of women artists depicting it. This is not to say that prior to the 1970s women were completely inactive in art-making, or in depicting the nude. However, it was the 70s protests against what the historical preference towards, what Whitney Chadwick refers to as 'heroic' male art which has led to its significance.[3]

A factor partially responsible for the male dominant production of art is the existence of educational art institutions within a value system which sustained the notion of sexual difference and held an attitude that gender constitutes ability. Therefore the value of artworks was defined based on which gender produced it. In *Framing Feminism,* Griselda Pollock discusses how 70s feminist artists sought to challenge the problematic gender inequalities engrained in the way several different types of art institutions such as museums, galleries and universities functioned, as well as orthodox ideas about

[2] Amelia Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.209. Amelia Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, eds. Malin Hedlin Hayden, Jessica Sjoholm Skrubbe (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010) p.14.
[3] Chadwick, p.8.

what makes 'great' artists and art.[4] These ideas are reinforced in Linda Nochlin's 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971) in which she argues that women's lack of cultural visibility should not be equated to any difference in capability in the production of art but rather the lack of equal academic opportunities available to women.[5]

Prior to the beginning of the 20th century, women's access to the life room was severely restricted within educational establishments, despite the study of the female nude being a crucial component in academic art training from the 16th century onwards.[6] Even if a woman had managed to place herself in art education along with her male peers, her gender was restrictive in denying her access to the most highly regarded type of subject matter.[7] Arguably, during the 19th century when women gained equal access to the life room, the nude still proved a very academic and objective study rather than the uninhibited exploration of self and of gender issues which came about during the 1970s: intrinsic to my investigation is this altered approach towards the female nude.

In the early stages of the Women's Movement, the overlying agenda was to unearth all of the 'forgotten' female artists who had managed to practice despite these difficulties; granting them the recognition they felt had been lost in the realms of a male dominated art history. The investigations pointed towards the fact that uncovering these works could prove valuable to the discussion and production of women's art now. Inevitably this brought about the question of there being an 'underlying feminine aesthetic,' such as 'core imagery'[8] which could present a link between female artists, and consciously be applied by contemporary female artists wishing to celebrate womanhood.[9]

However, these ideologies arose from the dominant voice of a predominantly middle class feminist group, which created the issue of simply herding all women artists into the same league, overlooking the numerous historical, social and personal differences in which the artwork had been produced. This form of stereotyping only reinforced the art historical habit of "filing women's art away under the denigrated category 'women artists'." [10] Also problematic was the ideology that these works with their new feminist overtones could simply be re-integrated into the existing structure of

[4] Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism* (London: Pandora, 1987) xiii.
[5] Linda Nochlin 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) pp. 147-158
[6] Chadwick, p.33.
[7] Ibid., p.33.
[8] See pp., 17 -18 in Contextual Overview
[9] Pollock, p.82.
[10] Ibid., p.62

general art history, back into the canon which has previously excluded women's art from cultural importance.[11]

With the simple feminist ambition for equal rights for the sexes, The Women's Liberation Movement was a time when activists campaigned for positive changes to end gender discrimination. The shifting social and political climate brought feminist concerns into the public eye and allowed women the freedom to express themselves in the arts, some engaging with subject matters considered 'taboo' surrounding the female body such as menstruation, masturbation and childbirth.[12] In *Tied-Up Woman* (1973), Ana Mendieta used her own body as a performance tool to depict the restrictive position of the female body in society.[13] This encapsulates the significance of female artists addressing gender specific issues directly with their own bodies in order to create an accessible and universal female experience. An autobiographical transposition from body to artwork caused a major shift in the appearance of visual art,[14] and was intrinsic to the reclamation of the female body and sexuality, both of which have been repressed in western culture and in western art as a result. The inequality and control of women under patriarchy has existed in parallel with male artists' domineering use of the idealised female nude as a subject matter. [15]

An investigation into the theories of the 1970s was and is crucial for contemporary female artists to be able to position themselves within the parameters of a previously male dominated field. At the time, many of the artworks were being produced both in light of and in response to feminist theory; therefore they often became highly political and debated sources of feminist visual imagery. They fuelled discussion about the complexities surrounding attempts by female artists to renegotiate their position within a patriarchal structure favouring an already accepted male intellectual supremacy. The ideal effect of this would be that it would allow for contemporary female artists to better position themselves when depicting the nude, however it has resulted in the nude becoming highly contested territory when it comes to selecting 'appropriate' imagery and relating theory to practice.

[11] Chadwick, p.12.
[12] Cornelia Butler, *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Calf.: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007) pp., 292-325.
[13] Gloria Moure, ed., *Ana Mendieta* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1996) p.34
[14] Pollock, p.3.
[15] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) p6.

1.2 Contextual Overview

One of the key feminist ideas discussed both during the period of the Women's Liberation Movement and in the years preceding it is the notion that gender exists as a cultural construction. The eminently influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' by Laura Mulvey provides a reference point for numerous feminist art writers when discussing the issues surrounding the objectification of the female nude as well as women as both subject and object. Based on an analysis on the structure of film, Mulvey highlights the importance of psychoanalytic theory for drawing attention to the ways in which gender and sexuality in culture are socially constructed, so other feminists can begin to "fight the unconscious structured like a language (formed critically at the moment of arrival of language) while still caught in the language of the patriarchy."[16] Integral to her discussion is the phallus as a symbol of power and domination, denoting all the typically 'masculine' qualities which structure society, such as language, law and rational thinking. The phallus is embodied physically in the form of a penis, thus the fact that women don't possess one means they exist as a literal inverse to men; exhibiting opposing 'feminine' attributes such as emotion and irrationality. The idea of the castrated woman proves problematic not only in that she functions as an archetype of sexual difference, threatening the male symbolic structure in which she exists, but also in her confinement to the 'negative' rather than the 'positive' pole of the binary pair. [17]

Concepts of constructionism and the perceived 'lack' of the female figure are also contained within Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex.* Beauvoir's main concern is that the 'outwardness' of the male, epitomized as whole, essential and universal, contrasts with the 'inwardness' of the female and thus her incomplete, inessential subordination.

This gendered structure is the foundation from which Mulvey discusses the formation of the predominant Male Gaze. Drawing from Lacan's 'Mirror stage'[18] Mulvey discusses the split nature of viewing in which the ego's idealistic misrecognitions overwrite reality, creating a paradox between a real and perceived sense of self. These inconsistencies can be linked with Beauvoir's observation that characteristics of gender and 'femininity' are not linked to anatomy, but to the influence of the

[16] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* by Laura Mulvey (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1989) p15
[17] Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) p.28.
[18] The 'mirror stage' is the moment in which a child recognises their own image, resulting in the constitution of the ego, when physical ambition begins to outweigh motor capacity. In Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* by Laura Mulvey, p18.

surrounding environment by which ideals are imposed onto the individual. [19] It is this "socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images,"[20] transforming 'woman' into an icon to be displayed and viewed pleasurably.

Problematic is that despite men being the 'active controllers of the look', the figure itself still "always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified."[21] Thus the idealistic qualities fabricated by the male gaze are mismatched with the 'inferior' reality of femininity. However, Mulvey acknowledges that society in its current phallocentric, law-and-order promoting form, relies on the image of the castrated woman to function. This symbolic order continues to control viewing pleasure, splitting it between active male and passive female, but this perception only exists because: "representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth."[22]

It is obvious that the Male Gaze is a dominant force which controls how images of women are perceived. The split nature of women's self-perception lies in the fact that they see themselves through the Gaze's idealisations of gender. Thus, physical attributes of 'femininity' are taken up by women; making them self-reflective and extremely image conscious, creating a paradox between the reality and performance of self. As John Berger famously stated:

> Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[23]

This is applicable not only to how women are presented and perceived *within* art but also reinforces the idea previously suggested by Chadwick that the traditional focus has not been on women as makers but as subjects of art. [24] Thus women have had to find ways to appreciate historical artworks despite their exclusion of female perspectives, because they are lead to believe that questioning their objectives would be to undermine their great significance:[25]

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[19] Beauvoir's quote "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" emphasises this point. Contained within Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminism Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1985) p.65
[20] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* by Laura Mulvey, p.19.
[21] Ibid., p.21.
[22] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997) p.161
[23] John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p.35
[24] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* by Laura Mulvey, p.15. Chadwick, p.33.
[25] Rosemary Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Hilary Robinson ed. (London: Camden, 1987) p.252. Nochlin, p.29.

> [I]n a patriarchal culture it is clearly the case that women are forced to adopt a masculine viewpoint in the production and consumption of images far more often than men are required to adopt a feminine one.[26]

In her essay 'How Do Women Look,' feminist writer Rosemary Betterton brings up the extremely valid point that, although Mulvey provides a basis from which to begin understanding the spectatorship of women, it is a dedication to describing the confines of the Male Gaze in which women are trapped. Thus is there any means by which women presenting the nude can break out of "a structure of gendered looking"?[27]

Suggested is that the male bias binary system from which psychoanalytic theory arises is in itself phallocentric and assumes hierarchy when placing woman as 'other' in relation to man, which reinstates their oppressed position. [28] In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray discusses the implications of this in comprehending womanhood and its inability to articulate a detached or specifically female discourse. [29] In opposition to Mulvey, Irigaray argues that examining the tools of patriarchy only enforces, rather than subverts, what is already the problem.[30] Irigaray suggests that the only means of breaking out of oppression is to employ new, female methods of articulation in order to overthrow the already male dominated structure of language (which of course regulates the way in which women's art is analysed), her rationale being that "exploitation of women is based upon sexual difference and can only be resolved through sexual difference." [31]

In response to the restrictive nature of voyeurism, the overlying objective for many women artists during the Women's Movement was to provide a more positive, less fetishized version of the female nude in an attempt to break it out of oppression.[32] Integral to my contextual overview is an analysis of feminist artist Hannah Wilke, who used her own nude as an artistic medium to question the contradiction between society's portrayals of ideal femininity versus its lived reality. It is her inextricable association with the movement which links her to some of the key feminist theory surrounding the 70's. Despite her work being quintessentially second wave, its imagery created a

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[26] Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Robinson ed. p.257.
[27] Ibid., p.252
[28] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell U.P., 1985) p.69.
[29] A literal example being Freud's description of the clitoris as a small penis. Ibid., pp., 34-35.
[30] This oppositional viewpoint is also demonstrated by Lucy Lippard when she asks: "How much by simply opposing something do you end up being defined by it?" Lucy Lippard in conversation with Margaret Harrison, in 'Feminist Issues in Contemporary Art' Audio Arts Magazine, Vol 4 No1, (1978) URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-4/number-1> [Accessed: 15 February 2016]
[31] Luce Irigaray, 'Equal or Different', in *The Irigaray Reader,* ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p.32.
[32]Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Robinson ed. p.251.

highly contested feminist debate, and suddenly personal endeavours became political ones. One of her most prominent works, *S.O.S – Starification Object Series* (1975), consists of Wilke acting out the poses of a glamour model, having stuck numerous vulvic forms made out of chewing gum to her naked body to symbolise the degradation of women within commodity culture. Relating to Irigaray, Wilke sought to create a uniquely feminine artistic language:[33] "I used that which recreates life, the vagina, as a source and symbol rather than a joke. Nobody cringes when they hear the word phallic."[34] However, Wilke was subjected to feminist criticisms. Suspicious of her supposed narcissism, Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman dismiss Wilke's objectification of herself, stating that: "in assuming the conventions associated with a stripper… Wilke… does not make her own position clear… It seems her work ends up reinforcing what it intends to subvert."[35]

Thus it was argued that certain methods of representation would simply place the female nude back in the restrictive position in which it already existed. Mulvey notes that:

> Feminist aesthetic theory became, itself, fascinated by the image and by analysing the image, turning away from the problems of the real, influenced both by the impact of semiotics on contemporary culture and the revulsion against realism that characterised in the late 1960s and 1970s.[36]

Therefore a conflict was created in which a female subjectivity has been eradicated in favour of the encompassing male gaze: "A feminist critique of the nude has focussed upon analysis of the ways in which the act of viewing itself reinstates male power."[37] It has therefore been problematic for feminist theorists to support the production of the female nude within feminist art, due to an understanding that so far, the language by which to read the female nude is weighted with male values,[38] meaning that it may not be read in any other than a male context. However, it is counterproductive to base feminist criticism on a wariness of pre-existing structures of representation over subjectivity when analysing a feminist artwork due to the fact that the nude *has* now been given a voice by the artist. [39]

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[33] Hannah Wilke, *A Retrospective* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1989) p.46.
[34] 'Hannah Wilke', The New Common Good Magazine, Issue 11 taken from the MAKE archive.
[35] Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing The Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) p.172.
[36] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* ((London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1989) xxii
[37] Ibid., p.252.
[38] Rose Garrard in conversation with Marion Roberts (of Birmingham Post) (1984) URL: <http://www.rosegarrard.com/vaso_di_pandora.html> [accessed: 23rd January 2016]

[39] Lynda Nead, 'Framing The Female Body' in *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality,* p.6.

Wilke, as well as numerous other female artists, endeavoured to modify approaches to representation by refusing to simply copy methods of art production which had previously been deemed 'successful,' but which had also restricted women's perspicacity. Turning to innovative mediums such as photography, photomontage and performance, was a means of calling into question the social construction of gender whilst bringing self-indicant ideas of femininity into the artwork.[40] Most significantly it was argued that women's performance art, such as Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975) succeeded in subverting the male gaze because it existed 'in the moment,' and broke away from idealised 'whole' depictions of the body by infiltrating the barrier between the internal and external body. This presentation of the female body in an interchangeable new state is what was said to prevent its fetishisation.[41]

If this is the case and performance is the only method by which to successfully bypass issues of voyeurism, female artists would be severely limited when wishing to explore other art forms. What about performances which are documented through photography, such as S.O.S? Does this change of medium revert the work back into object(s) subjected to fetishisation and perverse acts of spectatorship prominent in traditional art forms such as painting or sculpture, where "the viewer is able to relish the object at his chosen speed, to carry out repeated examinations and viewing positions?"[42] Feminist theory can then potentially repress women artists using other art forms such as painting or sculpture to depict the nude: the opinion of them being objectifying methods contradicts the artist's will, which she should be able to follow in a feminist context.

This created a division in women's approaches to art-making. Silvia Bovenschen suggests that as a female artist, your first option is to attempt to 'make it in a man's world' but in doing so, turn your back on the wider issue that women are unequally represented due to their gender. To deny elements of your own identity by muting any imagery suggestive of a 'passive' female experience is repressive, but also the only way to be understood and accepted by a masculine viewpoint. Contesting this, it is possible to explore a specific 'femaleness,' but only with the acceptance that your efforts may be overruled by the male gaze and the imagery may yet again fall under the control of patriarchy, resulting in re-objectification and conformation to the male version of the female nude.[43] Many criticisms of Hannah Wilke rely on this argument to prove that the work is degrading,

[40] Nochlin, p.29.
[41] Nead, pp., 69-70.
[42] Ibid., p.68.
[43] Silvia Bovenschen, 'Is There A Feminine Aesthetic?' (1976) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Hilary Robinson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) p.302. This idea is also vigorously reinforced throughout Judy Chicago, *Through The Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (London: The Women's Press, 1982)

often attacking the use of her naturally beautiful body in reinforcing unrealistic ideals. Roberta Smith dismisses her work on the basis that it is "little more than the artists enthusiastic exploitation of her own dark haired good looks."[44] However, surely the notion that Wilke is 'too beautiful' can be equated with the fact that the views of these critics have been constructed through the Male Gaze, which fetishizes the female body. Proven then is how simplistic these criticisms are due to the fact that, as previously suggested by Betterton, women often have to adopt a masculine viewpoint in the production and consumption of images, which shows that they are capable of oscillating between a male and female perspective. If Wilke is able to acknowledge the difference between being purely an object of vision and an object of her own experience, so should her female spectators.

Neither Wilke nor her counterparts incorporated the nude into their work as a passive object of heterosexual male fantasy; instead it was to bring attention to women's split subjectivity and allow for a direct, *female* response to being both surveyor and surveyed. This kind of autobiographical intervention, previously denied to women, cannot be equated to masculine ways of looking. Furthermore, to state that Wilke's work is purely narcissistic is to deny her any means by which to positively relate to her own image, despite the ideals and degradations society has imposed onto her female body. The 'female look' or gaze which Wilke hints at through her work, though deemed vain, brought about the possibility for women to create celebratory, positive associations with themselves.[45] There lies the justification for Wilke's level of disregard towards moulding her practice around restrictive feminist ideologies determining what feminist art 'should' consist of.[46]

Inspired by and practicing within the movement, artist Judy Chicago also employed celebratory strategies in order to counteract negative connotations of the female body. Embracing an idealist stance, she famously used 'core' imagery in *The Dinner Party* (1979) to signify female genitals as a centre point of spirituality.[47] Criticisms of this work include Hilton Kramer's accusations that it is 'pornographic,' 'kitsch'[48] and more comparative to an 'advertising campaign' than a work of art.[49]

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[44] Roberta Smith, 'Art View,' The New York Times, Friday October 7 1996
[45] Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Robinson ed. p.256.
[46] Jones, *Body Art: Performing The Subject*, pp.173-175.
[47] *The Dinner Party* consisted of a large, open triangular table with thirty-nine hand crafted place settings made up of plates, either painted or sculpted into variations of 'core; imager to honour an influential woman in history.
[48] Kitsch refers to a degraded culture which is linked to feminine tastes. Chicago used 'feminine' techniques such as china painting and embroidery in order to confront ideas of what constitutes 'high' art. It was a means of enlightening creative methods contained within women's culture which have previously been confined to the realms of domesticity which women have conventionally been subjected to. Contained within Laura Cottingham, Amelia Jones, eds., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party In Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University Of California Press, Berkley, 1996) p.29.

However his assumption that the work operates on no other than a symbolic level is "paradigmatic of a modernist, and still masculinist, mode of critical evaluation that could view the piece only as a threat to post-Enlightenment definitions of artistic 'quality.'" [50] This response suggests that the whole value system in which he analyses art is being tested, resulting in his rejection of it.[51] A major *feminist* condemnation of this type of work is that it reduces female subjectivity to anatomy, contradicting the richness and variety of women's achievements, and relies on pre-conceived concepts of femininity constituted within patriarchy.[52] Marjorie Kramer states:

> I prefer to assume there is no 'feminine aesthetic' and if there really is one, we'll find out after we change the world so men don't oppress women, because then women won't live in a different environment from men. Up to now, feminine sensibility has been slave sensibility.[53]

However, in order for women to escape subordination, they have to establish what has segregated them from men in the first place. Suggested is that this 'feminine aesthetic' refers to presupposed, repressive ideas of femininity; by which she assumes that there is no emergence of women's own subjectivity which seeks to counteract the symbolic order, despite being bound to it in its articulation.[54] Furthermore, she does recognise that "If art comes out of our experience, then our experience as a woman is bound to be in some of our paintings,"[55] relating to the idea that for any women to identify as a feminist in the first place means that, there is on some level, recognition that there are some shared issues affecting women, albeit negative ones.[56] Surely then, a possibility for celebratory images about positive aspects of womanhood, produced with a feminist agenda, to counteract the negative ones should be allowed?

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[49] Hilton Kramer, 'Does Feminism Conflict with Artistic Standards?' in The New York Times, 27 January 1980, sec 2, (in which he implies it does.)
[50] Laura Cottingham, Amelia Jones, eds., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party In Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University Of California Press, Berkley, 1996) p.88.

[51] Judy Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) p.294.
[52] Robinson, *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* p.233.

[53] Marjorie Kramer, 'Some Thoughts On Feminist Art' (1971) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) p.292.
[54] The same issue is highlighted by Robinson when discussing Berger in that identification with the heterosexual male gaze neglects to acknowledge women's own position in viewing pleasure. In Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Robinson ed. pp., 254-255.
[55] Kramer, 'Some Thoughts On Feminist Art' (1971) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson, ed. p.292.

[56] Robinson, *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* p.234.

Although Wilke's work is partially celebratory, she took a different stance from Chicago's 'mother earth' ideology in that she attempted to de-mystify the 'feminine' to depose taboos and highlight the banality of female anatomy as it is not any more mysterious symbolically than the phallus (penis). Through her production of vaginal imagery she did not assume that women hold a uniform position against patriarchy, but did attempt to give the female body a voice for what it *is,* so women could learn for themselves to love what is despised.[57] However, as we have already seen, Wilke has been accused of exploiting herself and according to Kramer in 'Some Thought On Feminist Art' (1971): "Feminist painting does not exploit women."[58]

Yet within the same text is Kramer's conflicting statement: "images in a feminist painting have to be socially legible, that is, recognisable. Figurative."[59] This is suggestive of a belief that feminism is not an internal but external quality, thus the artwork has to act on a symbolic level, much the same way as the language which articulates feminist theory. It is hardly surprising that these kinds of criticisms have resulted in a level of avoidance towards depicting the female nude with a feminist agenda, seeing as they only seem to reinforce its restrictive position and create a situation in which women's pleasure in the production of art is lost.[60] Moreover, to bring the nude back into the realm of the objective would subject it to the Male Gaze, which would end up making it exploitative anyway, unless a specifically Female Gaze was allowed to evolve. Not taken into account is the need for a certain amount of *deliberate* exploitation of the nude in order to constitute social and political change. Wilke reiterates the danger of this hypocritical feminist dispute in her work *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism* (1977) in which she poses topless with a tie around her neck, embodying a typically 'macho' stance. 'Marks-ism' suggests the internal wounds Wilke is subjected to as a women, whilst simultaneously making a comment on how this social constructionist approach to the body within feminist politics is now governing over the core ideologies of feminism, which creates a perilous situation for female artists.

Wilke's parodic approach to the nude embodies a form of criticism in which she can actively depict both a 're-creation and creation' of cultural forms,[61] combining a celebration of 'real' femininity with

[57] Hannah Wilke, Hannah Wilke: A Retrospective (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1989) p.47. Judy Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000,* Robinson ed. p.295.
[58] Kramer, 'Some Thoughts on Feminist Art' (1971) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.293.
[59] Ibid., p.293.
[60] Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures,* p.128.
[61] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory Of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985) p.51.

a condemnation of how the body is regulated. Evident is that it is problematic to equate the very real problems concerning the body with an artist's imitation of them to bring them to light – representation does not determine reality.[62] Mimicking the formula of advertising was a means of forcing a dialogue of feminist issues into the mainstream:

> [T]his kind of work may 'exploit the fetishistic style and content of glamour advertising, reproducing its time scale for viewing and reading, echoing its themes of auto-eroticism and violence. However, this is subverted by an edge, an ambiguity and an excess which is too incisive to sit within the parameters of the genre.[63]

Wilke's subject position as a knowledgeable feminist producer of her parody means she was in full control of calling into question the legitimacy of cultural norms.[64] However, the problem lies in the possibility that the spectator may not have an adequate understanding of what has informed the work to 'get' it.[65] Thus a situation is created in which if audiences miss a parodic allusion, they will then read the artwork like any other, which could explain why Wilke was dismissed for reinforcing the conventions she sought to overthrow. Misunderstandings of context mean that the artworks effect is "neutralized by the refusal or inability to share the necessary mutual code that would permit the phenomenon to come into being,"[66] creating a situation in which some level of feminist competence is required on the part of the spectator to be able to read the implications of the work adequately.

Revealed is how the multiplicity of Wilke's position has allowed for a creation of multifarious artworks – meaning they cannot be judged from one particular objective stance. However, the ambiguous nature of women's art has caused controversy within feminist theory due to the fact that discussions on what constitutes a 'good' feminist artwork seem to have revolved around visual appearance and any real critical awareness of the intrinsic nature of the artwork, or what ideologies have been used to create it, were lost.[67] Wilke uncovered the hypocrisy present within the dominant feminist movement and it was through her recognition of this that she kept herself from being engulfed in the popular feminist culture or consensus of the time.[68]

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[62] Betterton, 'How Do Women Look' in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* Robinson ed., p.256.
[63] Robinson, ed., *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* (London: Camden, 1987) p.236.
[64] Hutcheon, *A Theory Of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, p.75.
[65] Ibid., p.84.
[66] Ibid., p.94.
[67] Robinson, ed., *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* p233.
[68] Butler, ed. *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution,* p.316.

The overbearing, often contradictory criticisms of celebrations of femininity surrounding the women's movement could explain why women dealing with the nude now are reluctant to associate with the term 'feminism.' Robinson argues that if these criticisms had not been conducted at such a general level then:

> [I]t might have been possible to argue that in certain contexts, and under certain circumstances, the celebration of femininity is a highly appropriate and useful strategy for artists who wish to put their work at the service of the women's movement."[69]

However, emigrating from a 'feminist' position has not stopped women exploring the same themes and the same kind of imagery time and time again since the 1970s: depictions of the nude do not have to conform to any of these visual ideologies in order to be read with a feminist agenda or be placed within a feminist context. For this very reason, it could be argued that the feminist movement has not succeeded because women still feel the need to re-explore key themes such as objectification and the celebration/essentialism of the female nude, and cannot do so in conjunction with doing justice to feminist theory. Moreover, is there still a need to produce this kind of imagery because feminist art from the 70s lacks cultural visibility beyond a specific audience? [70] If so, an informed objective position like Wilke's would be paramount in making wider audiences pay attention to artworks which allow feminist discussion out of the 70's and into the realms of the contemporary mainstream.

[69] Robinson, ed., *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: an Anthology,* p234.

[70] Bovenschen, 'Is There A Feminine Aesthetic?' (1976) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson, ed. p.304.

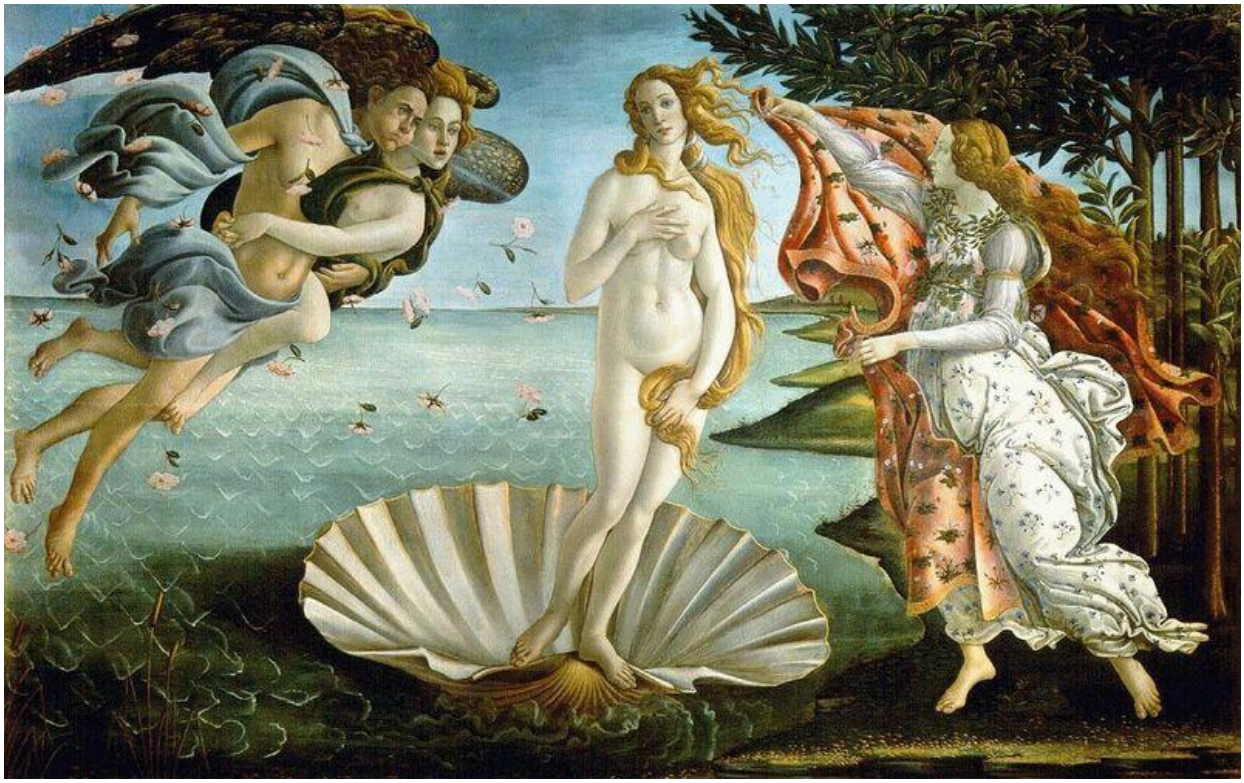

Figure 1: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus,* 1486. Tempera on Panel, 172.5 x 278.5 cm

Figure 2: Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1905. Oil On Canvas, 127.2 x 196.1 cm

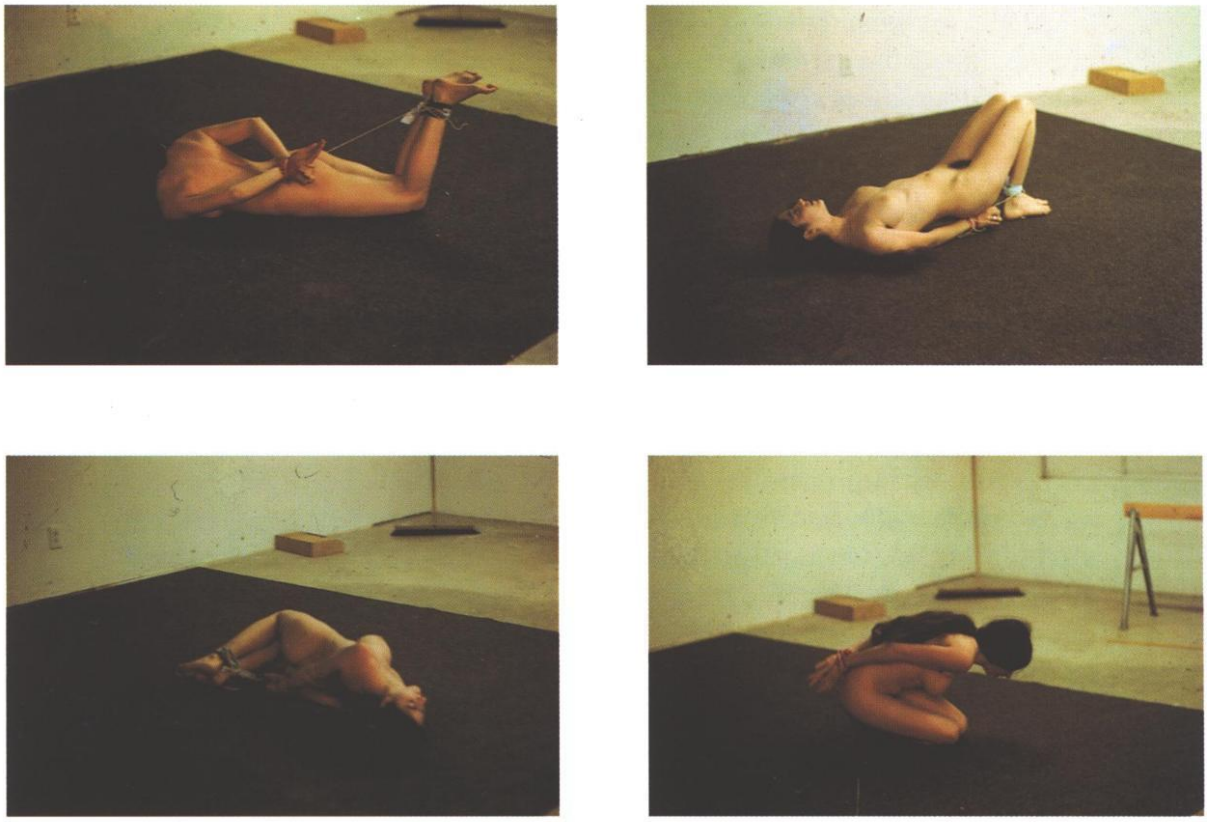

Figure 3: Ana Mendieta, *Tied-Up Woman*, 1973, Series of 4 Photographs of Performance

Figure 4: Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S - Starification Object Series*, 1975. Series of 28 Black and White Photographs of Performance, each 12.7 x 17.8 cm.

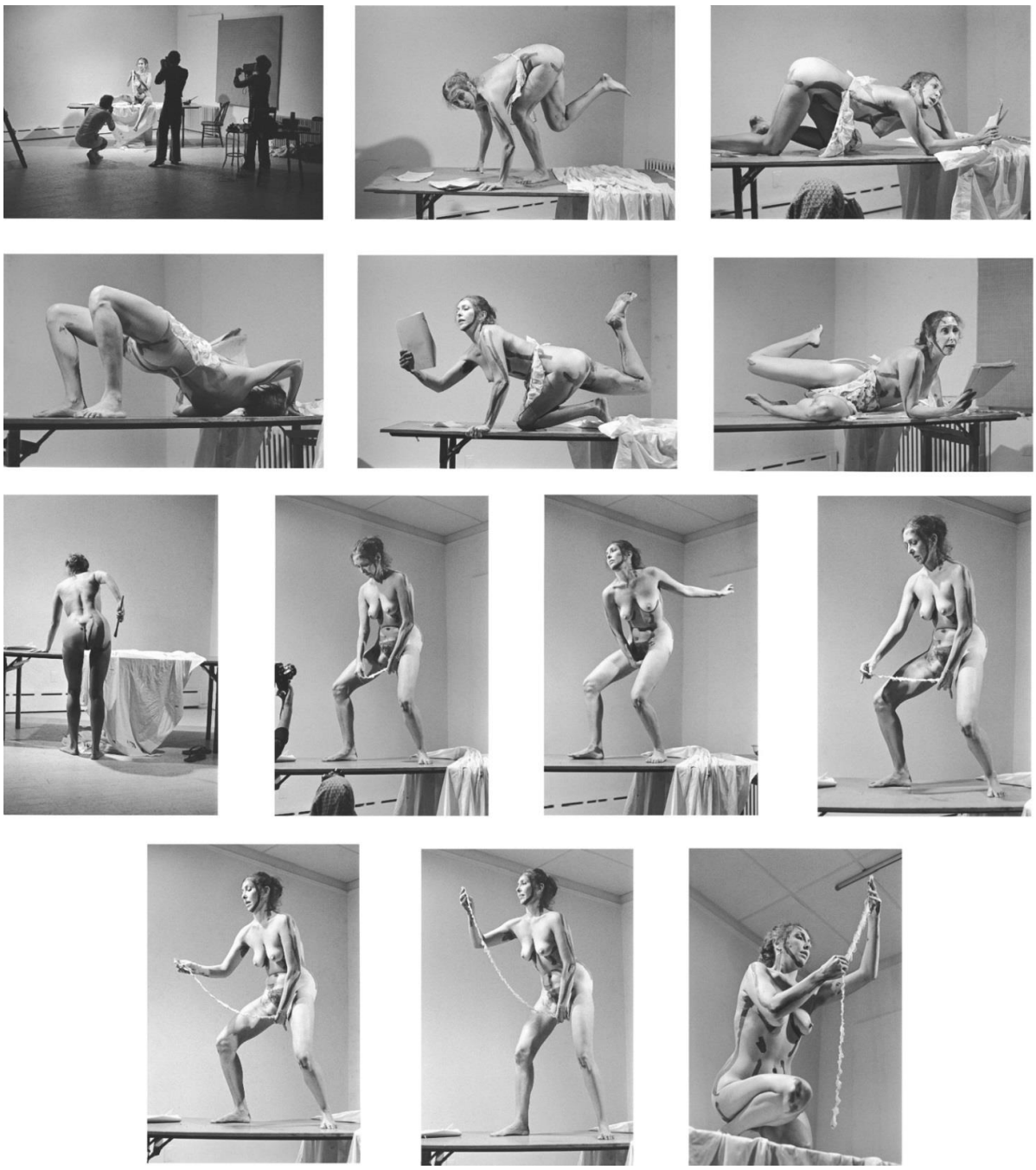

Figure 5: Carolee Schneeman, *Interior Scroll,* 1975. Suite of 13 Silver Gelatin Prints taken from photographs of Performance, each 35.5 x 27.9 cm.

Figure 6: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Photograph of Installation containing ceramic, porcelain, textile.

Figure 7: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Photograph detailing section of Installation

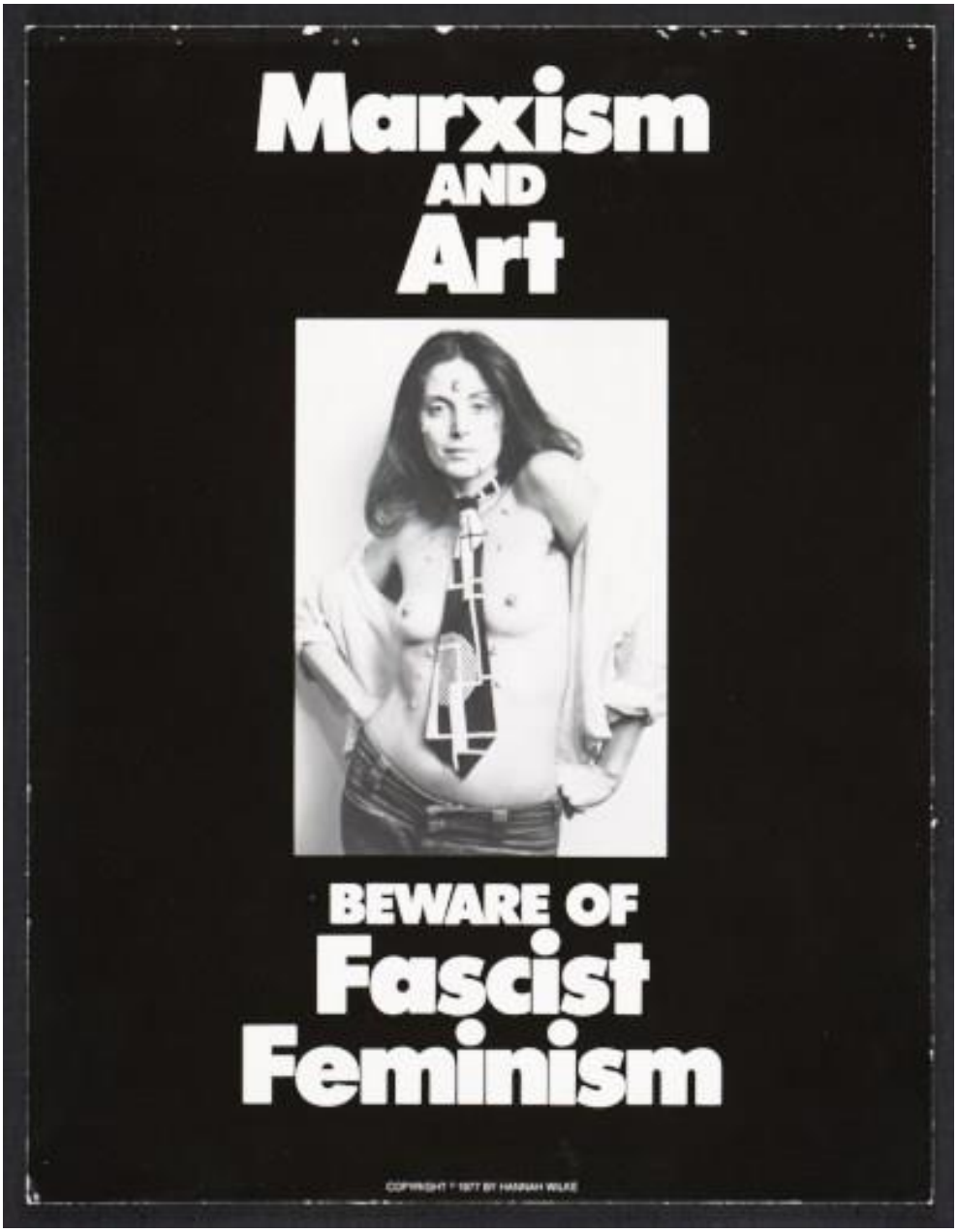

Figure 8: Hannah Wilke, *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism,* 1977. Poster, Silk Screen on Plexiglass, 91.4 x 69.8 cm

2. The Contemporary Nude: From 'Post' To 'Para' Feminism

In a post-feminist era, a disassociation has occurred which sees contemporary female artists choosing not to withstand feminism's political burdens because there is a danger that they will dominate over their own aesthetic and conceptual practice. Female artists prominent from the 1990's onwards such as YBA's Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas and Jenny Saville, have all made work dealing with the female nude but seem to actively distance themselves from a feminist position. Due to the misinterpretation surrounding 70s feminist body art and its subsequent segregation from the mainstream, it is possible that these artists believed that voicing a feminist objective would not be liberating or useful for their practice.[71]

However, feminist writer Laura Cottingham argues that failure to acknowledge the influence of their feminist predecessors in shifting the paradigms of a male dominated practice and regulated nude is problematic due to their 'indebtment' to the women's movement.[72] Yet even Cottingham herself uses the term 'seventies feminists,' which implies they are a homogenous group, whose critical recognition has been left in that period; this segregation is proven by the endurance of their male counterparts within the main canon.[73] It is this exclusion which risks feminism being treated as an 'out of date' political topic and results in younger artists' disassociation with it. Along with its rejection from the mainstream comes a diminishing comprehension of it, resulting in younger generations of artists regurgitating what has already been extensively theorised rather than developing feminisms pre-existing concepts.[74] That is not to assume that a wealth of feminist insights are unavailable; what proves difficult is negotiating the complexities of the movement whilst still doing it justice.

This relates to concepts contained within Amelia Jones's 'Post-Feminism' – A remasculization of culture?' (1990) in which she critiques how selected texts have used the term 'post-feminism' to endorse a wider patriarchal determination to diffuse and eradicate feminism's various voices. [75] Jones states that the remasculization of culture is a direct result of the repudiation of feminism - where it is treated as a finished phenomenon and then re-appropriated into the 'main canon' and

[71] Lucy McEachan, *Beyond The Seventies: The Politics of Contemporary Feminist Art* (Unpublished Dissertation, Glasgow: Glasgow School of Art, 1999) p.20.
[72] Laura Cottingham*, Not For Sale: Feminism and Art in the USA during the 1970's*. Dir. Laura Cottingham (New York: Apex Art, 1998)
[73] Helene Cixous, 'In And Out of the Mainstream,' in Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society,* p.302.
[74] Cottingham, Jones, eds. *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party In Feminist Art History*, p.86.
[75] Amelia Jones, ''Post-feminism': A Remasculinization of Culture?' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Hilary Robinson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) p.496.

placed alongside a string of 'humanist' libertarian movements where sexed specificity is not recognised. The treatment of "feminism as a term of radicalization to be subsumed into a broader field of cultural critique,"[76]is problematic as it denies and dilutes the feminism's specific attempts towards cultural innovation by overthrowing "patriarchy's strategies of ideological and institutional repression."[77] Women are allowed the 'privilege' of functioning as a *part* of the mainstream, but are not inclined to produce a counter discourse to the still male centred 'universal,' explaining the regularity in which the term 'women artists' is used to categorise artworks.[78] Therefore, as feminism is then treated as just one of many reconfigurations of the mainstream, its impact is impaired.

In *The Return Of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970/2009*, Ameila Jones outlines her scepticism surrounding recent revivals of feminist art due to a renewed interest from galleries and museums. What has become apparent through this resurgence is the tendency to streamline feminism, leaving out notoriously 'difficult,' politically driven and highly contested works.[79] This is because they are not as easily marketable as, for example, the 'bad girl' art of the 1990's, when the overlying attitude was (and often still is) that women could achieve cultural empowerment through forms of highly sexualised self-objectification. [80]

However, as Ariel Levy discusses, this type of art presents the female body as a seemingly 'liberated', but highly commoditised symbol which goes against all the Women's movement strived to achieve. What is even more disconcerting is art institutions' deployment of the body as a marketing tool, in a cultural age where the commodification of women is as strife as ever. Taking feminist work out of its 70's context and into an age where "Sex sells," leads to the inevitable fate that art institutions monetised from "the bodies, (and bodies of work) of women."[81]

Another danger is that the works are only re-integrated at face value, without the extensive historical discussions needed to contextualise them. Feminist criticisms which have formed the basis for these works have been lost somewhere in the realms of art history. Which begs the question: are 'bad girl' and other contemporary female artists selling themselves short of their feminist goals as a

[76] Ibid., p.496.
[77] Ibid., p.496.
[78] Ibid., p.499.
[79] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.11.
[80] Ibid., p.16.
[81] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.16.

means of producing "bodies, rendered as sexually available images that circulate without subjects as referents"? [82]

Integral to my discussion of contemporary female artists is the idea that feminist tones are prominent throughout some of their works, but are either muted for acceptance into the main canon, or are included without any acknowledgement of feminist theory. Moreover, the feminist issues expressed are still valid and continually evolving, meaning they *should* still be openly explored. I have chosen to investigate Vanessa Beecroft and Cecily Brown, who have both implied a 'post-feminist' stance in art-making. In an aesthetic and contextual analysis of their work, I will uncover what it 'does' in relation to feminism.

Is it possible to move on from 'post-feminism,' towards re-introducing feminist discussion in a way which would be beneficial for contemporary female artists? Amelia Jones discusses artist Pipilotti Rist as a means of implementing the concept of 'para-feminism'[83] which reinstates a more positive relationship to feminism.

2.1 Vanessa Beecroft

Vanessa Beecroft is known for her real life installations of models in a gallery or museum context. With a focus on her work *VB43* (2000), I will outline how a 'post-feminist' stance upholds the reversion of a positive feminist position. The *VB43* performance consists of twenty-three red haired, naked models: standing, lying or sitting within a gallery space, for the audience to view, but not interact with. Drawn upon is an interview conducted by Jean Wainwright in which Beecroft answers questions about the intention behind the work,[84] which is discussed in parallel with an analysis of how the work functions aesthetically. Beecroft compares creating this work with composing a painting, and often refers to the 'girls' as a 'raw subject matter' which she can 'colour in' and use as drawings, similar to pictorial elements on a canvas. [85]

In the interview, Beecroft states her distanced position from the feminist movement: "I was never fond of performance art from the 70's, I never even knew it,"[86] and also states her preference

[82] Ibid., p.19.
[83] Ibid., p.43.
[84] See Appendix i)
[85] Jean Wainwright interview with Vanessa Beecroft (2000). In Audio Arts Volume 19 No 1&2, Tate Website. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-19/number-1-2> [accessed: 7th January 2016]
[86] Ibid.

towards the *Living Sculpture* ideology of Gilbert & George, in which art is not separated from the everyday. [87] However, Beecroft's ignorance towards the 70s is highlighted by the fact that she is completely unaware of the movement that lay the groundwork for her practice. Without it she would be unable to make the work, never mind have an audience who could read it effectively.[88]

Beecroft states that due to a lack of widely accessible contemporary art, her main influences growing up in Italy were Renaissance paintings; and has conducted this piece by selecting models whose features appear to embody traditional archetypes of beauty present within some of her influences. This classical reference suggests that she favours art which adheres to traditional categories of aesthetic value, and so makes this a main element of her own work.

Furthermore, Beecroft uses make-up and heels as part of her aim to 'detach' the naked models from a natural image so that they appear completely objective and function conceptually. Beecroft justifies her disregard for naturalness as it suggests "more 70s statements I'm not interested in – my reference is with paintings,"[89] implying a post-feminist stance. This idea of treating the nude as a neutral subject matter is to embody the Male Gaze, which denies the models own 'true' experience of being a woman, but allows for the artworks' acceptance within the general art canon. Beecroft has seemingly "accepted the frame-work of art making as dictated by men and what serves men" [90]

This hierarchizing of art based on traditional 'male' notions of value and negating what may be deemed to threaten that hegemony results in a refusal of acknowledging gender subjectivity. Thus a level of ignorance exists when regarding gender specific issues such as references to the commodification of the female body. This approach is prevalent in Beecroft's production of her work and inhumane treatment of her models, whom she 'never speaks to' and 'installs' like objects within the space.

By disconnecting herself from the subjectivity of the work and the audience Beecroft denies her own subjectivity but reinforces an imposition of ideals on to women who are mute, powerless instruments to her tyrannical position. Perhaps her decision to pick women who represent her with

[87] This is using live human beings (themselves) to make 'sculptures' as a means of physically becoming an artwork. Amelia Jones, Tracey Warr eds. *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2000)p.209
[88] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.23
[89] Jean Wainwright interview with Vanessa Beecroft (2000). In Audio Arts Volume 19 No 1&2, Tate Website. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-19/number-1-2> [accessed: 7th January 2016]
[90] Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.294.

their features[91] is a means of partially representing herself without risking subjection to the male "process of transforming the woman artist into seductress as a means of opposing her to the cerebral confirms the mastery of the thinking male 'analyst.'"[92] In other words, by objectifying others, she is saving herself. What makes Beecroft's work so exploitative is the fact that she capitalises on the fetishisation of the female body on such a general level, which could be excused as a product of her own naivety if only she was using her own body instead of 'using' other women's. This affirms Lucy Lippard's observation that:

> A woman using her own face and body has a right to do whatever she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult.[93]

The fact that she cannot be near the naked models when they are getting ready, due to embarrassment, reveals her own uncomfortable position as a female as part of a wider denial of raw or 'real' femininity. According to feminist theorist Judith Butler, these struggles can occur at a "non-conscious or unconscious level… and are managed through the deployments of certain defensive strategies such as projection,"[94] explaining her reliance on models to embody her concept.

Towards the end of the interview Beecroft finally reveals the real objective behind the work – which is to de-fetishize the female body by reproducing it to such an extent that it is no longer equated with sex, but with beauty. This effort towards a celebratory stance relates to the 'girl power' approach utilized by 'bad girl' artists and celebrities. Nick Johnstone affirms this in his article 'Dare to Bare' (2005), by implying that by displaying these models in a way which may once have been exploitative and demeaning to women, she is asserting their autonomy.[95] However, attempting to obliterate objectification *by* objectifying is futile without a clear subjectivity behind the work, and does not allow women to become their own speaking subjects of discourse.[96] In *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Ariel Levy discusses the rise of what she refers to as post-feminist 'raunch culture,' where sexualised, soft-core pornographic images of women are constantly reproduced in western commodity culture. It is through imitations of overtly sexualised

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[91] Jean Wainwright interview with Vanessa Beecroft (2000). In Audio Arts Volume 19 No 1&2, Tate Website. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-19/number-1-2> [accessed: 7th January 2016]
[92] Jones, ''Post-feminism': A Remasculinization of Culture?' (1990) *in Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.503.
[93] Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, p.67.
[94] Lisa Blackman, *The Body: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2008) p.79.
[95] Nick Johnstone, 'Dare to Bare' (March 2005) Guardian Website. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/mar/13/art> [accessed: 25th January 2016]

[96] Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, p.68.

celebrity 'role models' that women hold a perceived sense of sexual liberation, which is problematic due to the fact that these images are "essentially commercial, not progressive."[97] Therefore Beecroft endorses a strategy which seems to reaffirm rather than disrupt these systems of sexual difference.[98]

> Rather than distancing us from cliché's of femininity, such recent practices reiterate these clichés, appropriating *strategies* from earlier feminisms without sustaining the *politics* these strategies aimed at promoting.[99]

Any positive message contained within the work is overruled by its seductive qualities, which are encompassed by the Male Gaze. Hence this approach is not useful for her or for any other female artist for which recognition of a feminist objective would benefit the work.

Beecroft also ignores, or is arguably uninterested in the audience's relationship with the work, despite the fact that the detached nature of the models results in no subjectivity to relate to, only object. This, however, is unsurprising with her ignorance towards the weight of criticism surrounding the Gaze. She states that the girls accept the voyeuristic nature of their position, however have they really been allowed that kind of power? Ariel Levy writes:

> [Strippers] are merely sexual personae, erotic dollies from the land of make-believe. In their performances, which is the only capacity in which we see these women we so fetishize, they don't even speak … they have no ideas, no feelings, no political beliefs, no relationships, no past, no future, no humanity.[100]

Beecroft likens the collective reaction of the press to that of "truck drivers, just passing by"[101] in their criticisms of the work, but this is hardly surprising seeing as Beecroft's models hold the exact same position as the one Levy states above. Perhaps the work will always be equated with objectification because it really *does not* have enough differences to separate it from the impersonal, artificial realm of commodity culture. The binary logic of the gaze is sustained through reinforcements of the 'sexy' ideals Beecroft presents or markets, in the hope of 'critiquing.'[102] Beecroft does not help herself in this sense – in some of her other works such as *VB 23* (1996), she

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[97] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.29.
[98] Jones, ''Post-feminism': A Remasculinization of Culture?' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.503.
[99] Ibid., p.41.
[100] Ariel Levy *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (London: Pocket, 2006) p.196.
[101] Jean Wainwright interview with Vanessa Beecroft (2000). In Audio Arts Volume 19 No 1&2, Tate Website. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-19/number-1-2> [accessed: 7th January 2016]
[102] Levy, p.30.

uses designer clothes as 'props'[103] and in doing so, endorses the commodification of the female body further. As previously stated by Laura Mulvey:

> [T]he image of woman as spectacle and fetish sets in motion another chain of metonymies, linking together various sites in which femininity is produced in advanced capitalist society: woman as consumed and woman as consumer of commodities, women exchanged in image and women transforming themselves into image through commodity consumption."[104]

The assumption that distancing yourself from a feminist position is simpler when making artwork involving the female nude is unfounded due to the fact that patriarchy's control over the image can overshadow your own intentions, *especially* if the subjectivity of the work is made particularly unclear. The post-feminist stance has arisen from women's acknowledgement that they cannot 'have it all' (for example, sacrificing motherhood in order to attain 'masculine' success). Although this attitude may make you money in the short term, it is overruled by the true cost of succumbing to masculine ideals which repress feminist cries for long term equality.

The overall failure of the project lies in the fact that it does not covey the artist's (inherently feminist) intention, nor do its aesthetics function critically due to "the incredibly powerful forces of fetishism (sexual, racial, commodity) in returning images to their predictable structures of objectification."[105] However, I think that to some extent, Beecroft already know this, stating that maybe nothing will come out of it because "the girls are girls and they are sexy, that's it."[106]

Despite the contention within feminist art theory, a positive relationship with it would have provided Beecroft with a much more informed position to produce the work; all the lessons of the past surrounding objectification would be laid bare and hers to do what she wants with them. While the objective stance embodied by Wilke and by others in the 70s sought to provide an alternative to the symbolic degradation of the female body, Beecroft's essentialist post-feminist position reinforces what is already the problem. It cannot be equated to Wilke's parody due to the fact that Beecroft neglects that the (only beautiful) models are embodying the source of their repression. For women artists to objectify the body in order to present a problem does not automatically make them the problem, unless they are unaware of its root cause, and are ignorant of what they are in fact doing.

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[103] Nick Johnstone, 'Dare to Bare' (March 2005) Guardian Website. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/mar/13/art> [accessed: 25th January 2016]
[104] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* by Laura Mulvey (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1989) p.xxii
[105] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. pp., 38-40.
[106] Audio Arts Volume 19 No 1&2. Jean Wainwright interview with Vanessa Beecroft (2000). Tate Website. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-19/number-1-2> [accessed: 7th January 2016]

2.2 Cecily Brown

Cecily Brown's work revolves around suggestions of female nudity as it oscillates between abstraction and representation. The artists own sensual, feminine experience of creating the work is of equal value to her somewhat indirect use of the nude as a subject matter.

> [T]he ease with which Brown refers to a wide range of visual sources suggest as much the promiscuity of visual imagery that influences our way of looking at things as it does the accumulation of images with which "image-makers and image-ridden" artists must deal. [107]

Suggested then, is that the work involves reactions to the external which the artist then processed and projects back out into the external. It blurs the boundary between objectively portraying the nude and urgently projecting an emotive idea or quality of nudity and female sexuality on to the canvas. Clearly referencing the female body, *Untitled* (2013) is composed of immediate, fleshy brushstrokes depicting violent yet sensual mark-making.

Through her production of large abstract expressionist works, Brown does not differentiate herself from her male counterparts, indicating that she holds a similar stance to Beecroft in having accepted that making art 'like a man' gains her inclusion and endurance within the main canon. In a comparative discussion of her work to the 'heroic' William Turner and his evocation of 'superior independent universalism,' Danilo Eccher places Cecily Brown within the same "literary, sophisticated context" of interpretation.[108] Suggested is that these 'sophisticated' methods of reading work derive from traditional notions of aesthetic value, and that the unsophisticated alternative is to politicise the work within a feminist context, which would detract from her supposed 'male' skill as a painter. By accepting this position, Brown has exempted herself from the enduring attitude that women's art does not measure up to the 'quality' of a man's. [109] However, her position as maker is not as simplistic as the way the art might be interpreted objectively.

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[107] Cecily Brown, Suzanne Cotter, Caoimh´n Mac Giolla Léith, *Cecily Brown: Paintings* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2005) p.43.

[108] Danilo Eccher in Cecily Brown, Cecily Brown (Rome: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 2003) p.20

[109] In 1885, Sir William Fettes Douglas, President of the Royal Scottish Academy, declared that the work of a woman artist was 'like a man's only weaker and poorer.' Exhibition Overview. National Galleries Scotland Website. URL: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/on-now-coming-soon/modern-scottish-women/about-the-exhibition-23654> [accessed: 24 January 2016] Nick Clark, 'What's The Biggest Problem With Women Artists? None of Them can Actually Paint, says George Baselitz' (Febuary 2013) URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/what-s-the-biggest-problem-with-women-artists-none-of-them-can-actually-paint-says-georg-baselitz-8484019.html> [accessed: 19th December 2015]

Although the imagery contained within Browns work has been subverted enough to fall into the category of 'abstract expressionism,' the subtle inclusions of female nudity begs the question of her exploiting the audience's seduction, or what Laura Mulvey has previously described as scopophilia – a fetishistic pleasure in looking. Suzanne Cotter writes: "her paintings are about looking: looking to discern an image, a story, a narrative, but also looking as a form of voyeurism, transgression and violation, and the mutual perversion this implies."[110]

This 'mutual perversion' occurs on numerous levels, through Brown's own expression in the creation of explicit forms, and the viewer's interaction with them. The function of the gaze is a crucial factor in that it permits the viewer to order the image based on their own underlying perceptions, ultimately allowing them control over the work's meaning. It is through this process that fragments of figuration can be recognised; however the image of 'women' and all its commodification's continue to be regulated through the Male Gaze. This means the way in which males read Brown's work may differ from a female's perspective, due to the fact that she has approached the production of the artwork emotionally rather than conceptually:[111] Unlike Beecroft's work, which is completely devoid of emotion, Browns paintings "have a wider emotional range than is commonly acknowledged,"[112] because she uses her art as a 'vehicle of feeling'[113] by drawing on her own impulses and desires. Suggested then, is that her paintings are a semiotic reflection of herself, even though they contain impersonal imagery. Does this mean that embodied within the work is the artist's own Female Gaze, both in form and in content? The confrontational compositions which force the dominant gaze to reformulate the imagery would suggest so. Eccher recognises that:

> [T]he artist imposes a direct presence in the painting; the gaze cannot escape from centre stage, cannot seek refuge in a more reassuring perspective from above that would permit detachment and neutrality. [114]

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[110] Suzanne Cotter in Cecily Brown, Suzanne Cotter, Caoimh´n Mac Giolla Léith, *Cecily Brown: Paintings* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2005) p.37.
[111] Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Hilary Robinson ed. pp.294 – 295.
[112] Brown, Cotter, Mac Giolla Léith, *Cecily Brown: Paintings*, p.53.
[113] Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Hilary Robinson ed. p.294.
[114] Danilo Eccher in Cecily Brown, Cecily Brown (Rome: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 2003) p.22.

This suggests that the time spent contemplating the work is more important than just the work's image. The longer you invest, the more the work will reveal itself, adding prevalence to its meanings.[115]

It could be said that in *Untitled* 2013, Brown frees her nude female 'subjects' from their original historical or pop culture contexts,[116] suggesting that she may have taken what could be deemed as 'degrading' images from mainstream culture, and reformulated them through a female gaze, allowing them to be brought into a new context where female emotion *is* a main catalyst behind the work. This offers the possibility of a highly feminist objective: the reclamation of the body through female subjectivity. In which case, a female audience could reconnect with new, positive depictions of the female nude.

However, what proves problematic is the fact that unlike Wilkes' feminist, narcissistic/parodic position, Brown disclaims any critical feminist statement which could be made by her work. Brown uses her unclear position to capitalise on the dominant Male Gaze's appreciation of the seductive aesthetic of her work so that she functions as part of its universal, without calling it into question. Her traditionalist approach combined with a post-feminist inclusion of the nude, means that her nude paintings are equitable with commodity objects which, with their conformation to typical qualities of aesthetic value, can be easily circulated. Furthermore, these images with their symbolic sex appeal have appeared in reproduced publications such as *Vogue, Vanity Fair and The New York Times Magazine,*[117] taking them out of their effective context into one where they are received only at face value, like an advertisement. Rosella Siligato appraises this as part of a wider post-feminist approach, writing that contemporary female artists are "appropriating strategies of seduction and distribution to expand the accessibility of their work, beyond the circles of an initiated few."[118] What is undeniable about this approach is the desire contemporary female artists have to get their work included within the main canon of art. Problematic is their perception that the term 'feminism' has to be denied completely in order to achieve artistic success.

[115] Rolf Lauter Interview with Cecily Brown as part of her exhibition 'Cecily Brown: Painting,' at the Kunsthalle Mannheim Museum (2005) URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DR_hoK9aI5A> [Accessed:15 February 2016] See appendix ii)
[116] Exhibition Press Release, Gagosian Gallery, 12 April 2013, URL: <http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/cecily-brown--may-09-2013> [Accessed: 7 February 2016]
[117] Rosella Siligato in Cecily Brown, *Cecily Brown* (Rome: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 2003) p.60
[118] Ibid, p.60

Discussed by Levy are women's attempts to be 'one of the guys' in an avoidance of being excluded by them.[119] This is applicable to Brown's attitude of wanting to emulate the desirable (powerful) characteristics of men in order to be able to do whatever they can – joining them is easier than trying to beat them. Thus by adopting a masculine position, she has found a way of functioning in the art world. However, in doing so she is not contributing to the progression of feminism by any means. Levy notes that "If you are the exception that proves the rule, and the rule is that women are inferior, you haven't made any progress."[120]

The most worrying concept that has arisen from Levy's analysis is the attitude that it is somehow beneficial to be "not like other women."[121] The derogatory term 'other women' refers to those who haven't accepted 'raunch culture' as a positive means for expressing their sexuality and are therefore regarded as uptight. This begs the question, how could there be any possibility of women being 'liberated' when they are still struggling to be accepted as themselves? Problematic is that artists like Brown and Beecroft have a selfish 'all about me' attitude which negates the most crucial goal of feminist politics - which is to interrogate structures of inequality which still dominate society.[122]

Brown has taken a stance which she knows will be 'safe' in her complex depictions the female nude in parallel with sexual and violent themes. Unlike Beecroft, she is not completely ignorant of feminism and at least acknowledges the dangers of basing her practice around feminist theory, in that it holds many contradictions which have the possibility to overwhelm the artwork and draw the artist into sticking to a specific ideology. [123] Therefore she holds the belief that the system as it exists in its current form does not allow for the positive inclusion of feminist themes due to the possibility of inequality and gender based discrimination of female artists which is still rife in today's art climate. [124]

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[119] Levy, p.4.
[120] Ibid., p.117
[121] Ibid., p.96
[122] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.23.
[123] Cecily Brown, Suzanne Cotter, Caoimh´n Mac Giolla Léith, *Cecily Brown: Paintings* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2005) p.53.
[124] Journalist Maura Reilly outlines specific examples of how certain institutions and publications have discriminated against female artists from the 1970s up until now. In Maura Reilly, 'Taking The Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes' (May 2015) URL: <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/> [Accessed 31st January 2016]

Brown's concern is not completely unfounded in that inclusions of feminist themes have previously resulted in problematic categorizations of 'women's art,' however, Jones states that art which is

> [P]redicated on feminism's term but denies the specificity of its arguments, glossing over the difficulties (addressed extensively in feminist debates…) of assuming work by women is feminist, and of knowing what we mean by women's art at all. [125]

Obvious is the fact that this stance denies women a right to understanding their own subjectivity, which is perhaps a more damaging consequence. Although Brown does not blatantly depict herself in the work, there is a clear tension and emotional struggle between a piecing together of cultural imagery and personal expression. Perhaps this is suggestive of difficult aspects of womanhood which are not easy to depict because they clash with western culture's prominent ideologies. If the work does contain a type of gender related struggle, it has been supressed by Brown's disconnect to feminism, and it is completely narcissistic in that it functions as an emotional release – which may 'be' feminist but does not aid the progression of feminist discussions. Chicago reiterates the complexity of this situation, which also applicable to Beecroft's practice, in 'Woman as Artist':

> She chooses areas of subject matter that most closely approximate the experiences of the male, and she avoids those images that would reveal her to be a woman. She resists being identified with woman because to be female is to be an object of contempt. And the brutal fact is that in the process of fighting for her life, she loses herself. [126]

The generalised nature of Brown's subject matter in works such as *Untitled* (2013) is reminiscent of Amelia Jones's discussion of the attitude that feminism is just another factor of a larger socialist or humanist movement resulting in the specificity of its intentions being lost. On that account, Brown's position is a product of a neoliberal society which values choices made by the individual over those made for the collective good. However, despite her belief that feminism does not benefit her work, it would be of undeniable value to the progression of feminism and of women's continuing art practice to keep making the personal political.

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[125] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010) p.19.

[126] Chicago, 'Woman as Artist' (1972) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.295. This betrayal of self when avoiding issues of gender within recognised systems of representation is also discussed by Susan Hiller in 'Anthropology Into Art: Susan Hiller Interviewed by Sarah Kent and Jaqueline Morreau in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) p.367.

Pipilotti Rist

As previously noted by Amelia Jones, it is not effective for artists or institutions to simply reproduce feminist art of the 70s. This is due to the fact that it is what *initiated* feminist debate, thus it is not helpful or productive to intervene the same way in today's context. Therefore, there is a need for younger feminists and art historians

> [T]o begin to conceptualize how to historicize feminist art in ways that both honour its politics and at least attempt to avoid lapsing into binary modes of determining authorial and artistic meaning and value.[127]

Due to the presupposed ideas surrounding 'feminism' as it existed in a 70s context, Jones suggests that it may now function better with an altered name which would bring it into the realm of the 21st century. Jones describes the new feminist direction in the work of Pipilotti Rist as 'para-feminist,' the prefix 'para' describing a practice which is both working in parallel with and beyond earlier feminism(s), in order to build upon their cultural critiques.[128] This deviates from the prefix 'post,' which in some contexts can be seen as 'anti' feminist, thus disproving Peggy Phelan's prior assumption that: "Rist seems to share the widely accepted idea that feminism has largely succeeded and that now there are other issues that are more central to the politics and aesthetics of contemporary art."[129]

Although Rist is aware that there is no need to 'redo' past feminist art, her position is not as simplistic as Phelan's suggestion of adhering to a post-feminist position over a feminist one. Her ideologies demonstrate a concern with positively building upon the narratives of feminism, with the primary goal of counteracting the power systems which seek to minoritize individuals, *without* reinforcing the structures of fetishism.

Rist's work consists of large, immersive video installations which completely subsume the viewer (and the environment) in the subject matter. The female body holds a central role in these

[127] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.19.
[128] Ibid, p.44
[129] Written in 2001, this viewpoint could now be considered dated which illustrates the importance of a continual engagement in discussion of women's position when making art which deals with the female body. Peggy Phelan, 'Opening up Spaces within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, Peggy Phelan, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Elisabeth Bronfen eds. (London, Phaidon, 2001) p.53

projections, and for Rist "female is the norm, male is the not normal,"[130] meaning that the traditionally central position held by man is replaced with a female benchmark from which to create new realities. Through the creation of domesticized environments within gallery spaces, often formed with soft viewing platforms, Rist creates a situation in which the audience is encouraged to look at, as well as interact with the work. These seductive, 'female' habitats allow for the viewer's full absorption into the work's context, granting an alternative to the regular vertical viewing position regularly adopted by audiences in a gallery setting. Thus Rist succeeds in "displacing the site of the work from the singular, discrete object to the multiple surfaces of the filmed and physically present body."[131] This obliterates the phallic supremacy connoted by the traditional erectness of viewing and subsequently the objective projection of ideals and value it creates. [132] By transforming recognised systems of representation, Rist's work draws upon some of the key themes encapsulated by 70s artists such as Carolee Schneeman, Yoko Ono and Ana Mendieta, and notably their methods of audaciously depicting the body, which:[133]

> [L]egitimised the role of female experience by creating internal, feminine performative rituals of the body that transformed the male dominated sculptural issues of scale, size and materiality into an enquiry into the relationship between real and symbolic space.[134]

Schneemans' *Interior Scroll* is echoed in Rist's *Blutclip* (Bloodclip, 1993) which shows a woman smothered in red liquid; celebrating the natural, yet still taboo, process of menstruation. Therefore she brings the body into a site of investigation, taking the supposedly 'grotesque' internal and presenting it externally in a situation which encourages viewers to engage, rather than avert their gaze.[135] Her refusal to succumb to the purity of 'wholeness' relates back to Wilke and her interruptions of an idealistic image of the female body through her vulvic adornments and their revelation of the 'normality' of woman's biological sex. Another prominent comparison is between Wilke's *S.O.S* and Rist's *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much* (1986) which both exist to disrupt and modify readings of the female body. Rist not only mocks the typical, fetishized portrayal of women in music videos, but also some of feminism's paradoxical rejections of visual pleasure, something which Wilke battled with throughout her career. Therefore, the necessity to continue feminist discussions

[130] Pipilotti Rist, *Show a Leg*, Francis McKee ed. (Glasgow: Tramway, 2002) p.30.
[131] Chrissie Iles, 'Your are a Queen: The Selfless Spaces of Pipilotti Rist,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage* (London: Hayward, 2011) p.107.
[132] Ibid., p.107.
[133] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.68.
[134] Chrissie Iles, 'Your are a Queen: The Selfless Spaces of Pipilotti Rist,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage* (London: Hayward, 2011) p.110.
[135] Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Pipilotti's Body Camera,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage* (London: Hayward, 2011) p.123.

is paramount in avoiding repetition of past feminist criticisms. It was not until the mid-1980s that an extensive understanding of the conflicting position of women's representation had been established.[136] Thus Wilke's ideological position being ahead of its time, could account for some of the misinterpretations and uninformed criticisms surrounding her work.

However, Rist's deployment of parody in her video, through which she embodies a frenetic state to enact the disputes and difficulties of women becoming "fully embodied subjects under patriarchy,"[137] came at a time where this 'no-win' situation had been realised. Thus instead of concentrating on the image as still defined by the Male Gaze, the analysis could move towards its other intentions, thus proving that an affinity with feminism is crucial for creating a space in which new meanings can continue to be established.[138]

Jones recognises that Rist pursues the subversion of idealistic representations of the body which are notorious for muting its reality, in that her works "perform the anatomically female body beyond femaleness per-se, pointing to a new para-feminism that disengages the question of the subject identified via codes of sexual difference."[139] Celebrating the corruption of language and image structures which rely on fixed objectivity, she presents a new kind of ideal which explores both the physical and emotional sites of the body. Rist intimately examines its surfaces and orifices to such an extent that we as viewers are forced to really look, rather than just see it.[140] Through this process the female body becomes the enlightened subject *of*, rather than being subjected *to* the gaze.

This is especially apparent in In *Pickelporno* (Pimple Porno, 1992) which depicts visceral shots of the body, employing the conventions of pornography which usually reinstates the objectification of the female body, to produce something quite the opposite. Peggy Phelan notes that Rist's use of narcissism, as well as the lack of distance between viewer and subject obliterates the structures of voyeurism on which fetishizations of the body usually rely.[141] Therefore the idea of 'scopophilia' discussed by Laura Mulvey, present in popular forms of cinema is overruled by the subjects' own sexual presence and desire. What is paramount for Rist, and the reason that the work can undermine such a dominant perspective, is that the female subject is in full control of her own erotic

[136] Phelan, 'Opening up Spaces within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, Phelan, Obrist, Bronfen eds. p.43.
[137] Ibid., p.43.
[138] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. pp.46-48
[139] Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and The Contemporary Subject*, pp. 212-213.
[140] Bronfen, 'Pipilotti's Body Camera,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage,* p.120.
[141] Phelan, 'Opening up Spaces within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, Phelan, Obrist, Bronfen eds. p.48.

body and the situation in which she chooses to present it. Rist overthrows typically fictitious, male-centric presentations of the body by transforming the camera into a tool which provides a pleasurable exploration by women, for women, making sure that the "camera and the object are both on the same level of power."[142]

Rist's rejection of classic codes of looking allows for her inquisitive bodily depictions to be light and euphoric rather than bearing the burden of sexual guilt and shame often imposed onto the female body. By refusing the gaze as a singular, dictatorial bearer of meaning, Rist successfully manages to transform the body into an object of pleasure rather than of fear. The phenomena of the unknown, internal female body being a monstrous and despised entity relates back to Laura Mulvey's descriptions of Freudian 'castration anxiety', where the female body is simultaneously glorified and degraded. Mulvey recognises the importance of tampering with conventional displays of the female body as a site of anxiety: [143]

> While curiosity is a compulsive desire to see and know, to investigate something secret, fetishism is born out of a refusal to see, a refusal to accept the difference the female body represents for the male. These complex series of turnings away, of covering over, not of the eyes but of understanding 'leave the body as an enigma and threat, condemned to return as a symbol of anxiety while simultaneously being transformed into its own screen in representation.[144]

Unlike Beecroft, for Rist, the audience is of equal importance to the subject matter of the work. By breaking down typical viewing methods, Rist gains much greater control over what the spectator gains from the work, which is far from Beecroft's authoritarian process. This immersion into a juxtaposition of internal and external environments is designed to provoke the sense that the subject matter echoes something which is inherent in all of us, thus allowing for the audience to see themselves within the 'other' presented to them. Rist penetrates the typically fixed boundaries of the body; the imagery she presents is neither complete nor incomplete, which in turn forces the viewer to fluidly reconfigure their own perspectives. This inability to fixate on certain elements

[142] Conversation with Richard Julin, trans. Matthew Partridge, 'Pipilotti Rist – Congratulations!' Exhibition Catalogue No.36 by *Magazin 3*(Stockholm Kunstahlle: Lars Müller Publishers, 2007) p.21.
[143] Bronfen, 'Pipilotti's Body Camera,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage,* p.120.
[144] Laura Mulvey, 'Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity,' in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996) p.56

results in the structures of logic which define the bounds of the recipients' own bodies dissolve, allowing for a collective experience and promoting the notion of being part of a larger organism.[145]

A first hand reconnection with the body within a fully enveloping, projectile environment achieves a level of three-dimensional interaction which is lacking in the work of Cecily Brown. Although Brown describes the production of her work as 'emotive,' its impact is limited by her disconnection from the actual images she responds to.[146] What Rist manages to activate is the idea of looking through the eyes of another person rather than just our own. This multiplicity is not accommodated by either Brown's or Beecroft's limitation of the positive, internal impact their work may potentially hold.

Rist is also aware that is not useful to deny the commercialisation of art due to the fact that: "the art market exists and functions according to the same laws as any other business."[147] However, her approach differs from that of Brown and Beecroft in that she refuses to capitalise on her work's bodies as "consumable and exchangeable things." [148] The commodification present in Beecroft's transformation of the 'girls' into aesthetic objects and in the marketing of Brown's paintings as objects means that in Marxist terms, their images are essentially the same as the money that is exchanged for them. [149] This is underwritten by the sensory, emotional experience at the forefront of Rist's work. Perhaps it does participate in an economy of possession and knowledge but it is this same economy which she attempts to overcome through her work's suggestion that emotion is not a thing to be acquired or owned, but rather gains value only when given to others. [150] Rist's awareness that "artists must devote their imagination not only to the art itself but to negotiating the given structures, which are often very ridged,"[151] demonstrates that it may not be easy, but it is by

[145] Chrissie Iles, 'You are a Queen: The Selfless Spaces of Pipilotti Rist,' in Pipilotti Rist, Konrad Bitterli, Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Eyeball Massage* (London: Hayward, 2011) p.115.
[146] In a Review of Brown's work, Leah Ollman writes: "Instead of powerful and passionate, her voice comes across as detached, and that the "Bodies feel disembodied, their psyche ignored altogether." Taken from Leah Ollman, 'Cecily Brown's Paintings Do Not Disturb' (September 2013) Review on Los Angeles Times Website. URL: <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/sep/26/entertainment/la-et-cm-cecily-brown-review-20130923> [accessed: 11th Febuary 2016]

[147] Phelan, 'Opening up Spaces within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, Phelan, Obrist, Bronfen eds. (London, Phaidon, 2001) p.40.
[148] Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject*, p.22.
[149] Hannah Wilke, *Exchange Values* Sonsoles Arroyo Planelles ed. and trans. (Araba: Artium De Alava, 2006) p.160.
[150] Peggy Phelan, 'Opening up Spaces within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, Phelan, Obrist, Bronfen eds. (London, Phaidon, 2001) p.41.
[151] Hans Ulrich Orbist, 'Interview: Conversation With Pipilotti Rist' in *Pipilotti Rist*, eds. Peggy Phelan, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Elisabeth Bronfen (London, Phaidon, 2001) p.8.

no means impossible for female artists to embrace a 'feminine' subjectivity and still have a 'successful' career as a female artist.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the varying feminist theory and criticism surrounding women's feminist art of the 1970s. Many of the conflicting ideologies between 70s theory and practice have been highlighted by analysing key texts and criticisms surrounding the prominent feminist artist Hannah Wilke. It was established that through 70s feminist art practice, the purpose of the nude was altered from an object of aesthetic pleasure to a subject in its own right. Although the overlying aim of this approach was to provide less fetishized versions of the female body, we have seen that the strictures of feminist theory often dominated over artists' own objectives for depicting the nude. The main issue arose from a concentration on imagery and whether or not it was 'appropriate' in overcoming the confines of objectification.[152] Although this may have created a challenging position for 70s artists, feminist theory ultimately exists to confront notions of male supremacy, both in the male dominated structure of the art world and in the wider, cultural objectification of the female body.

However, we have seen that due to the dominance of patriarchy and the male gaze, these critical evaluations relied on masculinist structures of looking and language in order to be articulated; creating a paradox in which women artists' own subjectivity was overrun by an analysis of their works' ability to communicate feminist politics. This inevitably led some female artists such as Wilke, to reject a strict abidance with the feminist regimes of the movement, with the belief that they could hinder their practice. However, Wilke's conscious decision to evade some of feminism's domineering ideologies did not impair her or her work's feminist concerns or her celebration of a specifically female subjectivity.

We have seen that, unfortunately, this cannot be said of some of her 'post-feminist' descendants, who instead of facing up to the implications of the movement have completely rejected it in relation to their practice. Avoiding some of the aesthetic restrictions suffered by their 70s predecessors, we have seen a new generation of female artists pushing feminism aside in favour of propelling their own practice. Amelia Jones clarified that some contemporary female artists' adoption of the term 'post-feminist' is problematic as it implies an end, rather than a continuance of feminism. The

[152] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.26.

feminist theories which arose from the 70s era succeeded in illuminating the continual segregation of women's art from the 'male' mainstream; and the post-feminist solution to this has consisted of attempts to 'make it like a man,' by which you may prove an exception to the rule. However this is at the expense of the wider cultural issue that women artists are still subjected to inequality, *especially* when outlining feminist issues, such as women's subjectivity through their work.

Despite Vanessa Beecroft and Cecily Brown's dismissal of the term feminism, some of the issues uncovered through an analysis of their work are intrinsically and undeniably feminist. However, due to their acceptance of functioning as part of the art world's masculinist framework, they endorse a system which only validates the cultural importance of women's art if it meets these male-centric standards. The embodied male gaze subconsciously controls not only how women are seen but how *they* see: in the case of Brown and Beecroft, what is clear is their refusal to differentiate themselves from the very same male concepts of aesthetic value which are designed to exploit and degrade women.

Also prominent is the dismissal of 70s feminism as just another socialist movement, which has diluted its cultural visibility to such an extent that non-progressive regurgitations of pre-existing theoretical concerns are produced by contemporary female artists. It has become evident that the only way to move away from simply re-exposing (and reinforcing) dominant codes of looking is to begin to alter them. Jones has revealed through her 'para-feminist' ideology that this can be made possible by building upon already established feminist theorisations. Her approach could even provide a solution to Elizabeth Grosz's concern, voiced in 1995, that:

> If women are to be granted a position congruous with but independent of men, the female body must be capable of autonomous representation, this demands a new form of language and new forms of knowledge capable of articulating femininity and women's specificity in ways quite different from prevailing alternatives.[153]

Therefore Jones' feminist art criticism proves a strong case is the most persuasive for me when considering where feminist art sits today in relation to feminist theory. However, can the insights of 70s feminism be presented in a condensed and progressive manner to inform successive generations of female artists?

Pipilotti Rist is a good example of how a non-prescriptive practice can leave behind some of the closures and limitations of feminist theory whilst continuing to make use of the strategies present in

[153] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason,' in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.32.

body orientated 70s feminist works. [154] What is clear in Rist's work is her unequivocal presentation of a specifically female process and experience which is only made possible through her imagination of the absence of fear and restriction present in social structures designed to fix meaning to object. Her approach carries feminism into a new context, building upon the innovative ideologies of Hannah Wilke, in that she does not allow her work to be ruled by, but is still undoubtedly aware of the importance of feminist politics.[155] Thus proving a means to:

> [T]he possibility of a work of art that is both sensual and conceptual or politically critical at the same time – a possibility that feminist artists have continually explored and have a high stake in maintaining, since such a work breaks down the rigid divisions required by modernist notions of criticality.[156]

Therein lies my proposal that the female body was and still is a key site for exploring feminist issues, and although the impediments of the term 'feminism' have resulted in some contemporary female artists' rejection of it, it is critical to maintain a feminist intent in order to continue exposing imagistic codes which reduce the female body to a fetishized object. It is only through a referral to, without a reiteration of these structures that we can begin to disperse its binary logic and allow women artists the full subjectivity they deserve when depicting the nude.

[154] Jones, 'The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970-2009' in *Feminism Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays On Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, Hayden, Skrubbe eds. p.44.
[155] Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation and The Contemporary Subject*, p.213.

[156] Jones, ''Post-feminism': A Remasculinization of Culture?' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968 – 2000*, Robinson ed. p.502.

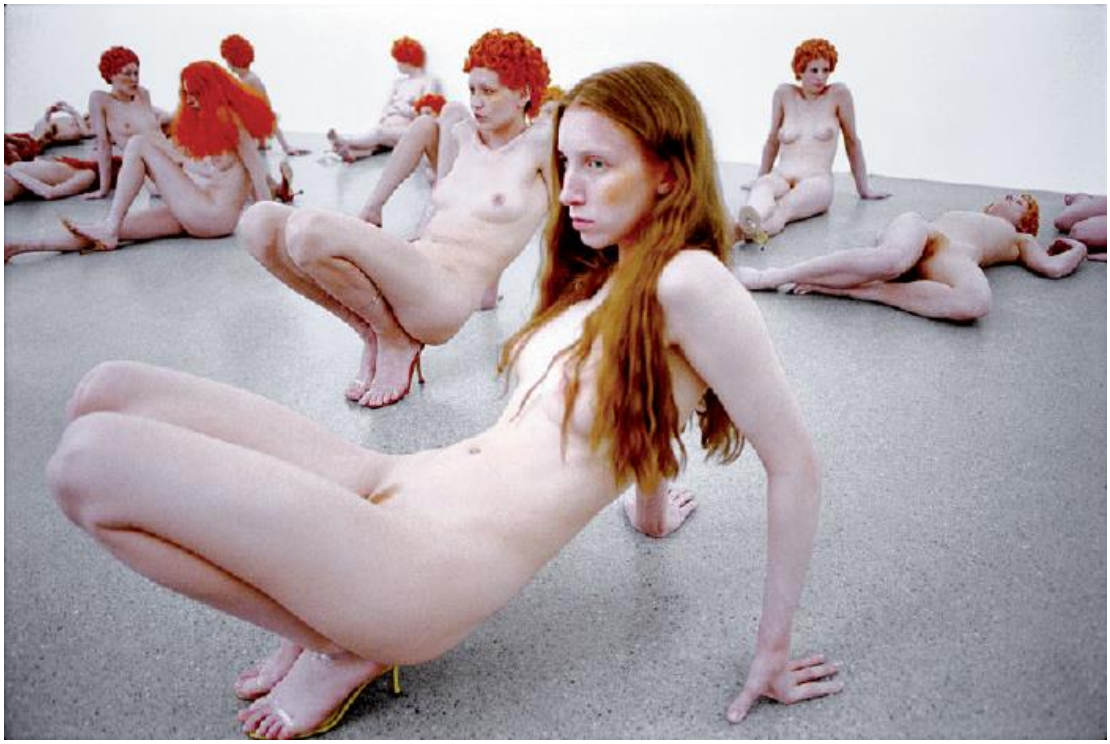

Figure 9: Vanessa Beecroft, *VB43*, 2000. Photograph of Performance.

Figure 10: Vanessa Beecroft, *VB43*, 2000. Photograph of Performance.

Figure 11: Gilbert and George, *Singing Sculpture*, 1970. Photograph of Performance

Figure 12: Vanessa Beecroft, *VB23*, 1996. Photograph of Performance

Figure 13: Cecily Brown, *Untitled*, 2013. Oil on Linen, 195.6 x 419.1 cm

Figure 14: Cecily Brown in *Vanity Fair,* 2000

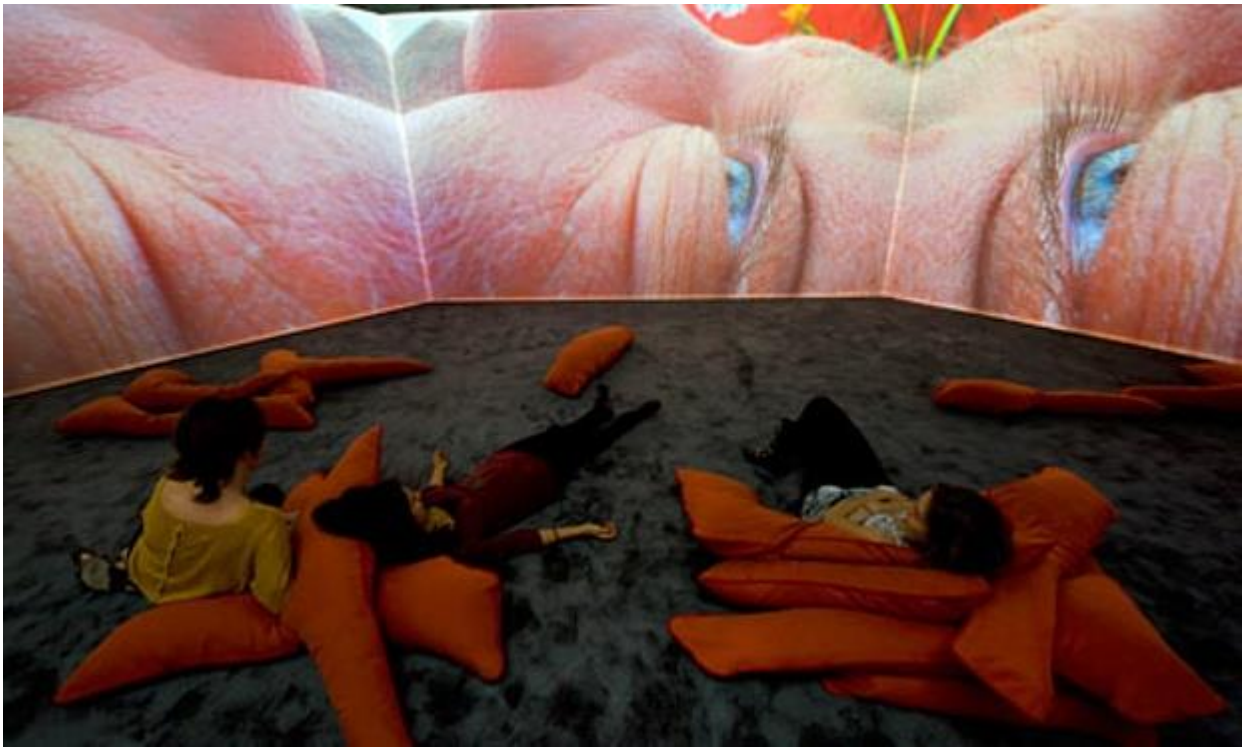

Figure 15: An example of one of Rist's domesticised and completely immersive gallery settings. Pipilotti Rist, *Lugenflügel*, (*Lobe of the Lung*) 2009. Photograph of Installation

Figure 16: Pipilotti Rist, *Blutclip*, (Bloodclip) 1993. Video Stills

Figure 17: Pipilotti Rist, *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986. Video Still

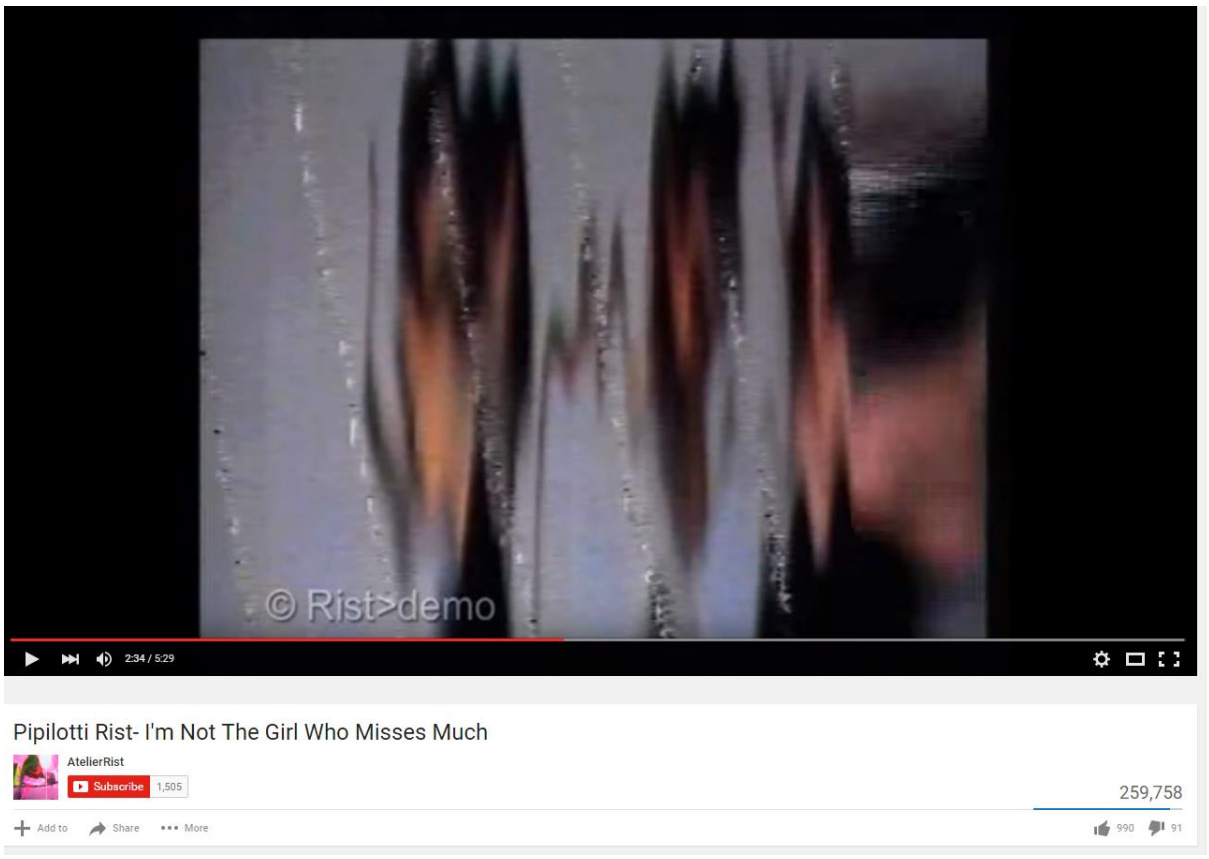

Figure 18: Pipilotti Rist, *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986. Video Still taken from Youtube

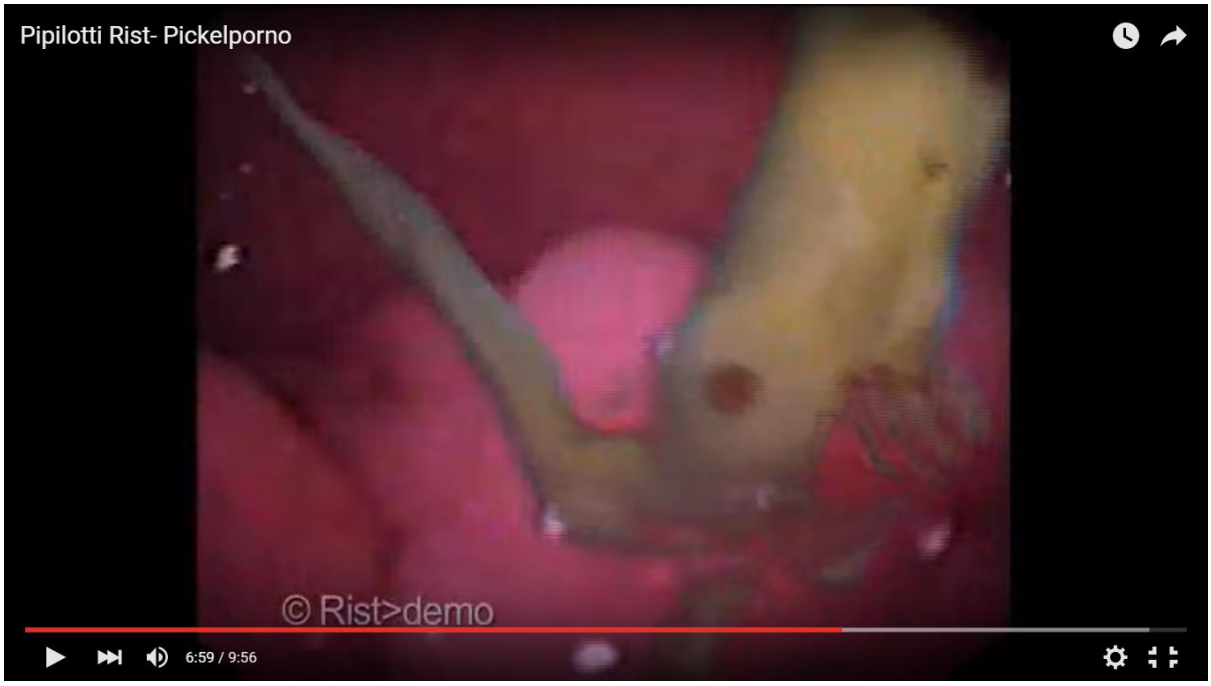

Figure 19: Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno* (Pimple Porno) 1992. Video Still taken from Youtube

Figure 20: Pipilotti Rist, *Pickelporno* (Pimple Porno) 1992. Video Stills.

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Vanessa Beecroft: Portraiture has been always very important for me, it means I was always looking for special features, mostly in the face, because the body is as soon as it's not too oversized or too short, [or] standardised, but the face is always most important and very few times I was able to find special portraits. So in this case maybe only two or three of the girls have the fact that I'm interested in.

JW: This is part of the whole way that you work, you're choosing your selection, you'll then think of the dynamics of the group.

VB: Yeah, the group is general, so it's always important the balance between the group, it could be anybody, and then sometimes I pick some special people that they represent with their features...]

JW: Another thing that you do in your work is the body make-up to kind of give a superficial uniform, but again the tonal values are very beautiful in that piece, certainly in the live performance. With that, how difficult is it to do that...?

VB: To me it's immediate; I know what I want in the picture. To me it's like I use girls as drawings, I use orange or white, I colour them in. In this case, I thought about Elizabeth first (referring to the Queen of Britain)she transformed herself [into] an icon, she made herself white.

VB: I asked the make-up artist to make them (the models) alabaster, a white which was not Elizabeth it was less, and it's difficult to work with make-up artists because I personally don't have concept or, im not fond of make-up. I just want them to look more detached from the natural image.

JW: Why do you do that, why do you want them to be more detached?

VB: Because then it's more conceptual, I don't care about nudity, nakedness. It's important because it is a classic reference and it has a certain impact, it's a bit aggressive on the audience and I am interested in that reaction but I don't want the details. I prefer if it's about nudity and they're naked, but it's not [a] natural, completely natural look. That's more 70s statements I'm not interested in - my reference is more with paintings. Even if I care that that's a live event and people are confronted directly with nudity that is a bit embarrassing, it's something that is not easy to deal with right away, myself included. I'm the first, when they (the models) get ready I just try to avoid it all, completely the situation because I don't want to be next to a naked girl because I can't handle it.

JW: That's interesting, so, I think that the way that the audience reacts is very interesting, the way they react with their Gaze, the way the girls were, I believe directed to return the Gaze in this piece. Sometimes you give fairly minimal instructions don't you, to not talk or maybe not to look or not to

smile. Again for each piece, are there different kinds of instructions you feel are intergral to the way they will react to the audience?

VB: The instructions are always the same because they are basic. Not to speak, not to move too fast, too slow, not to act. To be natural but not casual, and depending on the space, the dimension and the subject, I install them differently and I ask them to go back to their position. So it's the location, where they're located that, so they can break the group but then they can go back to it again, forming the picture. So at the end it's like a blurry picture, it's like out of focus because they slightly move, but they are realistic.

JW: And again you keep the trope of the kind of high heels where did that come from, where is that concept from?

VB: The high heels, always there is a personal reference so since I was fifteen I walked on and never went down, never ever apart from when I go swimming. But also for me it's like a base, where you stick the girl and she's like a sculpture, and her posture is different.

VB: I am asking the girls to be volunteers, to show themselves. And always they are aware, they must understand what's going on otherwise they wouldn't be able to do it, because its not a job, it's more. I kind of require them to be the purpose, and go there and display themselves and be okay with it. So it's in between, I would [say] and aesthetic but they also have to participate.

JW: Now, also in your work is time and duration. These are long pieces, you're asking quite a lot of your girls, your women to stand there... You're asking for some type of endurance. Where did the time and duration come from in the work, again was that a filmic reference, was that a personal reference, was that thinking about perhaps how you get made up and you're all perfect and then slightly throughout time and duration the façade slips, or the feet start to hurt or the high heels start to ache or whatever?

VB: But to me it's like as much as when you start a painting you have to spend some time... It's important for me for them (the models) not to be excited but to start to have endurance, to hang on and to stay there as long as possible. At the same time the stand there for a long time but then they're going to go and when they're gone they're gone. The fact that they are not going to last that is also the beauty of them is not going to last so that is always the point that they're going to go... My main work is the girls because I can see that the girls are a raw material that I colour and I push as far as I can but it's more informal.

JW: Do you ever talk to your audiences after the performance and see how they relate to it or indeed to the models, how they felt being on display? I mean it's unavoidable in the 21st century and certainly when you started working in 1994, for your work to be able ignore the whole kind of weight of criticism about the gaze, the female gaze, the male gaze. And I think what's interesting in your work, I mean you have described yourself as a kind of post-feminist, is that sensitivity that you bring to the work. How do you react to that whole kind of voyeuristic notion of what you're doing?"

VB: I, regarding talking to the girls, I never talk to the girls. I don't talk to the audience because I'm not interested. I look for a distance between me, my subject and the audience. I need them both, I need to know how the girl feels and I need to know what the audience thinks, but I don't want to be

involved because I have to go my way and there is no way they are going to defer, I cannot, it is not about the psychology, even if it is important element for the audience. So they deal between each other and I observe that, but I don't interact because I like the intimidation (interaction) that they have with the audience and the situation, and if I was friendly with them it would just break, so I prefer to keep it like real life, when you're walking in the street, what happens if you're naked.

JW: You come from a performance background from work, but you are approaching it in a different way from how performance art would have been approached in the 70s, necessarily, so but I just wondered how you see the spread through, do you see yourself as breaking some kind of tradition and then re-making it differently as a contemporary artist?

VB: To me, I was never fond of performance art of the 70s, I never even knew it. The one I prefer is Gilbert and George living sculpture, but I never really acted like a student in those terms, I just take it for granted that you can use performance as painting, as photography, and I was never fond of any media like painting. I always, because I was raised in Italy, like painting of Renaissance, and be impressed and influenced by them because that was the landscape, and there was no contemporary art that I could see, the most recent were... from the states, but for me it was not directly an influence and what impressed me and it's both in the girls and in the navy work is the fact that those archetypes exist in paintings but you can still find a girl walking in the street today that looks like a *Piero della Francesca*, or a marine that looks like a Greek sculpture like *David of Michelangelo* and so I like the link that they are referencing the past and the fact that they are still around.

JW: I think it's interesting that you have chosen to make a performance piece rather than a painting.

VB: It is exercising it in a public place, in a place which is supposed to be an art institution (only), they (the audience) can watch what they maybe were dreaming about and it's there… what's the problem? I personally think if you show a woman naked, beautiful or not, and on heels, in front of an audience what's going to happen? I don't like when this happens in private, I always have problems with that, so I want to display it and with the reference of art in which women are always represented beautifully, or not really because I'm not really fond of the painting presentation of women, I always hated the way *Rhubens* or whatever would represent these women. But the license to display them naked in *Monet*, the woman is there and it is not a problem, why I want to see how far that can, I like both the reference of paintings and real life, and I would like them to…. How many times can you display that until they are not/can no longer be an issue, or it would be seen as a picture so it would be more related to beauty than sex, because I hate it always this immediacy. And my work is funny, the press, I am always influenced by the press that they [perceive] that it is always more superficial, aggressive and 'scandelistic', that's funny.

JW: 'Sex sells Art' kind of headlines!

VB: I want to see how far it will go so then it won't make sense anymore to talk that way about the girls, so that was interesting, I was like so if you display it twenty times is it going to be the same reaction, so it might not. In that point I can stop doing it because then it will be okay, but I haven't yet reached that point because still the press is the same as if it was a show – a peep show or whatever. So I have fun with the press because it's so behind, and especially, even art critics who are

supposed to get it, they react as if they are truck drivers, just passing by, but that's fun, it's interesting in that that's how they take the work out of today. So I insist, until maybe something else comes out of this, I don't even know what it is. Maybe I will end up saying there is no way something else will come out of this, the girls are girls and they are sexy and that's it, maybe, I don't know. I insist because I want to see. But I like that it's a bit cheap, and that it is not too intellectual because I don't want to lie, I want [something] that is straightforward, what happens if you see these girls. And the same time with the reference, you can get them or not, and there is always this make-up that creates a distance, it is not right away [or] immediate, there is some filter, but it is very thin.

ii) Transcribed Excerpts From Rolf Lauter Interview with Cecily Brown (2005)

Cecily Brown: I would like to abolish the terms abstract and figurative… for me, it's, there's not really any difference. I've I don't feel like I approach a so-called abstract painting differently from the figurative one. It's as, I prefer the word figural, where there is some kind of trace of a figure, or if something from the real world, but, I like playing with a sense of uncertainty and things become forms in the process of becoming something or in the process of dissolving or melting, or breaking down. I'm most interested in that place where things are unsure, that seems like a sort of realism to me. Everything's in flux, my ideal viewer would spend a lot of time looking at a work, my ideal painting would keep changing over years of looking, it could survive being looked at for a long time. They change, when, for me, when they work, it's when I keep seeing new things in them that perhaps I didn't intend. I like to keep it very open, so that a different viewer will see, each viewer I think sees it quite differently.

CB: I want people to be able to look at it - that it keeps revealing itself, the more that you look at the more you're going to get from it, and I think sometimes with the very clear figures, perhaps that's a more difficult thing to do because I think people tend to look at it and think they got it straight away. So sometimes I want to do a very clear figure, but I also want to even with those paintings, make sure that there's some kind of shift away from what you see in the first instant. I always want to have a painting that grabs your attention, grabs your eyeballs, but you try and turn away but you can't because it keeps, it holds you there.

Rolf Lauter: What does sexual relationship mean to you certainly regarding your paintings - the subject?

CB: [I]t's a way to, it's not really telling a story but it's telling… it's hard to explain… it's not telling one story, it's something everyone can recognise, everybody can respond to, its universal. Of course visually, it's very exciting to look at, and then there's an emotional charge that I think comes with using this kind of imagery which I've… one of the things I've always loved about painting and other peoples' old master paintings, is its ability to carry an emotional charge, that the magical and chemical thing about painting being able to… this inner substance on a still canvass actually has the power to illicit an emotional response. So I suppose, it's kind of taking that idea a little further of, perhaps sometimes illustrating an idea in a way that is not so successful. But it seems… I used to

paint the subject a lot more, I think for me, it always seemed that would've the most ideal subjects for painting. The oil paint lends itself very well to describing flesh, or not describing so much as making an equivalent to flesh. And all the things I'm really interested in painting, are there in the sexual act, at the centre movement and light across skin/flesh, and some kind of charge and tension. The things I want above all are tension and electricity and energy, so that's, it makes it a good subject. I also love old master paintings and I always, I think the ones I love the most of always, are very erotic art, erotic works, which were possibly made a time where there was, you couldn't really be explicit. In some ways it's more powerful I hope to be to have an implicit erotic charge... it's the idea of the *Venus of Urbino* or something, so sexy, but it's not… it's like a full, you get a visceral response, I want a visceral response. [I] love the way that it hits your eye, your mind, your body, your, sort of, nervous system. So, I was always interested in how close can you get to… how can… when is it not pornography? How close can you get while using this kind of imagery but still remaining where it's appeal to the whole-body, all the senses and not aiming so below the belt?