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Citation:

Singleton, P (2023) "Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?" In: Zurbriggen, EL and Capdevila, R, (eds.) The Palgrave Handbook of Power, Gender, and Psychology. Palgrave Macmillan Cham, pp. 597-610. ISBN 978-3-031-41530-2, 978-3-031-41531-9, 978-3-031-41533-3 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41531-9_32

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Chapter contribution for Zurbriggen, E. L., & Capdevila, R. (Eds.). (forthcoming). The Palgrave handbook of power, gender, and psychology. Palgrave Macmillan.

Abstract: The female body has long been constructed by feminism as in need of reclamation. Singleton draws upon feminist praxis in therapy, art and embodiment to consider what such a reclamation might look like, and constructs both counternarratives and counterstrategies to generate trans-inclusive alternatives to the present “problem” of the female body. The chapter draws upon the affective imaginary of the female self in generative feminist political work to establish therapy centres for women, and considers economies of visibility in cultural representations of female and othered bodies in the work of Judy Chicago, Maria Abramović and Lola Flash. Examining two feminist poles of perspective on women’s embodied experiences, such as tattoos and bodybuilding, Singleton then makes a provocative argument for a call to feminist arms to transcend the disciplinary milieu of the categorically female body, with insistence on reconstruction of the apparent opposition of masculine and feminine.

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Chapter title: Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: Reclaiming the female body?

This chapter considers the female body, constructed by feminism as in need of reclamation (Pitts, 2003). The central questions are, what would it take to consider the female body as “reclaimed”? For it to be as unremarkable, as unproblematic, as the male body in public space? I consider some ways in which feminists have worked towards such ends, moving in sequence from women’s therapy through to art and then embodiment practices. The chapter draws upon the ideas raised in these fields to make an argument concerning tools at our disposal to work towards joyful and rebellious reclamation. However, there are a couple of important caveats. Firstly, I am a trans-

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

inclusive feminist. When I talk of reclaiming the female body, I mean reclaiming the abject feminine from misogynist culture, and rebranding it as powerful, dangerous and joyful. Whether the reader identifies as having a female body, or identifies beyond a gender binary, then they are included here. This includes the female body which presents as, or is made sense of as, masculine. Secondly, although a large part of this chapter is about art, I am not an art critic; I am a psychologist with an interest in gendered embodiments and a love of feminist art. This is my perspective on some art I have encountered over the past thirty years which questions what it means to be female or feminine in these times, and which engages with the impossible demands of patriarchal culture. It is a partial perspective I am sure, but my own.

Let us briefly consider a summary of relevant embodiment theories from a feminist perspective. Leder's "absent body" hypothesis (1990) contends that one's own body is normally absent to consciousness, unless a specific physical sensation or social experience cause it to "dys-appear", defined as the body's problematic emergence into the consciousness. Yet feminist work such as that of Young (2001) on the phenomenology of female body experiences challenges such a non-gendered theory. She argues that women simultaneously view their bodies as a burden, and as something that needs to be protected, but never something which we are allowed to absent from consciousness. Butler argues that all bodies have an "invariably public dimension. [...] Given over from the start to the world of others, [the body] bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life" (2004, p. 26). Yet even in the scopical economy of consumer capitalism, it seems to me that the female body is still continually re/presented to us in contrast to the male body: as more unfinished, less satisfactory, and certainly more noticeable in public. We simply don't think of men's bodies as in need of reclamation. The female body, women's psychosocial being, is still constituted as deviant in the public sphere, and as subordinate in the private sphere. The female body/self cannot yet be considered as "reclaimed". The chapter now moves to an examination of some attempts at reclamation from feminist therapy movements to art and embodiment practices, before

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

concluding with a feminist call to join arms (Ahmed, 2017) and sharing of tools to generate alternatives to the present “problem” of the female body.

Reclaiming the female self: the Women’s Therapy Centre and beyond

McLeod (1994) notes that feminist therapy began as a riposte to critiques of sexist accounts of women’s emotional well-being, and sexist response to women’s distress. The creative spark galvanizing this was the self-help paradigm dominant in the feminism of the 1970s, predicated on refusing to accept that “what exists” equates to “all that it is possible to be”. Feminist therapy therefore pointed to the way that women’s emotional needs were subordinated in sexist culture and attempted to meet these needs by engaging women in therapy that was psychologically productive, emotionally enlightening or personally transforming. Krzowski and Land (1988) describe how the London Women’s Therapy Centre was started in 1976 by Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum, so that women could be treated by feminist therapists in a way that addressed women’s needs and took account of their social realities. The Centre continues to this day, with a particular commitment currently to offer services to women whose needs would not be met elsewhere, or who would not usually have access to therapy: there is a young mothers’ group and services for migrants and asylum seekers. Back in the 1970s, its first home was a basement flat with two large consulting rooms and an office/kitchen. Self-financing, it charged fees on a sliding scale to enable access for the benefit of women who had little or no money. Very quickly, the center was overwhelmed by demand for individual therapy with a two-year waiting list, and so developed a workshop program dealing with the most common issues faced in individual provision: feelings about being stuck in caring roles or problems within social relationships. The workshops were also intended to teach skills useful for self-help groups which many women wanted. Groups were focused around three types of issues: firstly, the interpersonal, those to do with relationships with family or intimate partners; secondly, for issues dealing with the problems of the outside world rather than the psyche or intimate sphere; and finally, those dealing with issues of the inner world such as depression or

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

expressing creativity. Sessions were run for specific groups of women, such as working class and black women, lesbians, and those with mental health issues such as agoraphobia.

The burgeoning feminist therapy field knew it to be insufficient to consider women's emotional well-being solely in terms of subordination through gender; for example McLeod (1994) asks us to consider emotional experiences as a "permeable membrane" (p.7) where our inner states interact with the outside world, such as the demands from our social conditions and the resources and possibilities they make available, and more widely by the ideological assumptions of the day and the way we attempt to express ourselves within the bounds of these. There is so much more than gender at play here. However, McLeod argues, gender can be considered as the fulcrum of women's emotional wellbeing, whereby societal positionings of women as subordinate "filter into intrapsychic emotional processes that compose women's self-identity" (p. 9). One example of this, posited by Eichenbaum and Orbach (1985), is that young women's emotional needs are forged within relationships with their mothers, who themselves have their own needs unmet in sexist society: personal relationships where emotional needs are supposed to be met are often sites of dominance and subordination and, therefore, poor emotional wellbeing.

However, critiques of feminist therapy rest upon its call to the journey inward. Women's attentions and energies in feminist therapy were directed very much towards individual solutions and deflected from the need for urgent social change – in a way that sidestepped or even reinforced inequalities. Kitzinger (1991) drew explicit attention to this, in a critique of notions of female power as somehow superior to male power, and power as a concept used as a convenient way of summarizing a situation which however does nothing to explain it. In the early feminist therapy paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s, Kitzinger (1991) describes the slew of supposedly feminist self-help titles such as *The Journey Within*, *Journey Into Me*, *Healing the Child Within*, and so on, which make abundantly clear the supposed locus of the solution to the problem of female subordination – the "target of resistance to male power becom[ing] female minds" (p. 118). Kitzinger describes the

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

many feminist psychologist fliers at the 1990 conference of the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP) in the U.S., as this exemplar:

Sage Fairchild, a professional counsellor and bodywork therapist, who specializes in creative visualization and guided meditation, wants to help her clients “reach a centered place.... Through the integration of physical, mental and spiritual energies, clients are empowered to make clearer choices based on full awareness” (1991, p.121).

Lest this type of thing be dismissed as “fringe psychobabble without relevance to feminist psychology overall” (1991), Kitzinger argues that the same themes are to be found in mainstream works of the time such as Gilligan (1972), and Belenkey et al. (1986), where women’s ways of knowing are argued as purely intuitive, subjective and requiring a definitive reclaiming of the female self. In such a conception of female power and problems, Kitzinger argues, feminist psychology followed its home discipline, which has persistently refused to make explicit the reproduction of power relationships and often actively obscures these. In working towards the “free, autonomous, self-fulfilled and authentic woman” (p.124) Kitzinger (1991) argues that such feminist therapy is collaborationist with patriarchy, rather than a challenge to it.

Kitzinger argues for feminist attention to Foucault’s conception of power as productive, not as a force which acts on us from outside, but which produces how individuals are psychologically formed and “served”. In this way power can be considered as something that nurtures specific types of identity and decides that some are more worthy than others. At the nexus of power and identity therefore, feminist psychology must address an explicit politics of subjectivity, which acknowledges both the “violence of our oppression and the courage of our resistance” (p.126). But this is a challenging task even thirty years later. The discipline of psychology remains one which tends to depoliticize and individualize, in a way with which therapy inevitably colludes, however feminist it might aim to be, as argued by Fine and Gordon in 1991. We cannot reclaim our authentic selves if there are no authentic selves to be had while our psychic feet are bound by the culture which grows us.

Reclaiming the female body in art and body practices

One important way in which attention has been drawn to problematized femininities in patriarchal cultures is through art by women, whether or not such work explicitly identifies as feminist. In their broad survey of the impact of the American feminist art movement of the 1970s, Broude and Garrard (1994) describe the initial impetus and energy of the times: the goal of feminist art was to enact a comprehensive and lasting cultural revolution by stopping the suppression of women's perspectives, and thereby ushering in a new era of equal representation for the dreams and lives of both women and men. Broude and Garrard argue that the contribution of feminist art has been to introduce a postmodernist revolution in art, by highlighting gender as socially constructed, by contesting the hierarchy of art forms, by using "low" methods such as crafts, video and performance art, and by prioritizing pluralist varieties of work. To exemplify the contribution of such work to the project of "reclaiming" the subordinate gendered body, this chapter focuses, although not exclusively, on the work of Judy Chicago using pottery and various forms of needlework, the performance art of Marina Abramović, specifically *Rhythm 0* (1974), and the photography of Lola Flash.

Judy Chicago

This artist is probably most (in)famous for her work *The Dinner Party*, undertaken 1974-1979 and now on permanent view at the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Lucie-Smith's (2000) survey of Chicago's body of work describes this work in detail in chapter four. The work is a huge installation piece with monumental textile entryway banners, a triangular table with a shaped plate and decorative runner for each of the 39 historically important women featured, ceramic floor tiles underneath featuring the names of 999 more important women, and the "heritage panels" (information boards) which outline why these women were included. The work was equal parts wildly popular and critically derided. Feminist critique mainly decried the shaped plates which purported to represent vulvar forms, querying why women must always be

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

represented by their body parts, even with feminist aims. Certainly, the imagery could be conceived as problematic because of its essentialist, passive nature. The work fits into the feminist movement of the 1970s which glorified and focused on the female body. Nevertheless, it is of its time, and unfortunately, women of ethnicities other than white and European are not well represented in the work.

Chicago's *Birth Project* undertaken in the early 1980s focused on representations of birth, as the artist could find no artistic representations of crowning (when the baby's head starts showing through the vaginal opening with each contraction), saying that "If men gave birth there would be hundreds of representations of the crowning" (1985). Again, Lucie-Smith's (2000) work, chapter five, has a full description and images from this series. Chicago undertook the design of dozens of these works to be enacted in various form of needlecraft such as embroidery, macramé and crochet; these were enacted by more than 150 skilled needleworkers for payment. One of the most powerful images in the collection is that of a "birth tear" to the vulva. Feminist critique focused on the lack of "authenticity" in this work because of its collaborative nature arguing that Chicago might have exploited these women. The reaction of mainstream art critics was to negate these representations as art due to both their subject matter (which was considered by many to be too graphic) and the medium. Yet to this date these are the only representations in art of this topic, and their enormous power endures.

To my mind, both of these works exemplify the feminist project of putting women's lives and experiences to the fore, transforming the abject positionings and embodied experiences of women into high art through decorative "low" art methods. Further, these works reclaim both women's history, as equally world-shaping and powerful as its male counterpart, and the female body as a site of creative power.

Marina Abramović

This artist is famous for her performance works such as *The Artist Is Present* in residence at MOMA New York in 2010. However, I now focus on an early performance, *Rhythm 0*, undertaken in 1974, at an art gallery in Naples. The artist prepared a table laden with 72 objects, from the mundane to the more threat-laced, including lipstick, comb, a whip, paint, a scalpel – and an unloaded gun and one bullet. The instructions for the work displayed on the table were as follows:

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance

I am the object.

During this period I take full responsibility.

1974

Duration: 6 hours (8pm–2am.)

[source: Tate, N.D., where the props and a video recording of parts of the performance can be seen]

In a video recorded for the Marina Abramović Institute (Zec, 2016), Abramović herself described how she undertook this piece in response to critiques of performance art, which at that time constructed its creators as “sick, exhibitionist, ridiculous, masochistic and attention-seeking”; she undertook this piece “to see how far the public would go if the artist themselves doesn’t do anything”. The outcome of this piece was genuinely disturbing. In the artist’s own words, again from the video of 2016:

They cut my neck and drink [sic] my blood, they carried me around, put me on a table and opened my legs and put a knife in between them. Then one person took the pistol, put the bullet [in] and see if I would really with my own hand push the [trigger], the gallerist came and went crazy, took the gun and threw it out the window, they took the scissors and cut my

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

clothes, they put the rose [thorns] into my body. Then at the end of the time the gallerist came and said the performance was over, I started moving and being myself because I was there like a puppet just for them, and at that moment everyone ran away, people could not actually confront with me as a person. (Abramović, 2016).

The power of this work, for me at least, lies in how comfortable the audience was in 1974 with brutalizing an objectified woman in public space. Abramović echoes the work of Yoko Ono in *Cut Piece*, premiered in Kyoto in 1964, (see MOMA, N.D.) where Ono invited the audience to approach her and cut pieces of her clothing. However, where Ono's work ended at the discretion of the artist, Abramović allowed her audience to continue for six hours. I am including this work here as a piece exemplifying the need for a reclamation of the female body; it points to an urgency of rehabilitation of the category of woman.

Lola Flash

Lola Flash is a portrait photographer who has spent decades creating work that speaks to racism, sexism and homophobia. They celebrate queer legacies and their career straddles activism and art, beginning in the 1980s with work documenting the ACT UP protests. Recently their work has focused on women over the age of 70 in the *Salt* series, continuing their project of representing those who are often deemed invisible. As they describe it, "I've been going to galleries and museums forever and feeling invisible" (Lynne, 2018), and they encourage their students to start building their own artistic legacy if they don't find themselves represented. Their series *[sur]passing* draws attention to the impact of skin pigmentation on Black identity and consciousness, where amount of melanin can lead to a wild variety of outcomes, from "overt favoritism to extreme alienation" (Lynne, 2018). Lola Flash describes the aim of this series:

The models are shot with a large format camera from towering urban vantage points [...] they become divine, larger than the purposely out of focus buildings [...] in contrast to the sharp, crisp rendering of each subject. The subjects assertively return the gaze, hanging the four-foot

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

by five-foot photographs above eye level, the viewer has no choice but to “look up” to these people [...] creating a plethora of complex positive imagery of [black] people (Flash, n.d. 1)

In the SURMISE series of images of those who are “gender fluid, [and] gay people who look straight and vice versa” (Flash, n.d. 2), Flash deals explicitly with the impact for queer people of visual representations of gender and their effects upon both our psyches and society. In the artist statement on this series, Flash reminds us that the language we have available to talk about gender and sexual identity is constantly being transformed because of shifting political climates and socially constructed notions of what gender expressions are acceptable. In the current climate of demonstrations and campaigns against trans people, often undertaken in the name of feminism, these are important and timely reminders. Gender is not (and never has been) a monolith, except as it has been presented to us by those in positions of power: the church, the state, and heteronormative society. Psychology itself has been a shameful participant in this through the work of those such as John Money, who performed “sexual reassignment surgery” on infants, and more recently, clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson, who firmly conflates “attractive women” with “nature itself”, rendering women as inspiring of terror to young men (2018, p.323). The consequences of “misunderstandings and misrepresentations related to perceived gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation are often painful, soul destroying and, in some countries, life threatening” (Flash, n.d. 2). Even in countries where legislation might appear to protect those who are different, we continually hear of killings of those with less social power, who are women, femme, queer, trans, Black: the stakes could not be higher for our claim to be fully human and to demand to be seen differently, respected. Flash is keen to celebrate the beauty in diversity and to enable their various subjects simply to be visible, rather than inspected: “my focus as a photographer is really just to say to my beautiful subjects, ‘Lola Flash thinks you’re beautiful. She’s going to drag her big old camera over and take a portrait of you.’” (Lynne, 2018).

Body practices

I now consider feminist politics in relation to body practices beyond art, and some problems which arise when feminism and postmodernism meet agentic female embodied experience. Essentialist feminist politics of the 1970s had a conception of the female body as naturally better than the male body; more nurturant, more peaceful, and preferable in its natural state, unmarked by patriarchal culture, such as freedom from imperatives to shave body hair or wear a bra. This type of interpretation is also common today in media accounts or representations of women's bodily practices such as tattooing, piercing and cosmetic surgery (see Pitts, 2003, for an account of the experiences of what might be considered by some to be extreme body modifications). Mainstream culture was then and still is now quick to interpret women's agentic acts concerning their own bodies as signifying underlying problems within the individual psyche. Even postmodern theorists have been very ready to discount women's own understandings of agency in regard to their own bodies and experiences, for instance Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993/2011) argues that we need not consider personal understandings of individual bodies since bodies are made sense of socially, and this overrides individual concerns.

In Pitts' (2003) examination of the accounts of women who have modified their bodies through scarification or tattooing as responses to trauma, she notes that "women's attempts to reclaim their own bodies acknowledge the ways their bodies have already been inscribed for them, without their consent and often through violence" (p. 81). She further argues that these women choose to refuse challenging social pressures which bend them towards silencing and normalizing women's victimization. Even when women do not explicitly refuse victimization, they can still be considered pathological if they fail to inhabit weakness and vulnerability as a sign of femininity. Haywood (1998) notes how women body builders are often pathologised as ugly, steroid-abusing, unfeminine, and "with a will and self-determination that is so extreme that it can be [...] self-destructive" (p. 7). They are violating beauty norms, inviting the male gaze in a way which recuperates women's category of "being looked at" (Berger, 1972, p.47), moving it from a position of

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

passivity and oppression to one of self-definition, display on one's own terms, at least to the extent allowed in a patriarchal culture.

But what of modern economies of visibility in social networking sites? Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) draw attention to self-presentation online of female athletes. There are possibilities of disruption here, they argue; "the sportswomen with the biggest international followings and thus the most visible female sporting bodies in [social networking sites], however, tend to be those who are most successfully practising neoliberal feminist discourses of self-entrepreneurialism and empowerment, and who willingly celebrate a sporty and heterosexy, fashionable femininity" (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p.20). It still seems that to violate beauty norms means to "remain largely invisible and/or illegible" (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p.28).

Before turning to the construction of spaces in which to subvert convention and create such possibilities as Nussbaum outlines in *Sex and Social Justice* (1999), I now summarize two poles of perspective on women's embodied experience, relevant to a reclaiming project. One pole is what Pitts (2003) describes as the "mutilating" model, wherein radical feminists and postmodern theorists alike conceive of the perspectives of individuals on their own experiences as somehow irrelevant to notions of power and justice. Pitt designates the alternate pole as the "reclaiming" model, conceiving the individual as all powerful in choosing to refuse patriarchal inscriptions on her psyche, as in the work of the Women's Therapy Centre, and wherein the individual body can therefore be read as a kind of autobiography unimpeded by culture. These positions both neglect women's agency: we can draw attention to the body as socially constructed and inscribed by gendered power relations. And, like Pitts' women body modifiers, women need not choose to be modified or marked by patriarchal culture, as this is not within individual control. Pitts' argument is that there is no attempt at meaning making about the individual body which can be separated from discourse. She argues that attempts at reclaiming the body should therefore be re-conceived: not as returning the self to some kind of "pre-victimized state" (2003, p. 85), but rather as producing stories of the body different to the ones socially assigned, for example by gender. These stories co-construct meanings

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

in a mediated exchange between firstly, the lived experience of the body, secondly, a dialogue between the social and personal interpretations about the meanings of that body, and thirdly, within cultural conversations about what those meanings represent. As Cahill (2001) argues, in choosing to account for “how and in what way and by who and to what effect” (p. 143) we have been marked, and in negotiating our agency within (and bursting the bounds of) the discursive limits of gendered power, we are able to transcend (however momentarily) Cahill’s “phenomenology of fear”: the affective, disciplinary milieu of the categorically female body.

Discussion: the future of reclaiming the female body

Both individual therapy, and art practices like the Abramović piece *Rhythm 0* described above, bravely position the individual as intensely vulnerable – noticing and foregrounding the problem of how women are perceived in, and how they experience, the public and private spheres. Only by entering this difficult and vulnerable state can our lot be bettered in the longer term. We perform the subject positions made available to us in normative culture (in art) and our present living situations (in therapy), explore and draw attention to the problems within these situations, consider and practice some potential solutions, and reflect upon these to come up with new forms of practicable solutions which are unimaginable from the perspective of normative culture. Whether through feminist therapy, in making or witnessing feminist art, or in deciding how and when to mark our bodies, we are enabled to speak our truths – or as Ahmed (2017) would put it, we raise our arms willfully - even though this makes us vulnerable and can be painful. The self-help paradigm referred to above in the material on feminist therapy continues to the present day in contemporary feminist activism. Such activism includes protesting injustice and campaigning for resources, both physical and discursive. Examples of these include continuing the work of the Guerrilla Girls by pointing to such matters as continuing sexism in art displays, by “ArtActivistBarbie” (to be found on Twitter at @BarbieReports), protesting at the closure or defunding of women’s therapy centers and domestic

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

violence shelters, and Chella Quint's Period Positive campaign against menstruation taboos, based upon inclusive values.

The chapter now moves to consider two of the major tools available to those who wish to "reclaim" the female body: firstly, the decoupling of the category woman from vulnerability in the public sphere, and secondly offering ideas for counterstrategy, of making spaces in which, referring back to Nussbaum, we can subvert convention and resourcefully create possibilities of love and joy, even in societies that nourish problematic gender roles.

Tools 1: Counternarratives

We can use our arms (after Ahmed, 2017) to draw attention to how power works to reinforce inequality. It is possible to decouple vulnerability from "woman". The counselors, artists, and feminist activists described above point to women's everyday encounters and the limited affordances available to women under patriarchal regimes. In their transgressions and refusals, they draw attention to dominant cultural norms and how unsatisfactory they are for women as individuals and as a category. They present subjectifications in magnified form. The submissive form of Yoko Ono in *Cut Piece*; the passive bodily object presented by Marina Abramović in *Rhythm 0*: they perform the passivity that patriarchal culture expects and show it to the world at large to shocking effect. They challenge the dark and depressing place assigned to woman within the dominance hierarchy. It is possible to refuse to stay home and suffer in silence, hiding menstrual blood as a source of private shame. It is possible to refuse to accept that only the male nipple is publicly acceptable. It is possible to revel in that which is held abject – female bodies and their entrances and exits, capacities and curves – by producing them at 15 times life size in glowing technicolor and invite all to enter, as in the monumental sculpture *Hon-en-katedral* of 1966 (Niki de Saint Phalle Foundation, 2016). It is possible to re/present abjection as beauty and capacity. Inspired by the photography of Cindy Sherman, it is possible to present women as multiple, complex and contradictory, as men are allowed to be. As in the fleshy, awe-inspiring self-portrait photography of

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

Catherine Opie, and the exuberant erotic art of certified sexologist, sex educator, former sex worker, and feminist, Annie Sprinkle, it is possible to refuse to accept our designated position as either worthy Madonna or unworthy whore; it is possible to be sexual on terms which refuse such ordering and the shame heaped on the unapologetically sexual woman. After Judy Chicago, as cited in Lucie-Smith (2000, p. 56/7), it is possible to challenge the positioning of the female body as the repository of all the emotions in culture, of the male body as disembodied and invulnerable, and it is possible to enquire as to the emotions the male body can contain and express, beyond anger and violence. What would it mean to draw attention to the male body as equally embodied, emotional, vulnerable, and why is this constructed as so threatening? If the feminine is the site of all that is abject and vulnerable, then the masculine can be re/presented as respectable and invulnerable. Hegemonic masculinity is repetitively formulated as denying vulnerability (Courtenay, 2000); Glaser and Frosh (1988) explicitly link hegemonic forms of masculinity with fear of emotion, denial of vulnerability and especially repudiation of feminine aspects of the self.

Outlining these new forms of subjectivity draws attention to how the “reclaiming” of the female body does not return us to some prelapsarian state, before patriarchal rule. Rather as Pitts argues (2003, the reclaimed body is not recovered, but rather produced by such art, activism, and engagement with cultural critiques enabled by feminist and intersectional theories and concepts. There is always the risk of being misinterpreted by misogynist culture, nonetheless we exercise our agency. It is not possible to escape the dense web that power weaves around us in macro- and micro- cultural practices: what Heritage (1984, p. 197) argues as the “filigree of small-scale, socially organized behaviors which are unceasingly iterated” and which “interlock to constitute the great public institution of gender as a morally-organized-as-natural fact of life”. Yet it is often possible to draw attention to these small-scale behaviors, interrupting their ceaseless iteration and hence disrupting, even if for a moment, the moral organization of gender as natural fact.

Tools 2: Counterstrategies

As Ahmed reminds us (2017) another way to use our arms is to join arms. I now turn to a different way to “demystify power and its components” (Layland, 1990, p. 129) by suggesting some possible ways to join our arms against injustice.

Much power comes from bringing silent individual shames into the public realm, exposing them to air and light, taking the shame out of them by situating them within wider political debates rather than positioning them within discourses of individual failure; drawing attention to the injustice of local practices that were hitherto hidden; proposing alternative subject positions which are more equal. The power apparatus of the gender binary is strong. Nevertheless, it does not produce at all times and in all places men and women who are appropriate and completely docile bodies and subjects. There are significant opportunities for deviousness (in Nussbaum’s terms), for resourcefulness and creating new ways of being, even if in limited ways. To speak of reclaiming female bodies is to remind the listener that femininity is far from a monolith, and that, even under the panopticon of femininity as a disciplinary regime, there are alternatives whereby challenges to subjectivity can be responded to creatively.

None can escape the role of culture in creating understandable and appropriate bodies and subjects, nor is it possible to evade completely the constant reinscription of problematic gender roles. However, the artists, practitioners, activists, and others described in this chapter lay bare, question and/or provide alternative modes of women’s embodied subjectivities. They provide access to experience of the ways in which discourse inscribes female bodily surface with meanings, and they contest those meanings. This chapter aimed to critically examine some spaces where it has been possible to subvert such inscription, by drawing attention to it as inscription. If it is possible for the body to be written upon by culture, then it must also be possible for the embodied subject to communicate with the culture through the type of inscriptions we choose to make upon and about our own bodies. And this includes demands for payment for their work from artists outside the

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

world of the white cis-gender heterosexual artist, who point out that their marginalization often makes it a struggle to survive, let alone to create cultural products with which to educate those in positions of more social power.

For more on this, we can consider an artwork in the form of a public letter from non-binary textile artist L.J. Roberts from June 28, 2019 (Roberts, 2019). The letter is addressed to “artists, curators, museum directors, archivists” drawing attention to the “systemic barriers and frequent aggression that consume valuable time, energy and resources” of marginalized artists. The work of these artists was commissioned by the Archives of American Art for an exhibition entitled “What is feminist art?”, which commissioned work from many groups of people who are marginalized, and yet paid none of them, while also requiring the work be granted to the archive after the exhibition.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn upon feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices to consider what it would take to consider the female body as unproblematic as the male body in public space. I have highlighted above some tools at our disposal to reach for rebellious reclamations. However, how to evade the psychosocial effects of hegemonic femininity? How can we (after Nussbaum) resourcefully create possibilities for love and joy, despite patriarchal messages about the “appropriate” (read: insufficient) female body? Wetherell and Edley (1999) argued that upon critical examination of contextual social practices which make up gendered enactments, they are “multiple, varied and much more complex” (pp. 351-352) than usually theorized. This chapter has explored some of the ways in which women are oppressed by the hegemonic feminine. However, the chapter has also explored some of the ways in which practices such as feminist therapy, art and embodied activism can enable us to “see the structures of power more clearly, and so [we] can the more clearly evade them” (Nussbaum, 2012 p. 77). These visions of the structures of power are seen from below, from a position of oppression. Perhaps as in Lola Flash’s positioning of their subjects in *[sur]passing*, it is possible to “assertively return the gaze”, hanging our representations “above eye

Feminist therapy, art and embodiment practices: reclaiming the female body?

level so that the viewer has no choice but to 'look up'". (Flash, n.d. 1). We must insist upon our construction in the public sphere as powerful, active, agentic subjects: "Insist, insist, insist—there is no such thing as repetition, no such thing, she said, only insistence. We insist" (from Halberstam's [n.d.] *Off Manifesto* commissioned by the Feminist Art Coalition).

Perhaps we could remind ourselves that, no matter what the world says about our bodies, nor even how we feel about our individual bodies, we can re/claim our bodies by rewriting the apparent opposition of masculine and feminine, in drawing attention to the disciplinary workings of gendered power. Rather than recover them from some imaginary prelapsarian state, we must produce our re/claimed bodies. Returning to my caveat on being a trans-inclusive feminist, if we turn to de Lauretis' (1989) argument that to represent gender is also to construct it, then I argue that the most joyful outcome here would be for feminism to take the counterstrategy of repudiation of the fearful governance of the imaginary boundaries of masculine and feminine bodies. Inspired by the Xenofeminist manifesto of "Laboria Cuboniks" (2018), let a thousand genders bloom, in order to allow all bodies to be represented as they choose, whether vulnerable, powerful, loving, warlike, or joyful.

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