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Feeding Feminism: Food and Gender Ideology in American Women's Art, 1960-1979

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Emily Elizabeth Goodman

Committee in charge:

Professor Norman Bryson, Chair
Professor Grant Kester, Co-chair
Professor Rebecca Jo Plant
Professor Kuiyi Shen
Professor Mariana Wardwell

2016

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The Dissertation of Emily Elizabeth Goodman is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

For Taylor, my partner in everything.

EPIGRAPH

Richard M. Nixon: I want to show you this kitchen. It is like those of our houses in California. (Nixon points to dishwasher.)

Nikita Khrushchev: We have such things.

Nixon: This is our newest model. This is the kind which is built in thousands of units for direct installations in the houses. In America, we like to make life easier for women...

Khrushchev: Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism.

~ “The Kitchen Debate,” 1959

“We all have to begin together [...] because we’re all we have and we have a big job before us. We must unearth the buried and half-hidden treasures of our cunts and bring them into the light and let them shine and dazzle and become art.”

~ Judy Chicago, Letter to the Admissions Committee at California Institute of the Arts, 1971¹

¹Letter to CalArts Admission Board, 1971. Judy Chicago, in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 1947-2004).

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Feeding Feminism: Food and Gender Ideology in American Women's Art, 1960-1979

By

Emily Elizabeth Goodman

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Grant Kester, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair

In my dissertation, I examine the ways that women artists engage with two primary and interrelated themes in their art practice — food and femininity — in an attempt to challenge gender inequality in midcentury American society. As such, I illustrate how these women's art practices are related to the discourse and political

actions of the American feminism during mid-1960s. Recognizing that — despite the unity implied by the commonly employed umbrella terms of “Second Wave Feminism” and the “Women’s Liberation Movement” — feminism in this period existed in myriad forms and was very much a personal issue for many of the individuals involved, my dissertation focuses on the experience of nine women artists and collectives within the larger artistic and political climate of feminism. I thus highlight the ways in which these different women artists used their art practice for political purposes, examining particular aspects of women’s lives in a public forum in order to raise awareness to the ways in which misogyny and oppression are woven into the fabric of American culture and to simultaneously advocate for a potential alternative.

This dissertation is divided into two parts, spanning six total chapters. The first part, which consists of a single chapter, presents the history of women’s art in the United States prior to and during the emergence of women’s art activism in the 1960s and 1970s. The second part of the dissertation is comprised of the remaining five chapters, each of which follows a similar format, focusing specifically on how two different women artists engage with one particular aspect of American food culture as it relates to the cultural construction of femininity. These dynamic relations between food and femininity are: Cooking, Serving, Feeding, Eating and Being Eaten. In each chapter, I situate these artists within their contexts — both geographically and temporally — and I examine how these works relate to their individual experiences as women, as artists, and as feminists. In so doing, my dissertation combines both an in-

depth analysis of individual feminist art works and a broader narrative of American feminism during this period.

Introduction: Feminism and Art

In October 1980, *ARTnews* magazine ran a special edition entitled “Women’s Liberation, Woman Artists and Art History,” featuring 20 prominent women artists and their work. The cover of the magazine featured a candid photograph of the artists engaged in conversation, juxtaposed with the tagline “Where are the great men artists?,” a direct reference to Linda Nochlin’s watershed essay “Why have there been no great women artists?,” published in the magazine nine years earlier. The tagline of the issue, in essence, declares the goals of the Women’s Art Movement of the 1970s to have been definitively achieved, asserting that women artists have not only achieved parity with their men counterparts, but have ultimately surpassed them in terms of acclaim and innovation. These claims are supported through the chronicling of the significant changes to how both artists and critics have approached the question of women’s artistic production that emerged during the 1970s in the various feature articles. As such, the edition ends up functioning as a celebration of the progress that women artists had made in the previous decade.

The magazine contained four feature articles about the nature of women’s art and the status of women artists at the end of the 1970s. In one such article, entitled “Redefining the whole relationship between art and society,” New York Times art critic Grace Glueck examined how “amid the ambiguities of the art world in the ‘70s, women artists gained a new sense of themselves.”² Similarly, Kay Larson’s article “For the first time women are leading, not following,” focused on how “women artists

² "Features," *ARTnews* October 1980. 3.

have begun to define what they want art to be. By challenging clichés they have opened up new freedom for all artists.”³ While some of the articles did recognize that barriers to women’s parity in the arts still did exist — most notably, Avis Berman’s article “Could a female Chardin make a living today?” highlighted the economic challenges put forth to women artists — on the whole, the edition was a celebration of feminist victory, championing the gigantic strides women artists had made in the course of a single decade, moving from relative obscurity to prominence and finally garnering some critical and curatorial recognition for their unique and important art practices.

Although this special issue would eventually prove to be a premature victory lap for the rise of women artists in the 1960s and 1970s, the edition is an interesting reflection in the form of a retrospective of the feminist art activism that emerged in these two decades. Between 1960 and 1979, the number of women artists working and receiving critical and curatorial attention increased dramatically. Along with this increase in the number of women working within the arts came a drastic shift in both the subject matter featured in women’s art practices and the discourse used to describe women’s work in the arts. Furthermore, as the *ARTnews* edition sought to commemorate, by 1980, women artists were beginning to shift the nature of contemporary art in general, specifically through the ready embrace of experimental and new media found within feminist art enclaves during the 1970s.

³ Ibid. 3.

The reason behind the career successes attained by women artists by the year 1980 was the result of according to these *ARTnews* articles — and in many subsequent discussions about women’s art practice during the 1960s and 1970s that have emerged since that time, particularly in the United States — boils down to a single word: “feminism.” The assumption made is that feminism provided women with resources to agitate for gender equality within the arts, and thus women’s art production in the 1960s and 1970s was helped by feminism. While feminism did have a profound impact on women’s art activism, this logic is both tautological and problematic. These assumptions neglect to ask several essential questions including, but not limited to: how did feminism as both an ideology and social movement impact women’s art production during the 1960s and 1970s? What kinds of feminist activism were women artists involved with and how did that impact the nature and form of their art practices? And, perhaps most importantly, how is feminist art defined?

These questions have challenged scholars of women’s art in the intervening decades and the potential answers offered within the existing literature have served to further complicate the relationship between feminism and art. The shifting political and scholarly climates of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s have functioned to form a particular historical narrative surrounding women’s activism as a part of “Women’s Liberation.” The rise of “cultural feminism” and the “anti-feminist backlash” of the 1980s and 1990s in many ways functioned to reform feminism into a monolithic entity that can be easily reduced to a stereotype, and which has, in turn, undermined the diversity that truly existed within women’s activism during the 1960s and 1970s. This

construction of feminism as singular has thus impacted how scholarship on feminist art has approached this subject matter; it has given art historians, critics, and curators *cart blanche* in determining what is feminist art.

Many critics, curators, and art historians have loosely applied the term “feminist” when discussing art created by women, regardless of an individual woman’s association with feminism as a social and political movement or a theoretical basis upon which to make work. For instance, while, in the 1980 edition of *ARTnews*, there was a tacit assumption that the women artists featured were inclined to be affiliated with feminism as a social construct and political movement, in more recent years broader assumptions have been made in determining “feminist art” as a particular movement or style. For instance, in the past decade, “blockbuster” exhibitions of feminist art — including *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2007), *Elles* (Centre Pompidou, Paris 2009), and *Modern Women* (Museum of Modern Art, New York 2010) to name a few — have compiled together the work of dozens of *women* artists under auspices of exhibiting “feminist art,” wherein the sole unifying factor between the works is the gender of the artist.⁴ Some scholars have gone so far as to label all art created by

⁴ It should be acknowledged that in the case of the *WACK* exhibition, curator Cornelia Butler was aware that feminism was not a singular or monolithic entity, writing in her essay for the catalogue: “I want to assert that feminism constitutes an ideology of shifting criteria, one influence and mediated by myriad other factors. Whereas art movements traditionally defined by charismatic individuals tended to be explicated and debated through manifestos and other writings, feminism is a relatively open-ended system that has, throughout its history of engagement with visual art, sustained an unprecedented degree of internal critique and contained wildly divergent political ideologies and practices.” Her effort was to showcase, “consciously reenact feminism’s legacy of inclusivity and its interrogation of cultural hierarchies of all kinds to suggest a more complicated history of simultaneous feminisms.” While Butler intended for the exhibition to showcase the diversity of feminist art practices, the exhibition, in an effort

women as feminist, an assertion that neglects both the individual approach and aims of a woman artist and also presume that men artists cannot be feminists as well.

Moreover, beginning in the 1980s, new approaches to feminism within academia have heavily permeated the ways in which feminist art history has been written. In particular, the integration of Freudian and Marxist theory into the discipline of art history, and particularly into the art histories written by feminist scholars, such as Griselda Pollock and Amelia Jones, has shifted critical attention from the relationship between feminism as a form of social and political activism and art to the theoretical application of feminist theory to the reading of works of art.⁵ While the latter methodology has functioned to provide a considerable amount of insight into the ways in which gender has been and can be examined within a given work of art, this emphasis on theory considerably neglects the historical realities that influenced the production and reception of women's art practices within a given moment, and specifically during the rise and height of so-called "Second Wave Feminism," during the 1960s and 1970s.

to present feminism as a unifying and global art movement, ended up reducing the diversity of women's experiences and the nuanced political complexities of the individual artists' practices to a few overarching themes, which functioned to further ahistoricize the relationship between feminism and women's art practices in the latter half of the 20th century. For more information see: Cornelia Butler, "Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria," in *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia et al Butler (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007). 15-16.

⁵ Jones' work on Hannah Wilke and Judy Chicago in particular focus extensively on reading the works through the lens of psychoanalysis, and considering their work in an ahistorical and theoretical manner. For further reading see: Amelia Jones, Laura Cottingham, and Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center., *Sexual Politics : Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996). And Amelia Jones, "Intra-Venus and Hannah Wilke's Feminist Narcissism," in *Intra Venus*, ed. Hannah Wilke and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. (New York: R. Feldman Fine Arts, 1995). Pollock employs a similar methodology in her work: Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon : Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).

Other histories of feminist art, such as those of Julia Bryan-Wilson and Norma Broude, do pay considerable attention to the history of feminism in relation to the artwork created by women artists, but their approaches are myopic with regard to the manifestation of feminist content in women's art practices. Bryan-Wilson and Broude make efforts to address to the work of the Women's Art Movement in the 1960s and 1970s with regard to the increased visibility that these activist efforts and alternative art spaces and systems fostered on behalf of women artists in the latter half of the 20th century, and their works reveal a great deal about the origins of women's socially engaged art initiatives during the 1960s and 1970s. However, works like Bryan-Wilson's *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* and Broude's encyclopedic anthology *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, neglect to consider in depth the formal characteristics of the works of art created by women involved in this form of art activism.⁶ These histories of art activism focus on the nature of the movement, thus neglecting to analyze how an individual artwork articulates the feminist imperative of its maker, and how these works function as a form of activism in and of themselves.

These trends in feminist art historiography ultimately overlook the complexities of the relationship between feminism and art in this period. Such narratives thus often portray feminism as either an abstract, theoretical construct or as a monolithic political movement, which functions more as a zeitgeist than as a form of

⁶ For further reading see: Norma Broude, Mary D. Garrard, and Judith K. Brodsky, *The Power of Feminist Art : The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994). And Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2009).

direct social activism. This approach therefore neglects the history of feminism and the diversity that existed within feminist discourse, activism, and art practices during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, this dissertation seeks to unsettle this conventional narrative by re-historicizing women's art practices during this period within the context of various forms of social and political activism that comprised feminism of this period. Moreover, this dissertation aims to address the diversity of women's approaches to feminism and the Women's Art Movement by highlighting the experiences of nine women artists and collectives with feminism and their approaches to gender in their art practices, illustrating how the convergence of myriad intersectional factors informed the nature of women's art production in the 1960s and 1970s.

Contrary to the unity implied by umbrella terms such as "Second Wave Feminism" and the "Women's Liberation Movement," feminism during the 1960s and 1970s took on many forms; class, racial, sexual, generational, and geographic differences greatly impacted the ways in which different women were involved with feminist theory and activism. Different forms of feminist activism — including Liberal, Radical, Politico, Cultural, Black, Chicana, and other racially and class defined forms of feminism — emerged during the 20 years between 1960 and 1980, and each offered a different approach to the problems of systemic gender inequality. While these different sects of feminism did, on occasion, converge, such as in the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality, each form of feminism was characterized by its own ideological approach and form of activism.

Moreover, much of the feminism of this period was highly personalized. Ideas such as “consciousness-raising ” — an epistemological strategy wherein a woman would come to recognize, through dialogue with other women, that her experiences with gender inequality on a daily basis were seldom her own — was entirely premised upon the personal dynamic of feminism. Consciousness-raising became most closely aligned with the notion that “the personal is political.” This tactic, although developed primarily within Radical and Politico Feminist groups — those of the younger generation of women activists — was employed very widely among differently affiliated feminist organizations. As such, in order to fully appreciate the nature of women’s activism during the 1960s and 1970s, we must examine how individual experiences and personal politics informed the art practices of different women artists.

In order to conduct such analysis in this dissertation, I approach this project through the lens of “intersectionality.” According to Kimberle Crenshaw in her essay 1991 “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” the concept of intersectionality is meant to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences.”⁷ In the more than 20 years since Crenshaw penned her theory of intersectionality, the concept has been expanded to attend for myriad and multidimensional factors that dictate how identity politics impact the lives of individuals, including concepts of race, gender, sexuality, class, age, and ability, among others. This study aims to employ an intersectional framework towards the

⁷ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 1241 (July 1991). 1244.

study of cis- gendered women artists in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ In an effort to attend to the differences in racial experience between white women and women of color — and recognizing that whiteness is a racial category unto itself, and not, as is often supposed, a normative way of living — I have selected nine white women artists or collectives. Moreover, recognizing that class has a significant impact on how gender is experienced and articulated, I have also focused the framework of this project primarily on middle-class women artists.

The decision to focus solely on white women artists during this period was purposeful and reveals a great deal about the nature of feminist discourse at this time. As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1, the factions most readily associated with the concept of “Second Wave Feminism” are those comprised of white women, either of college age or in middle age. In their activism, women from this subset spoke out from their experiences and their position within society, drawing stark criticisms towards the ways in which they had understood gender inequality based on their own lives. In their language, however, many white feminists of this period expressed their plight through universal terms and frequently employed hyperbolic metaphors that did not resonate with the lived-experience of women of color. Recognizing that the claims of these women were frequently myopic as a result of the implicit privilege garnered to white women and in an effort to attend to the fact that the experience of white

⁸ The decision to focus on cis-gender women is a result of two primary factors. First and foremost, in the period in question, trans-visibility was extremely low and the understanding of transgender identity was significantly different from what it is today. Second, as with race and class issues, issues of gender inequality facing transgender and gender queer individuals are distinct from those facing cis-gender individuals, and in an effort to neither generalize nor tokenize the experience of one population or another, I have limited my focus to a particular subsection of the population.

women is not a universal, I have focused my attention on how this discourse is manifest in the work of white women artists and how it reflects their specific racial and class positioning. Moreover, I have not included Black women or Latina artists in this scope, as to do so within this framework would likely fall into the problematic realms of tokenism or would employ a similarly false, universalizing tone when discussing the problems facing women in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

In an effort to increase clarity and conciseness, however, I have limited my usage of the phrase “white women” to only those key instances wherein the distinction in experience must be made readily apparent. Instead, the discussion of womanhood in this dissertation should be understood as solely an expression of white femininity during the postwar period. This is not to say that the experience of white women is, by virtue, the paradigmatic experience of womanhood; on the contrary, my aim in this dissertation is to unsettle the hegemony of whiteness as normative by examining how gender roles have been delineated within white America and how the feminist criticism launched by women activists, writers, and artists during this period reflects that particular racial articulation of gender.

Whereas I have limited my examination to only white women, I have, however, employed age as an intersectional factor in order to illustrate the variations that exist within a particular racial category with regard to the articulation of gender. In this dissertation, I aim to illustrate how generational factors impacted both how women artists viewed their own practices and how they approached feminism within

their work. Moreover, these differences expose the ways in which, in a span of a few years, American gender ideology — particularly the dominant forms that pertain primarily to white women, as the dominant class — has undergone significant transformations. To make this transformation apparent, I have at several points throughout this dissertation examined the work of women artists of different generations who were directly in contact with one another, most frequently in the role of teacher/student or mentor/mentee. These case studies have the unique advantage of controlling to a degree the influence of other factors on the nature of the feminist art practices developed by women in these circumstances.

In addition to age, I have used geography as another point of comparison in constructing this history of women's art practices. In particular, I examine how regional differences exist within two different art centers in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s: New York and Southern California. Instead of centering on one major art center, as much of the existing literature has done, I am interested in the role of bi-coastalism and dialogue in the history of American art practice during this period. The history of art practice in each location is unquestionably geographically dependent. Artists in New York consistently have worked within a gallery/museum oriented framework, while the history of modern art in California is more intermingled with the academic system as well as frequently taking the form of public art. Despite these different climates, I have found a great deal of evidence through my archival research to indicate that there was a great deal of bi-coastal exchange during this period. Moreover, by examining the ways in which these different geographic regions

impacted the kinds and forms of art being created, I create a more holistic and nuanced picture of the nature of feminist art practices in the U.S. during this period.

Furthermore, by using food as a central theme in my examination, I am better able to address the nuances of women's lived experiences as they relate to the discourse and practice of feminist art. Previous scholarship has focused extensively on the themes of sexuality and maternity in women's art. While I do address these topics — specifically in the chapters “Feeding” and “Being Eaten” — I look at other aspects of women's lives, such as domestic labor and body image, as they relate to gender ideology in order to attend to the nuances of femininity and the perpetuation of gender inequality. By focusing on food culture, I am thus able to craft a more complete understanding of the ways that various women artists engaged with the discourse of femininity perpetuated in midcentury America and thus create a more nuanced examination of the relationship between feminist art practice and the larger women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s

Employing such a framework, this dissertation thus focuses on how feminist art work during the 1960s and 1970s reflected larger debates about the nature of American womanhood, both within women's activist circles and in the culture more broadly. In order to elucidate the profound effect of feminist (art) activism, I have divided this dissertation into two parts spanning six total chapters. The first part, which consists of a single chapter, presents the history of women's art in the United States prior to and during the emergence of women's art activism in the 1960s and 1970s. In this chapter, “Out of the Kitchen and into the Studio,” I begin by discussing

the status of women artists in the postwar period prior to the emergence of “Second Wave” feminism, analyzing how the Cold War rhetoric of “neo-domesticity” functioned to undermine the success of women artists, rendering them anomalous and secondary figures within American art of this period. I then examine some of the significant challenges posed by feminist activism both within American politics and the art world to this ideological construction of womanhood. In particular, I discuss the emergence of the Women’s Art Movement in the 1970s, and their efforts to increase the career opportunities and the visibility of women artists within major museums and galleries. I further analyze how women in the arts during this period developed and implemented feminist pedagogical methods within art schools, while simultaneously creating alternative art spaces to help women artists in their career development. This first chapter serves as a historical basis for the rest of the dissertation, establishing the context and defining the Women’s Art Movement with regard to the history of activist art practice and the social and political movements of the time.

The second part of the dissertation is comprised of the remaining five chapters, each of which follows a similar format, focusing specifically on how two different women artists engage with one particular aspect of American food culture as it relates to the cultural construction of femininity. These dynamic relations between food and femininity are: Cooking, Serving, Feeding, Eating and Being Eaten. In the first three chapters, I focus on the ways in which womanhood has been deeply entangled with the practice of domestic labor, highlighting the nuanced and complicated ways in which

domesticity and womanhood are intertwined. In the first chapter of this section, “Cooking,” I examine the ways in which Alison Knowles and Martha Rosler engage with food culture throughout their art practices as a way to challenge the feminization of culinary labor. In this chapter, I examine the historical gendering of cooking as women’s labor through the methods of culinary instruction — cooking classes, cookbooks, and television programs — and the reaffirmation of domestic labor as intrinsically feminine as a part of postwar gender politics. Turning to the art works in question, I then argue that Alison Knowles’ Fluxus performance work *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* (1962), wherein Knowles prepares a salad in a gallery, and Martha Rosler’s absurdist parody of a cooking demonstration in the video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) illustrate the arbitrary nature of the delineation of cooking as women’s work by decontextualizing and re-evaluating the gestures that comprise the act of food preparation. In so doing, these artists thus offer a challenge to the patriarchal assumptions that domestic cooking is, indeed, women’s work.

The following chapter, Chapter Three, “Serving,” focuses on serving as a feminine task, both domestically and industrially as manifest in Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974-9) and the performance art collective The Waitresses’ series *Ready to Order?*(1978). In this chapter I examine the ways in which serving became feminized as a result of the decline in the presence of servants in American middle class homes during the postwar period. I then use this understanding of the history of serving as women’s work in order to highlight the ways in which these artists challenge this designation of labor as an implicit aspect of womanhood. In particular, I

illustrate how Chicago employs the rhetoric of hostessing as manifest in etiquette manuals and in maternal transmission of housekeeping instruction in the creation and implementation of her monumental installation *The Dinner Party*, in order to call attention to the invisibility of women's domestic labor. I then compare this to the ways in which the Waitresses use their "guerilla performances" about the experiences of women waitressing in Los Angeles restaurants to illustrate the ways in which the labor of serving and the woman who performs it are degraded within the restaurant industry in the form of pervasive and systematic sexism, on the job harassment, and economic exploitation. In examining these two works together, I thus illustrate the ways in which different feminist artists used their work to challenge the myriad implications of the feminization of service labor that face women in their daily lives.

Chapter Four, "Feeding," serves as a bridge between issues of gendered labor and the gendered body. In this chapter, I analyze the differences in the representation of feeding in the *Nurturant Kitchen* — from the CalArts Feminist Art Program's *Womanhouse* project (1972) — and the Feminist Art Workers' performance *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-81). I argue that the *Nurturant Kitchen*, an installation wherein the viewer is immediately subsumed with a monochromatic pink and symbolic representations of women's reproduction, depicts feeding as an extension of the concept of the *unheimlich* — the German term for the uncanny that literally translated means the "unhomely" — in order to convey maternity as an overwhelming and detrimental experience. I contrast this depiction of maternity to the collaborative discourse of feeding employed by the collective Feminist Art Workers in their

performance *Heaven or Hell?*, wherein participants attempt to eat various food items with four-foot-long forks, a task that can only be accomplished through cooperation. This depiction thus contrasts with the negative associations made between maternity and caretaking in the *Nurturant Kitchen*, by affirming that it is women's capacity to care for others that is a powerful tool in the fight for women's equality.

This point of contrast, I argue, is emblematic of a larger trend within feminist literature during this period, wherein the idea of maternity is either considered powerful or problematic depending on the views of the author, highlighting the diversity of feminist discourse during this time.

The fifth and sixth chapters of my dissertation shift focus from issues of labor to body politics. The complicated and often problematic issues surrounding a woman's weight, shape, and body image are the subject of my fifth chapter: "Eating." I examine feminist critiques of dieting and body image in Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), wherein the artist documented her own weight-loss over a 60-day period through serial photographs, and Martha Rosler's *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977), a video of a fictionalized news story with the parents of a teenager who died as a result of excessive dieting. In particular, I analyze how these works engage with the changing discourse on the "thin ideal" as the dominant body shape for (white) women popularized in mass media during this period of time. I examine how both artists convey the negative psychological implications of being inundated with this kind of discourse and the dehumanizing implications of this kind of mass cultural praise of disordered eating.

The final chapter, “Being Eaten,” shifts from actions that women do with food to considering how the sexualization of women’s bodies frequently involves the rhetoric of food. I begin by highlighting the ways in which the female body has been linguistically and psychoanalytically understood in terms of something to be consumed by men, and how feminist discourse explicitly notes this trend of objectification. I then compare the ways that Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke align sexualized women’s bodies with food in their performance works *Meat Joy* (1964) and *Super-t-Art* (1974), respectively. In particular, I examine how both Schneemann and Wilke use the affiliation of consumptive behaviors with sexual discourse in order to challenge the dominant construction of the image of women’s sexuality as passive and inherently focused on the sexual gratification of men as exists in American mass culture as well as in the art world. I assert that the metonymic usage of food for sexual organs in Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* and the euphemistic allusion of loose women as “tarts” manifest in Wilke’s *Super-t-art* in each work functions to challenge the notion that women’s sexuality is contingent upon being consumed by men. Sexuality was, for both Schneemann and Wilke, a central tenet of their identity as women and as artists, and both women sought to unsettle the conventional understanding of women in the arts and in sex as passive subjects to be consumed. As such, I argue that both artists used food in their performances in order to challenge this trend of objectification by asserting women’s active participation within sexual expression.

In each chapter, I situate these artists within their contexts — both geographically and temporally — and I examine how these works relate to their individual experiences as women, as artists, and as feminists. In so doing, my dissertation combines both an in-depth analysis of individual feminist art works and a broader narrative of American feminism during this period. This dissertation thus addresses the diversity of women’s experiences with feminism and the variation that exists amongst feminist art practices through the exploration of a particular common theme by employing several case studies into particular facets of women’s artistic production during the 1960s and 1970s. In so doing, I aim to unsettle the conventional understanding of feminist art as a singular construct and illustrate the complexities of the relationship between feminism and art in the United States during the era of the “Second Wave.”

Chapter 1: Out of the Kitchen and Into the Studio

The Question of Women Artists

In January 1971, Linda Nochlin demanded to know just “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” In her inquisitively titled essay, Nochlin posited that women’s exclusion from the canon of art history was the result of a pervasive and systematic discrimination that privileged the work of white men above all others. She writes:

in actuality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, are stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male. The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education — education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals. The miracle is, in fact, that given the overwhelming odds against women, or blacks, that so many of both have managed to achieve so much sheer excellence, in those bailiwicks of white masculine prerogative like science, politics, or the arts.⁹

Nochlin argues that women’s lack of appreciation in the arts is not the result of any apparent conflict between womanhood and one’s ability to create meaningful and substantial works of art, as had previously been argued by male critics and historians. Instead, she asserts that women’s exclusion from the canon of art history was the result of the systematic and pervasive bias among the white men who had dominated the Western art world throughout the modern era in order to promote the works of

⁹ From the Essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” initially published in *Art News* in January 1971, republished in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power, and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988). 150.

those who fit into their limited criteria for serious artists. Nochlin accused the discipline of art history of navel-gazing, writing: “in the field of art history, the white Western male viewpoint [is] unconsciously accepted as *the* viewpoint of the art historian.”¹⁰

Moreover, she notes, that this myopic perception of culture and history would render the discipline irrelevant if it was not corrected. Citing the debates around scholarship that resulted from the emergence of student activism as a part of the New Left and Free Speech movements of the 1960s, Nochlin states: “At a moment when all disciplines are becoming more self-conscious, more aware of the nature of their presuppositions as exhibited in the very languages and structures of the various fields of scholarship, such uncritical acceptance of ‘what is’ as ‘natural’ may be intellectually fatal.”¹¹ Nochlin implored her audience, which included both artists and art historians, to look beyond the conventions of the discipline and to create a new form of criticality. She entreated her readers to question the dominance of this narrow-minded perspective and to challenge the structures that have limited the definition of great artist to white males exclusively.¹²

Nochlin’s assertions, though revolutionary and quite eloquent, were not simply hers alone. In the 1960s and 1970s, the question of the role and status of women in the art world was being posed by artists, critics, curators, and academics (including

¹⁰ Ibid. 146.

¹¹ Ibid. 146.

¹² In this case, the use of the term “males” is meant specifically to refer to cis-gender men only. Because the criteria for great artists as outlined in Nochlin’s article were only applied to biologically sexed men, and because for generations trans-men have been greatly excluded from the canon of Western art, the use of the term male in this case is meant to emphasize the breadth of this systematic exclusion on the part of critics, educators, artists, and art historians alike.

students) across the country. The conventions of the discipline that had for so long maintained an extremely myopic vantage point were coming under new scrutiny, and women in the arts were beginning to organize and advocate on behalf of their gender. During the period from 1960 to 1980, the number of professional women artists increased greatly, as did their representation in galleries, major museums, and within academia.¹³ Women in the art world banded together and formed a political and artistic movement of their own — which I will refer to as the “Women’s Art Movement” — aimed at increasing women’s visibility in museums and galleries, as well as within the academic disciplines of visual arts and art history.

This movement, however, did not exist in a vacuum. In this chapter I will examine the ways in which women’s artistic production underwent significant transformations during 1960s and 1970s as a result of changing cultural conceptions of gender in the United States at this time. In particular, I will highlight the ways in which the rigid gender roles that emerged in 1950s promoted the careers of men artists while simultaneously hindering the success of their women counterparts. I will then examine how the activism of the Women’s Art Movement directly challenged these ideological constraints. Specifically, I will highlight the ways that women artists in the

¹³ There is a great deal of evidence to support the fact that there were large numbers of women artists in the Victorian era, many of whom did receive both payment and critical acclaim for their work, yet were subsequently written out of the historical record. That said, their work was frequently focused on specific lower genres and was rendered to be inferior or of a different quality than their male counterparts. As such, the Women’s Art Movement represents a singular moment for the history of women’s professional development in the arts, as it marks the beginning of women artists generally following similar career trajectories to their male counterparts within the gallery and academic system and within the same styles and genres. For more information see Rozsica Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses : Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 3rd ed., World of Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

1960s and 1970s used their practices as a means to critically engage with the social and political discourse surrounding womanhood that had become a dominant part of the anti-Communist rhetoric of the postwar period. As such, I will examine the ways that the Women's Art Movement in this period existed in dialogue and in parallel with the broader social and political feminist movements in the United States. Moreover, I will examine these practices in the context of socially engaged art during the Vietnam War era. In particular, I will compare the strategies used by women artists to those of their contemporaries in the service of using art as a form of activism. In so doing, I will illustrate the ways in which women artists during the 1960 and 1970s created art works that were aimed at addressing the experiences of womanhood in order to advocate for political and social equality within American society.

Women's Work and the Home in the Postwar Period

In order to fully comprehend the history of the Women's Art Movement, we must first understand the cultural conception of womanhood during the postwar period, which many of these women artists criticized directly in their work. Feminist art during the 1960s and 1970s, as we will see in this and subsequent chapters, sought to challenge the politically dispersed and socially repressive climate of the early Cold War period in the United States, which relegated women's lives solely to the domestic realm. As such, in order to fully understand the plight facing women artists at the start of the 1960s, we must fully examine the transformation of gender ideology in the postwar period and the ways in which the cultural conception of womanhood at this time set substantial obstacles in the career paths of women artists.

During the postwar period, American womanhood became re-immersed in the discourse of domesticity and morality. Moreover, the delineation of what was considered a woman's domain was narrowed significantly following the conclusion of World War II, in large part in response to women's participation in the workforce during the war. Whereas women during the early 1940s had been encouraged to participate in the labor market as a form of wartime patriotism, as the war came to a close, women were quickly and assuredly ushered back into the space of the home. As Mary Ryan notes: "no sooner had the armistice been signed than this patriotic image was swept away, in turn, by the balmy climate of postwar prosperity which nurtured images of a pristinely domestic womanhood."¹⁴ Across diffuse forms of mass culture — including television, magazines, fashion, and advertising — American women were primarily defined by their roles as wives and mothers.

On the one hand, this domestic ideal was the result of "policies that forced women out of high-paying, high-skilled wartime jobs by giving preference to returning GIs."¹⁵ On the other hand, postwar plenty and the economic freedom and social mobility it presented for a generation that had just come through more than two decades of paucity due to war and depression functioned to reinforce this domestic shift with regard to the delineation of women's roles. As Christine Stansell states: "neo-domesticity also came from below, from men's and women's desires for a

¹⁴ Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, Third Edition ed. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983). 253.

¹⁵ Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (New York, NY: The Modern Library 2011). 183.

bountiful private life freed from the demands of sacrifice for the nation.”¹⁶ The plentitude that coincided with the conclusion of World War II rendered it not only possible, but also preferable for families to establish autonomous, nuclear family homes. As Stephanie Coontz writes: “By the early 1950s, newlyweds not only were establishing single-family homes at an earlier age and amore rapid rate than ever before but also were increasingly moving to the suburbs, away from the close scrutiny of the elder generation.”¹⁷ The new family structure was, therefore, premised on both personal and fiscal independence, and prioritized the views and values of younger Americans over their parents. Financial autonomy and increasing affluence were thus seen as aspirational but attainable goals, and the idea of an independent, nuclear family was championed as an essential part of the “American dream.”

As such, the rhetoric surrounding this autonomous nuclear family centered and depended on a particular home economic system with a clear and distinctly gendered division of labor. Although women’s domestic labor has been a centerpiece of capitalism since the beginning of the modern era, the rise of the single-family home in the postwar period made that distinction far more rigid. Without the ability to share the burden of domestic labor with other family members, “the amount of time women spent doing housework actually *increased* during the 1950s, despite the advent of convenience foods and new, labor-saving appliances.”¹⁸ Yet as the amount of domestic labor expected of women increased during the postwar period, so too did its

¹⁶ Ibid. 183.

¹⁷ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were : American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992). 26.

¹⁸ Ibid. 27.

cultural affiliation with womanhood. As Christine Stansell argues: “Family ideology in the 1950s directed women back to the home, to take their place in the Cold War as homemakers for democracy. A placid, satisfied housewife would tend her darling children, basking in their dependence on an energetic, fully committed male breadwinner.”¹⁹ As such, domestic labor came to constitute the feminine contribution to capitalism and the American way of life, championed in the rhetoric of the Cold War as women’s fundamental contribution to the fight against communism.

This gendered division of labor was perpetuated both obliquely in cultural norms and practices and explicitly in the form of political rhetoric. This inscription of western capitalism onto the practice of femininity in the form of domesticity is nowhere better documented than in the “Kitchen Debate,” an impromptu debate between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and then American Vice President at the American National Exhibition in Moscow on July 25, 1959. During the exchange, each politician championed his political and economic system by illustrating how it specifically betters the daily lives of his country’s citizens with the model of the American home kitchen in the exhibition functioning as a framing device from which each politician launched his respective tirade, transforming the room into a symbol of American capitalism. The kitchen was emblematic of a postwar American conception of progress, premised upon the emergence of middle class consumerism and typified in the new suburban ideal of the prefabricated home, “like those of our houses in California.” As Elaine Tyler May notes: “For Nixon, American superiority rested on

¹⁹Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 181.

the ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members. He proclaimed that the ‘model’ home, with a male breadwinner and a full-time female homemaker [...] represented the essence of American freedom.”²⁰ Nixon’s rhetoric thus served to reinforce the dispersed and pervasive political ideology of capitalism during this period, which permeated well beyond the economics of the free-market and into the realm of gender identity and the politics of daily life.

Avenues of mass culture, including advertising, television, and magazines similarly functioned to reinforce the ideology of the “traditional” family and the gendered divisions upon which it was dependent.²¹ Central to the affirmation of capitalism in these media outlets, as in the political rhetoric of the time, was the idealized, patriotic, nuclear family with its gendered division of labor. Countless programs, from *Leave It To Beaver* to *The Donna Reed Show*, as well as innumerable films, radio dramas, and other programs, presented Americans nationwide with the image of a wholesome, All-American family.²² In so doing, these programs created a

²⁰ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). 16.

²¹ The promotion of domestic ideals of gender and Cold War patriotism through mass culture are emblematic of the Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s criticisms of “The Culture Industry” from the 1944 essay of the same name. They write: “The masses, demoralized by existence under the pressure of the system and manifesting civilization only as compulsively rehearsed behavior in which rage and rebelliousness everywhere show through, are to be kept in order by the spectacle of implacable life and the exemplary conduct of those it crushes. Culture has always contributed to the subduing of revolutionary as well as barbaric instincts.” In many ways the Culture Industry as such functions as yet another ideological state apparatus as discussed by Althusser. See: Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, *Dialectic of Enlightenment : Philosophical Fragments*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).123.

²² So pervasive was this image of the American nuclear family promoted in these television programs that references to the fictional Cleaver family, from *Leave It to Beaver*, is still used in political rhetoric today in support of the “traditional values” championed during the early stages of the Cold War.

rigid, nationalistic family archetype that was white and middle class, consisting of immediate family members with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. During the early years of the Cold War, therefore, American women were sequestered into the space of the home, which in turn functioned to ghettoize women's contributions to the domestic realm. This relegation of women to the such restricted spaces functioned to counter the relative freedoms that they had experienced in the Interwar and World War II eras, which, as we will see, had a profound impact on women's contributions in professional arenas, such as the arts.

Postwar Women Artists at Work and at Home

Following World War II, the United States became, for the first time, an international hub for avant-garde art. In addition to welcoming masses of exiled artists who had left Europe to escape the repression of Nazism and Stalinism and the desolation of postwar Europe, a new crop of American-born artists emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s, garnering an unprecedented amount of acclaim within the art world. For the first time in history, American art seemed to have developed its own style and voice: Abstract Expressionism. While the history of abstraction has very clear roots in Europe — the traditional genealogy, such as that in Alfred Barr's 1936 chart (Appendix: Figure 1), traces the origins of the movement to Cubism, Suprematism, and de Stijl, among other movements — the forms of abstraction that emerged in the post-war years, particularly at the hands of the so-called New York School of painters

Moreover, Stephanie Coontz highlights the ways in which such television programming and media stories about celebrities

(including Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Frank Stella, and Robert Motherwell) were lauded as both singular creative geniuses and as paragons of American virtues. A nationalistic ownership was taken over the style and a new mythology was developed, wherein Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction were to be understood as both the logical progression of an American tradition, one deeply rooted in the ideology of individualism and the “American Dream,” and as the antithesis to Soviet realist art.

Yet the ascent of American painting during the postwar period was primarily beneficial for a small handful of artists. The career trajectory of the heroic, American Abstract Expressionist painters of the 1950s was reserved for a very select group of individuals, determined on the criteria of race, class, and gender. Critics and curators alike woefully ignored the artwork of women and people of color, even those whose art practices were similar in style, genre, and composition to those of their white male counterparts. Cold War American culture, moreover, provided no place for women artists, whose affiliation with domesticity rendered them better suited to produce children than great works of art. As such, women artists in the postwar period faced significant challenges and never received a fraction of the acclaim of their male counterparts during their careers.

This lack of critical and commercial attention for women in the arts ran counter to the success that many women artists in America had enjoyed in previous decades. During the Great Depression and World War II, hundreds of women had enjoyed a great deal of fiscal independence and professional success as a result of the gender-

blind and color-blind policies of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Federal Arts Program, which employed 40,000 American artists for a wide variety of art projects. Because artists were hired solely on the basis of the work in their portfolios, many women artists enjoyed increased career advancement within the Federal Arts Program. Abstract painter Lee Krasner, for example, had been a beneficiary of these programs, enjoying both commissions and career advancement within the FAP, including employing her future husband Jackson Pollock in 1941 “on a new government project she was supervising that advertised the war effort.”²³ The programs of the WPA and the FAP thus allowed women artists to attain a degree of prestige and professional development in the arts that was more on par with that of their men counterparts.

Following the closure of the WPA in 1942 and the end of the war in 1945, however, many women artists lost their positions as professional artists. As Gibson argues: “After World War II, the United States which was struggling to provide jobs for returning G.I.’s wanted women out of their professions and back in their homes.”²⁴ For women artists, who, like their male counterparts, frequently supported their practices through other forms of work, the pressure to force women back into the space of the home simultaneously cut off their livelihood and undermined their credibility. While women artists had been able to maintain a professional career in the years prior to and during World War II and the U.S. government even saw fit to

²³ Robert Carleton Hobbs and Lee Krasner, *Lee Krasner*, 1st ed., Modern Masters (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993). 32.

²⁴ Ann Gibson, "Lee Krasner and Innovations in American Abstract Painting," *Woman's Art Journal* 28, No. 2, no. Fall-Winter 2007 (2007). 12.

endorse their practices, with the onset of the Cold War, women's contributions to art were considered secondary to and lesser than those of their male counterparts. Frequently women would find themselves unable to sell their work, as "collectors were reluctant to take a chance on a woman painter, who might decide to turn her studio into a nursery."²⁵ As such, the logic stood that by purchasing works from male artists, a collector was "investing" in his "career," whereas if a collector were to acquire a work by a woman artist, he would simply be supporting her dalliance or hobby, a side job from her primary role as wife and mother.

The credibility of women artists' was further challenged in what little media attention they did receive. In magazines, newspapers, and even art journals, women artists were consistently discussed in a diminutive manner that placed their femininity at the forefront and framed their artistic pursuits as frivolous flights of fancy. For example, a 1953 profile of Elizabeth Weistrop ran in *The Sunday News* in New York City under the headline "Same Tools to Sculpt or Cook a Chicken."²⁶ The article went on to describe Weistrop's practice as a sculptor in terms of the "feminine" objects that she employed in making her work. Doyle writes: "Handy to the hall is her kitchen. There she uses measuring cups, designed primarily for flour, to measure the ingredients required for making a statue. Her spoons are fine, too, for mixing her materials. And, of course, she uses her kitchen mixing bowl."²⁷ The rhetoric here is

²⁵ Ibid. 12.

²⁶ Edward Doyle, "Same Tools to Sculpt or Cook a Chicken," *The Sunday News*, June 21, 1953 1953. Clipping found in Scrapbook in the Judson Memorial Church Archives at the Fales Collection, in the New York University Library.

²⁷ Ibid. n.p.

obvious; Doyle discusses Weistrop's practices in such domestic terms because she is a woman and these items are associated with womanhood. Had he been profiling a male painter, it is unlikely that Doyle would have taken note of the use of egg whites in the service of making tempera, even though that "ingredient" is as essential to baking as Weistrop's kitchen mixing bowl.

The profile of Weistrop also highlights the ways in which the domestic and studio spaces of women artists often overlapped. Beyond mere rhetoric, in the case of many women artists the home and the workplace were one in the same. Lee Krasner, like Weistrop, frequently worked within the space of her home, painting in the living room of the house she shared with Jackson Pollock during the morning hours when he was asleep. Lucy Lippard has noted that this comingling of domestic and studio spaces for women artists was quite commonplace. She recalls in an essay that the women artists that she encountered early in her career regularly "worked in corners of their husband's spaces, or in the bedroom, even in the kitchen."²⁸ The spaces in which women artists worked were marginal and domestic; the sites of their artistic production thus echo the rhetoric of femininity during this period, in which the interior of the home is understood to be a woman's primary domain, regardless of what she does in it.

Beyond the liminal nature of the domestic spaces in which many engaged in their practices, women artists in the early Cold War period found themselves further marginalized because of their domestic partnerships. As Lucy Lippard notes, the

²⁸ Lucy R. Lippard, *From the Center : Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976). 47.

traditional view of the career woman artist, she writes, is that of “another artist’s wife, or mistress, or as a dilettante.”²⁹ Women artists are not afforded the autonomy of individual identity, but rather, are always discussed within the confines of their gender and with regard to their relationships. Their work, as such, is frequently understood in relation to (and often as derivative) of their romantic counterparts, where the same cannot be said for men in the arts. While this is still a common practice today, the identification of women artists with their spouses during the Cold War functioned as yet another means to uphold Cold War gender roles in an effort to maintain American values. As previously discussed, the American family was considered an essential unit in the fight against Communism. Part and parcel of this project was the encapsulation of female sexuality within the conjugal framework. As Elaine Tyler May notes: “the sexual containment ideology was rooted in widely accepted gender roles that defined men as breadwinners and women as mothers. Many believed that a violation of these roles would cause sexual and familial chaos and weaken the country’s moral fiber.”³⁰ Women’s morality and virtue was of central importance and as such a woman’s marital status was rendered central to her identity. Thus, while the affiliation of women artists with their spouses during the 1940s and 1950s was and is undoubtedly diminishing and demeaning, it also did, to some degree benefit to women artists, by functioning to maintain their respectability and femininity, which in turn helped them to continue working as artists with some — albeit comparatively limited — success.

²⁹ Ibid. 41.

³⁰ May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era*. 117.

The pursuit of that success, however, could prove extremely challenging. Women artists who aspired to greatness did so by risking their femininity, particularly within the masculinized heroic field of postwar abstraction. As Gibson notes: “Ambition in a woman was considered dangerous, and a woman who became assertive enough as to be a hero was, by definition, less of a woman.”³¹ Because, as previously noted women were considered to be the keepers of American morality, their adherence to their gender roles was an essential part of that effort. According to a textbook cited by May, “When women work, earn, and spend as much as men do, they are going to ask for equal rights with men. But the right to behave like a man [means] also the right to misbehave as he does. The decay of established moralities [comes] about as a by-product.”³² The rhetoric of the period, thus, maintained that the moral heart of America was entirely dependent on women’s inequality, and on her adherence to a gendered order that restricted her to the domestic realm. Women with professional aspirations — both within the art world and within other fields — therefore had to walk a fine line in order to gain recognition and advance in their careers without appearing “ambitious” or “mannish.”

As such, women artists found themselves in a precarious position during the early years of the Cold War. On the one hand, maintaining their femininity was essential to their ability to continue to work, as transgressions to this ideology would cast them in a highly negative light and render them pariah’s within the art market. On the other hand, their adherence to the ideological prescriptions of womanhood in

³¹ Gibson, "Lee Krasner and Innovations in American Abstract Painting." 13.

³² Text book quoted in May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era*. 69.

America during this time rendered them to be “less-serious,” “part-time” artists. Caught in an impossible double bind, women artists like Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, and Helen Frankenthaler — not mention the scores of other women working during the postwar period — continued to make work, while receiving little to no acclaim during this part of their career. While these women did eventually receive some appreciation from critics and curators in later years, the damage of these social conventions was already done. When asked in 1977 “whether it felt good to have been recognized, at last, as one of the major figures of the Abstract Expressionist movement,” Lee Krasner responded “No, it doesn’t make me feel great. It’s thirty years late. Too bad it didn’t happen thirty years ago. It would have been of help then.”³³ Krasner, like many other women of her generation, managed to have a career as an artist, but the obstacles placed before her because of her gender were significant and greatly impacted her success in the field.

The Rise of the 1960s and the Increasing Number of Women in the Art

Although the rhetoric of the early Cold War sought to affirm the heroic masculinity of male artists while simultaneously rendering women’s contributions to the field to be “part-time,” “amateurish,” or the result of a fortuitous match with a male artist, this appreciation of the status of the masculine artist began to change by the end of 1950s. The emergence of new forms of art — specifically performance, installation, and conceptually-based practices — and the dramatic increase in of

³³ Eleanor C. Munro, *Originals : American Women Artists*, New ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000). 100.

university art departments in the post-war period, challenged the Cold War conceptions of artistic genius and success. In New York City, three distinct but interrelated art circles emerged in the early 1960s, all of which engaged with art forms that challenged the dominance of materiality, representation, and the limits of the gallery space: Fluxus, Happenings, and the Judson Dance Theater and Judson Gallery. While the origins of all three movements are distinct, they each share a common lineage: the work of John Cage. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, John Cage began experimenting with ideas of chance and the every day in his own compositions. As Mildred Gilmcher describes Cage's works: "His music was based not on harmony but on a structure determined by duration, chance operations, and silence. He allowed the environment in which the music was performed to become part of the piece."³⁴ In his experiments, including the seminal composition *4'33* or his event at Black Mountain College in 1952, Cage created works that involved the full emersion of the audience within the space and that called attention to both elements of chance and the conditions of the surrounding environment. These forms were subsequently taken up in the works of artists involved with Judson, Fluxus, and the Happenings.

Fluxus, Judson, and the Happenings were distinct in both focus and form. While all three embraced chance and performance, each movement was more closely related to a specific form of the performing arts: music, dance, and theatre, respectively. In the case of Fluxus, a large number of its proponents — arguably the vast majority — came to the practice through some background in music. Practitioners

³⁴ Mildred Glimcher and Robert R. McElroy, *Happenings : New York, 1958-1963*, 1st ed. (New York: Monacelli Press, 2012). 13.

like LaMonte Young, Jackson MacLowe, Dick Higgins, and James Tenney all drew on their background in experimental music in the creation of their work. The artists most closely associated with Judson, on the other hand, demonstrated a marked interest in dance. Steve Paxton, Fred Herko, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown all had formal dance training, studying with the foremost figures in improvisational dance: Merce Cunningham and Anna Halprin. The Happenings were in many ways, works of theater in and of themselves, drawing from the new techniques and forms being employed within theater in and around New York City — specifically groups like The Living Theater — as well as those found in Surrealist and Dada Performance in Europe during the interwar period. The practitioners of these varying forms of performance were not altogether isolated from one another, but there were definitive distinctions with regard to who was engaged with which form. Similarly, all three forms of performance would frequently occur in the same venues; all three groups at various moments hosted pieces at the Judson Memorial Church, either in the Dance Theater Space, the Church Gymnasium or the Gallery. That said, each group had a particular agenda and an ethos of its own, which while similar in content and format to the others, was determinably unique.

Regardless of these distinctions, Fluxus and Judson — and to a much lesser extent the Happenings — did include women artists in their own right. From the very beginning, women like Alison Knowles, Simone Forti, and Yoko Ono were closely tied to the members of Fluxus and their contributions were considered without many of the qualifications placed upon women artists in the 1950s. While Fluxus, as a

movement was headed by men, specifically George Maciunas, women were welcome — albeit not sought after — contributors to the group. Perhaps because of its close link to dance, and the fact that several prominent women — most notably Josephine Baker, Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Anna Halprin — had been integral to the development of modern dance forms, the Judson Dance Theater, was arguably the most inclusive for women of all three. From the very beginning $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the choreographers/performers for a given dance concert at the Judson Dance Theater were women. In the first year of programming, of the 33 people who presented work, 14 of them were women.³⁵ Within these new forms of performance-based practice, the climate was generally a bit more open to women's participation, especially when compared the exclusion many women faced in Abstract Expressionism.

In addition to women artists finding some degree of inclusion within new forms of art practice, the number of women seeking professions in the arts increased in the early 1960s due to their increased presence within the university system as well. During the post-war period, artistic training became part of the domain of the University. The number of programs and institutions offering degrees in the fine arts increased exponentially during the middle decades of the 20th century. As Helen Molesworth notes: "In the early 1940s, there were 60 candidates for graduate degrees in studio art enrolled in eleven American institutions. By 1950-51, there were 322 candidates at thirty-two institutions. The trend continued through the end of the century. Thirty one new Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs opened in the 1960s,

³⁵ Anonymous, "Judson Dance Theatre Chronology," in *Judson Memorial Church Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries).

and forty-four in the 1970s.”³⁶ As such, artistic training was shifted into the realm of higher education, and the criteria for artistic success became more codified within a system of advanced degrees.

Women artists did benefit from the increased number of art programs that emerged nationwide in midcentury America, the conceptual framework that these programs began to embrace, and the opportunities they could and did provide for artists to develop and show their work. The number of women attending colleges in general in the United States increased dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. As Mary Ryan notes “While their mothers had often dropped out of high school during the depression and rarely completed college, the women of the 1960s left secondary school with their diplomas in hand and fully one-third of them went on to college where, by 1968, they constituted 40 percent of the student body.”³⁷ The number of women who did pursue arts degrees increased along with women’s increased presence on university campuses in the early to mid 1960s, although many of these women did experience a great deal of discrimination and sexism in these departments and their numbers did not approach parity for many years. In spite of these facts, many of the women artists who did gain their degrees in the 1950s and 1960s then went on to be instructors at the various art institutions across the nation, providing a model for younger generations of women artists and helping to increase the number of women who did pursue such a path. As will be discussed later in this chapter, many women

³⁶ Helen Molesworth, ed. *Work Ethic* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). 32.

³⁷ Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*. 310.

artists used their pedagogy and their positions within academia as a means to foster feminist activity and support the activism of women in the arts.

Investigations into American Womanhood and The Rise of “Second Wave” Feminisms

One of the major factors that contributed to the increase of women in universities and in professional careers in the arts was the reconfiguration and examination of American womanhood that occurred in the early 1960s. As we have seen, a woman’s identity in the 1950s was intrinsically defined by her roles within family structure as a wife and a mother. Even in the cases when women worked — and there were many cases where women did, particularly amongst poor women and women of color — they were not so much praised for their contributions to the larger American economy, but rather for their role in maintaining the American home. Over the course of the next twenty years, however, the American feminine ideal underwent a drastic and permanent transformation. In particular, white, middle class femininity, which was championed as the paragon of womanhood within the hierarchical structures of gender hegemony, underwent significant transformations during the 20-year period between 1960 and 1980. This transformation, however, was extremely gradual and was the result of myriad, intertwined factors, including an increase in women’s post-secondary education, the delay of marriage and childbirth, changing mores about sexuality, and — as is the focus of our study — the rise of a new wave of feminist activity in the 1960s and 1970s. Dubbed the “Second Wave,” feminism in this period was multifaceted and highly variable. As such, we will focus our attention first

on the some of the major milestones in the early 1960s that helped to bring the question of women's place in American society to the foreground before teasing out some of the substantial distinctions between the various forms of feminist activity that emerged during this period.

Although women's activism is perhaps the most indelible image of feminist activity in the 1960s, the first challenges to the rigid gender distinctions of the Cold War came in the form of two written volumes published in the same year, 1963, on the status of American womanhood: *American Women*, the collected findings of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), and Betty Friedan's (in)famous tome *The Feminine Mystique*. Both of these texts presented clear indictments of the iniquitous treatment of women within the United States, highlighting the detrimental impacts of the prevailing gendered discourse. Both the findings of the PCSW and Friedan shone a spotlight on the clear and omnipresent sexism within the United States, bringing public awareness to the issue of gender inequality on a scale that had not been seen since the decline of the suffrage and temperance movements of the early 20th century.

Shortly after taking office, President John F. Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). He charged the commission with the task of examining and making recommendations in six specific areas: "employment policies and practices; [...] social insurance and tax laws; [...] federal and state labor laws; [...] differences in legal treatment of men and women in regard to political and civil rights, property rights, and family relations; [...] new and

expanded services that may be required for women as wives, mothers, and workers; [... and] the employment policies and practices of the Government.”³⁸ The commission spent the next few years compiling “a mountain of data that showed that ‘horrible sexism’ existed across American society,” which they published in the volume *American Women* in 1963.³⁹

The report’s findings served to illustrate that an outmoded understanding of gender, a dearth of substantial career and educational opportunities, and a lack of support frequently thwarted American women in their efforts to contribute meaningfully to society. “The President’s Commission,” Stansell writes “sketched a female population poised for great things: determined, hopeful, and blessed with superior capabilities and plans. [...] Discrimination was a problem, but with proper attention, Americans could overcome old habits.”⁴⁰ In crafting such a narrative, the PCSW therefore attempted to implore the American government and the general population to work towards supporting women and promoting their advancement in an effort to better American society on the whole.

In addition to calling attention to the iniquitous treatment of women in various aspects of American culture and highlighting the preconditions that limit women’s meaningful contribution to society, the efforts of the PCSW laid the essential groundwork for later feminist activity and meaningful political change. As Jo Freeman notes: “The most concrete response to the activity of the president’s commission was

³⁸ United States. President's Commission on the Status of Women., "American Women; Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women " (Washington, D.C.1963). 7.

³⁹ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 203.

the eventual establishment of 50 state commissions to do similar research on a state level. These commissions were often urged by politically active women and were comprised mostly of women.”⁴¹ In so doing, Freeman argues, these statewide commissions established a basis for later feminist activity by bringing together disparate “knowledgeable, politically active women who otherwise would not have worked together around matters of direct concern to women,” and whose collaborative efforts helped to “[unearth] ample evidence of women’s unequal status, especially their legal and economic difficulties,” and “[create] a climate of expectations that something would be done.”⁴² As such, the efforts of the PCSW and the various statewide offshoots thereof brought the question of women’s political and civil rights back into the American consciousness.

At the same time as the PCSW was preparing their findings in *American Women*, Betty Friedan’s was conducting her own case study on gender in America *The Feminine Mystique*, which she also published in 1963. An instant success, *The Feminine Mystique* has been described as a “muckraking indictment of women’s lives and family dysfunction in the suburbs.”⁴³ In her text, Friedan sought to expose the “problem that has no name,” which, according to Friedan, “lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. A strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century

⁴¹ Jo Freeman, "The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 4, Changing Women in a Changing Society (1973). 797.

⁴² *Ibid.* 797-8.

⁴³ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 204.

in the United States.”⁴⁴ This problem, in Friedan’s opinion, was more than just mere ennui; it was psychosis and trauma originating from the enslavement of women within the domestic realm. As Stansell notes, in *The Feminine Mystique*, “Friedan depicted a mass of women who had fallen into catatonia or hysteria under the totalitarian pressures of neo-domesticity. [...] Women were trapped in their well-stocked homes, isolated from real life, slaves to their appliances and children.”⁴⁵ In her sensationalist writing, Friedan appeared to have unearthed a dystopian reality hidden behind the American dream, one in which women were the primary victims, exploited by the domesticity that was considered inherent and essential to their gender identity.

Despite the questionable validity of some of its claims about the oppressive nature of domesticity — which, as Joanne Meyerowitz has pointed out, are primarily cherry-picked from works of fiction in women’s magazines from the 1950s — *The Feminine Mystique* “had an indisputable impact [...] and] hundreds of women have testified that the book changed their lives.”⁴⁶ *The Feminine Mystique*, like *American Women*, brought to the forefront many of the problems with the Cold War gendered rhetoric and signaled to many women the necessity for social change. As Jo Freeman writes: “An immediate best seller, [*The Feminine Mystique*] stimulated many women to question the status quo and so to suggest to Friedan that a new organization be

⁴⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁴⁵ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 204.

⁴⁶ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958 ” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994). 230. Meyerowitz goes on to dispel the veracity of many of Friedan’s claims due to their grounding in fictional articles by examining the use of gendered rhetoric in both fiction and non-fiction articles from the same periodicals during the postwar period.

formed to attack their problems.”⁴⁷ In the years that followed, Friedan did go on to be a founding member and the first president of a group focused on advocating for women’s rights, the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was established in 1966.

The charges raised at systematic gender inequality in the PCSW findings and in *The Feminine Mystique* resonated with women across the country. For some women, these texts served to confirm the way they had felt this way for many years. In other cases, the ideas espoused by the PCSW and Friedan — among others — helped to awaken women to their own systematic oppression and were instrumental in bringing together women in the hopes of advocating for social change. In the years that followed, women began to organize and to challenge the existing social structure wherein women were marginalized and oppressed by the patriarchal value system that was in place in American society. Feminist groups emerged both locally and nationally, entreating women to join their sisters in solidarity in order to combat their systematic subjugation through various forms of community actions. Yet American feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was not singular or ubiquitous. On the contrary, feminist activity during this period took on many forms with distinct orientations and foci based on myriad factors, including class, race, sexual orientation, geography and age.

⁴⁷ Freeman, "The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement." 798.

White Feminisms: Liberal Feminism and Radical Feminism

Because femininity and in turn feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was highly variable and varied, it is important to note that the intersection of these factors can also impact the ways in which feminist activism existed within racial groups. This is particularly true for white women, whose feminism focused more exclusively on gender inequality than on other such as race. Within the feminist activism promoted and practiced by white women, according to a number of comprehensive studies on the history of feminist activity, age was one of the most central criteria for determining different tendencies with regard to feminist activity. Generational differences between women have frequently been cited in an effort specifically to delineate the distinctions amongst two forms of mainstream white feminist activity: Liberal Feminism and Radical Feminism.⁴⁸

Liberal feminism, as such, describes the feminist tendencies of an older generation of women. In her 1973 article “The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” Jo Freeman succinctly describes this form of feminism stating:

the first of the branches will be referred to as the older branch of the movement, partly because it began first and partly because the median age of its activists is higher. It contains numerous organizations, including the lobbyist group (Women’s Equity Action League), a legal foundation (Human Rights for Women), over 20 caucuses in

⁴⁸ Liberal and Radical feminism are by no means the only forms of feminism practiced by white, middle class women. Scholars like Alice Echols and Patricia Bradley also discuss the distinct Politico and Cultural feminist factions, which differ slightly in group affiliations and avowed political stances from Radical feminism. However, these distinctions can be understood as forms of radical feminism, since all three factions employ the same central approach to the issues of gender inequality and the importance of cultural change over political rights. Also given the loose affiliations between feminist organizations within the Radical feminist movement, I maintain that these variations are more the result of in-group distinctions than distinct forms of feminism, as is the distinction between Liberal, Radical, Black, Chicana, Native American, Asian American, and Working Class feminisms.

professional organizations, and separate organizations for women in the professions and other occupations. Its most prominent 'core group' is the National Organization of Women (NOW), which was also the first to be formed.⁴⁹

This older form of feminism used its resources to work within the existent political structure to advocate for changes in policy and government that would help establish equality for women in America. The various organizations associated with this form of feminism were thus focused on advance women's equalities in the eyes of the law and with regard to political issues and had little to no interest in transforming the economic and social basis of American society, but rather providing women with greater opportunities within the existing social order.

The younger generation of feminists, however, saw the structure of American society, and not the political iniquities perpetuated under the law, to be the primary force behind women's subjugation. These women felt that a more radical social and economic transformation would be necessary in order to bring about true gender equality, and as such, this strain of feminist activity has been termed "radical feminism." In many cases, these younger feminists had "received their political education as participants or concerned observers of the social action projects of [the 1960s]. Many came direct from New Left and civil rights organizations."⁵⁰ As such, many of these women drew from these experiences in the establishment of their own feminist organizations and the development and implementation of activist strategies.

⁴⁹ Freeman, "The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement." 795.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 796.

Radical feminism, as such, describes the loosely connected, but similarly socially- oriented form of feminism adopted primarily by white women who had been a part of the New Left, although not exclusively. Jo Freeman describes this movement as consisting of “innumerable small groups — engaged in a variety of activities — whose contact with each other is, at best, tenuous,” the expansion of which, she argues, is “more amoebic than organized, because the younger branch of the [Women’s Liberation] movement prides itself on lack of organization.”⁵¹ Unlike Liberal, whose activist organizations were centralized and had a clear, hierarchical leadership structure, Radical feminists favored a more collective and collaborative form of organization and governance, which resulted in the emergence of hundreds of different Radical feminist groups — such as New York Radical Women, the Redstockings, the Feminists, Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, etc. — across the nation, each with a slightly distinct orientation and approach. These different factions held different beliefs for what the realization of “Women’s Liberation” would mean.

Despite the idiosyncrasies among these disparate groups, there were some commonalities within the Radical feminist movement, lack of a clear and hierarchical governance being just one. Arguably the most central tenet of Radical feminism was the use of “consciousness-raising” as an epistemological strategy. Derived from Marx’s theories of class-consciousness, consciousness-raising is understood to be a method wherein an individual comes to recognize the pervasive and systematic nature

⁵¹ Ibid. 796.

of his or her oppression. As Stansell notes: “the term was an offshoot of the Marxist concept of ‘false consciousness,’ the distorted view of the world that kept workers in thrall to capitalism instead of rising up in proletarian movement.”⁵² The idea of consciousness-raising, therefore was premised upon the idea that one must be aware of the systematic ways in which culture (functioning as a form of superstructure) works to perpetuate the base. In this case, the base would be the subjugation of various groups in order to maintain a capitalist social order that is maintained through the exploitation of particular classes of human beings, women being one.

While consciousness-raising had been employed to some degree within the New Left, radical feminists adapted this strategy in order to raise awareness of the subjugation of women and American society, in an effort to illustrate the same pervasive and systematic strictures that supported male dominance. Consciousness-raising was highly variable and existed in many forms. As Stansell notes: “Consciousness-raising could occur in many settings: when a woman was reading feminist literature, talking to friends, or writing in her journal.”⁵³ Regardless of where or how precisely a woman had her “consciousness raised” the result was still the same: she experienced the “click” — or the moment wherein she realized that her struggles and personal experiences were not hers alone, but rather were the result of a culture that endorsed her subjugation and exploitation.

Most often, however, consciousness-raising occurred in group settings with other women. C-R groups (as they were commonly called) would meet “in apartments

⁵² Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 244.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 244.

and women's centers" and would begin their discussions with a central question, "with members sharing their experiences in (supposedly) equal measure."⁵⁴ Through these consciousness-raising sessions, individual women's encounters with sexism came to be understood as more than simple grievances; the problematic instances that these women had commonly experienced were imbued with political significance. "Stories of families, marriages, love affair, professional slights, men's emotional thuggery, mothers' wrongdoing, broken hearts, and thwarted ambitions, entered a stream of political narrative."⁵⁵ Radical feminists came to employ the slogan "the personal is political" to describe the process of consciousness-raising. All aspects of women's lives were examined in these sessions, and the result was the transformation of individual experience into a collective issue. The goal of these efforts was thus to facilitate recognition of the pervasive and diverse culture of sexism, which was considered central and fundamental to impacting meaningful and substantial cultural changes that would help advance the state of women.

This interest in examining various facets of daily life — as opposed to legal issues and codified civil rights — was, therefore, a central and unifying feature of the Radical feminist movement, which was greatly divided about many other issues (i.e. the role of men, female sexuality, relationship to the New Left, etc.). As Alice Echols notes, "radical feminist groups [...] agreed that gender, not class or race was the primary contradiction and that all other forms of social domination originated with

⁵⁴ Ibid. 245.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 245.

male supremacy.”⁵⁶ The hallmark of this faction of the feminist movement of this period was therefore, an emphatic understanding that various iterations of sexism in daily life — and not specific political rights, as was the focus of liberal feminist organizations, like the NOW — were central to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Women’s Liberation: From Action to Theory

Although clear distinctions exist among feminist groups and organizations with regard to ideology and demographics, certain common practices emerged among the predominantly white feminist movements. Raising public consciousness with regard to gender inequality was the central goal of all feminist actions during this period; as such, certain tactics emerged in order to garner attention for feminist causes and to advocate for gender equality. Explicit consciousness-raising sessions were one effective tool in this process, but their impact was generally limited to the participants in these sessions. In order to advocate to the broader American public, other strategies were necessary. Members of feminist groups put a great deal of effort into organizing protests, creating feminist-oriented forms of cultural production, as well as developing and implementing a feminist pedagogy became in order to bring about the raised consciousness considered essential to make meaningful change in society during the 1960s and 1970s.

The protests organized by members of the Women’s Liberation movement — be they Radical, Liberal, Politico or Cultural feminists — were all designed to create a

⁵⁶ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). 139.

large scale public spectacle, aimed at capturing media attention in order to bring awareness to feminist issues. The messages they presented more frequently reflected the ideological orientation of the factions that organized these demonstrations. For instance, when Radical feminists organized their own protests, they frequently focused on the institutionalized practices of sexism, which functioned on a daily basis to subjugate women. Employing a performative strategy, which both helped to foster further media attention for the issues at hand and helped to dramatize their points, Radical feminist groups designed their protests to highlight the dispersed and manifold ways in which women's oppression was woven into the fabric of American culture.

On September 7, 1968, members of various Radical feminist groups gathered together in large-scale protest on the Atlantic City boardwalk, outside the Miss America competition. Organized by members of New York Radical Women, "approximately one hundred women's liberationists from New York, Boston, D.C., Detroit, Florida, and New Jersey gathered in Atlantic city to protest the pageant's exploitation of women."⁵⁷ The protesters carried signs that compared the competition to a cattle auction, including a poster that mapped a butcher's cuts of meat onto the naked back of a woman wearing a cowboy hat (Appendix: Figure 2). As Echols notes: "From early afternoon until midnight, they picketed the pageant and performed guerilla theater on the boardwalk," including "[crowning] a live sheep 'Miss America,' before "[parading] the sheep on the boardwalk to 'parody the way the contestants (all women) are appraised and judged like animals at a county fair'" and

⁵⁷ Ibid. 93.

the coordinated the discarding of “tossed ‘instruments of torture to women’ — high-heeled shoes, bras, girdles, typing books, curlers, false eyelashes, and copies of *Playboy*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Ladies Home Journal* — into a ‘Freedom Trash Can.’”⁵⁸ Although organizers had initially hoped to burn the items — a symbolic action intended to parallel the burning of draft cards in earlier anti-war demonstrations by various New Left organizations — “they were prohibited from doing so by the city which purportedly wanted to prevent another fire from breaking out on its flammable boardwalk.”⁵⁹ Regardless of the lack of fire, the symbolic nature of the action was readily apparent and the protestors were successful in making a spectacle, so much so that their actions spawned the stereotype of “bra-burning feminists” that exists to the present day.

While the demonstrations on the boardwalk managed to capture the attention of the media who were reporting on the contest from outside, the protestors also carried out actions meant to disrupt the proceedings of the competition. In particular, sixteen women entered the auditorium and “as the outgoing Miss America read her farewell speech, four or five women unfurled a large banner which read, ‘Women’s Liberation,’ and all sixteen women shouted, ‘Freedom for Women’ and ‘No More Miss America.’”⁶⁰ Although the protestors did not manage to get the attention of the cameras of the contest, they did manage to leave a lasting impression. The declaration of Women’s Liberation during this protest stuck and became synonymous with the

⁵⁸ Ibid. 93.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 93-94.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 94.

feminist actions of the day, to some extent regardless of political orientation. Overall, the various actions carried out during the Miss America Protest helped significantly in bringing the agenda of Radical feminists to the attention of the American public. As Bradley notes: “the 1968 protest would forever after cause the American public to look at the Miss America Pageant in new ways. And while bra burning became the easy characterization of the movement, the event put the radical agenda before the public as no other action had.”⁶¹ The Miss America Protest, as such, put the idea of “Women’s Liberation” into the mainstream American discourse, drawing attention to the ideological and practical ways through which women were subjugated in American society.

The Miss America Protest was just one of many protests carried out by groups affiliated with Radical feminism during the 1960s and 1970s. While it drew a moderately large crowd, Radical feminists carried out actions with groups as small as five or six, all of which were aimed at capturing public attention, with or without the help of the media. Protests like those of the Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) — a group that regularly staged protests in the form of guerilla theatre wherein groups of anywhere from five to thirteen women would perform “hexes” on crowds in a variety of public venues — regularly employed merely a handful of women engaged in some form performative protest (Appendix: Figure 3). For instance, on Halloween on 1968, a “coven” of 13 women dressed as witches — according to the kitschy, pop culture iconography of witches in mid-

⁶¹ Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003). 62.

century America, complete with black dresses, tall hats and broom sticks — assembled on Wall Street and began to “hex” the finance industry.⁶²

After this initial performance, WITCH covens began appearing all over the country, staging works of guerilla theatre and protests in cities nationwide over the next several years. In February 1969, “a dozen WITCH members took on the ‘Bridal Fair’ at Madison Square Garden,” handing out flyers that read “‘Confront the Whoremakers’” (Appendix: Figure 4) before performing an “unwedding ceremony” meant to represent “‘unholy state of American patriarchal oppression.’”⁶³ That Halloween, a Chicago “coven” gathered at the Federal building in order to perform a “hex,” and in 1970, a group of five Milwaukee WITCH members staged their own work of guerilla theatre, interrupting a group of advertising executives during the Annual Gridiron Dinner at the OP-Press club.⁶⁴ Drawing on a considerably smaller group of participants than those at the Miss America Protest or the Women’s Strike for Equality, WITCH was still able to capture some attention and at the very least create a spectacle.

Liberal feminists also used organized and spectacular demonstrations quite frequently as a means to further their agenda. As Patricia Bradley notes: “During the early years, NOW and its chapters found few issues inappropriate for public demonstration. The demonstrations tended to be attached to a rhetorical strategy aimed at media attention including a name for the demonstration and highly quotable

⁶² Jo Freeman, “The Revolution Is Happening in Our Minds,” in *The New Feminism in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. June Sochen (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1971). 150.

⁶³ Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975*. 63-64.

⁶⁴ “Action,” *Off Our Backs: A Women’s Newsjournal* 1, no. 5 (1970). 10.

placards.”⁶⁵ The most notable protest organized by Liberal feminists was the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality. Like all NOW protests, the planned action was highly coordinated and organized in a way meant to maximize media attention. As Stansell notes: “On August 26, 1970, NOW staged a huge Women’s Strike for Equality on the fiftieth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment’s ratification, replete with slogans and sound bites that could survive hostile coverage. The Women’s Strike for Equality, which had sister demonstrations that day in cities across the country, combined the orderly march and a list of demands with enticing hints of wildcat actions,” including the suggestion that “women everywhere just might take the day off from ironing, cooking and making love.”⁶⁶ The Women’s Strike for Equality, while organized by Liberal feminists, had a wide draw, bringing together not only Radicals and Liberals, but also women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Prominent women activists like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Flo Kennedy, Rita Mae Brown, and Robin Morgan all spoke at the Strike, garnering further support and media attention for the cause.⁶⁷

The event was extremely successful, capturing interest from a wide variety of media outlets across the country. Moreover, the attention was generally quite positive. As Stansell writes: “What is remarkable is that the journalists managed to frame feminism as a serious matter, worthy of consideration. At the most basic level, the mainstream media provided information about what feminists were protesting, thereby

⁶⁵ *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975*. 46.

⁶⁶ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 241.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 241.

disseminating the terms of grievance and widening the circle of the aggrieved.”⁶⁸ Moreover, the widespread coverage, which was disseminated amongst national media outlets, far beyond the host cities, helped to expose women and girls who had not previously encountered feminism to the cause and its efforts.

In addition to capturing media attention through protests, feminists during this period also produced their own media, aimed at circulating ideas about Women’s Liberation to women nationwide. Because of the tenuous links between distinct factions of feminism during this period, publications about women’s issues occupied a central position within the broader feminist movements. Journals, magazines, and newsletters circulated widely between groups. A profound distrust for the mainstream media, who would frequently convey women’s issues to the benefit of their circulation, led to the establishment of alternative, women-centered media outlets. As Patricia Bradley notes: “The general distrust of the media in radical circle encouraged a rush of alternative publications, an explosion prompted not only by the times but also by the availability of cheap offset printing. [...] women’s newspapers rejected the values of the mainstream press by taking a partisan view instead of the ‘objective’ reporting of mainstream journalism, utilized personal voices in their editorial matter, and took a collective approach to decision making.”⁶⁹ A flurry of publications emerged, including *off our backs*, *RAT*, and *Chrysalis* — which was conceived of and produced at the Los Angeles Woman’s Building — that circulated widely among individual feminists and women’s groups.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 242.

⁶⁹ Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975*. 50.

In addition to periodicals, innumerable books on the subject of women's status in society appeared on the market in the late 1960s and 1970s. Many of these books focused specifically on the experiences of women within daily life, drawing on personal narratives and anecdotes in order to illustrate the ways in which sexism is woven into the fabric of American society. As Christine Stansell notes: "Discoveries were data for a burgeoning ethnography of the gendered self, a kind of top-to bottom, inside-out, and outside-in account of femininity that developed at a breakneck pace."⁷⁰ Works like Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, for example, mined the subject of daily life and identified many of the ways in which the pressures to adhere to a hegemonic ideal of femininity worked to undermine women within society, as told through Rich's own experiences as a daughter, wife, and mother.

Other works, like Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* took a more essayistic approach to analyzing the issue of gender inequality. Following in the footsteps of earlier publications like *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Firestone and Morgan published volumes that analyzed the various avenues that exist to reinforce women's subjugation within society. Books of these sorts circulated widely and were frequently featured on the reading lists of feminist groups and collectives.⁷¹ As Bradley notes: "Despite the frequent canard that the women's movement was only of interest to a handful of women, paperback publishers found profit in the subject. Dell reissued a

⁷⁰ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*.

⁷¹ Many of the feminist art organizations and educational programs, such as the Fresno State College/CalArts Feminist Art Program, the Los Angeles Woman's Building, the West Coast Women Artists Conference,

tenth-anniversary edition of *The Feminine Mystique*, Vintage published Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* in a cheap edition, Quadrangle published Aileen Kraditor's *Up from the Pedestal* in paperback, and Bantam reissued Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.⁷² In addition to being readily available, these volumes were written in an accessible manner. Women identified with the issues being addressed and reading texts of this nature was considered by many to be essential to consciousness-raising.

In addition to mainstream texts on women's issues, academic publications on feminism also abounded during this time. A great deal of scholarly research brought the issues of the Women's Liberation movement into the academy, and with the emergence of women's studies as an academic discipline in the early 1970s came the establishment of numerous scholarly journals on women in society. Journals such as *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* and *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* — to name just two — were founded in the mid-1970s with the specific intent to publish scholarly articles that addressed feminist topics. While the target audiences of these publications were within academia, in many cases, these publications also had a wide appeal with the public; Kate Millet's doctoral thesis *Sexual Politics*, which focuses extensively on the treatment and objectification of women in Western literature, was, for instance, a best seller. Regardless of the popularity of these works, the emergence of a feminist discourse within academia was extremely significant for the advancement of the feminist agenda.

⁷² Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975*.

In addition to publishing scholarly articles on women's issues, feminist academics also developed curricula and pedagogical strategies aimed at addressing the position of women in society, both historically and in the present moment. As Marilyn J. Boxer writes: "Women's studies first appeared in the last half of the 1960s when women faculty in higher education, stronger in number than ever before began to create new courses that would facilitate more reflection on the female experience and feminist aspiration."⁷³ The faculty who established these courses and departments drew upon their own experiences within various strains of the Women's Liberation Movement, as well as other activist movements during the 1960s that had challenged the normative practices on college campuses nationwide, such as the Free Speech Movement and SDS. The challenges lobbed at the academy by the student movements of the 1960s helped to create various interdisciplinary fields of study, such as African American/Black Studies, Chicano/Latin American Studies, and Women's Studies; the criticality of the New Left and youth activism in the early 1960s had brought to light both the need and the interest in disciplines that would address the diversity of experience of the students within the academy.

The first Women's Studies courses appeared at Cornell University and San Diego State College (now San Diego State University) in 1970. Over the course of the next decade, the number of Women's Studies programs grew exponentially. Boxer notes: "Between 1970 and 1975, 150 new women's studies programs were founded, a

⁷³ Marilyn J. Boxer, "For and About Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies in the United States," *Signs* 7, no. 3, Feminist Theory (Spring 1982). 663.

feat that was repeated between 1975 and 1980.”⁷⁴ This massive upsurge in women’s studies courses on university campuses thus presented a large number of students with the opportunity to re-evaluate the ways in which gender inequality exists and is perpetuated in their culture.

There was variety amongst the courses taught, but the central aim of these programs as a method of consciousness-raising and advocacy for social change was clear. As Boxer writes: “Women’s studies was a necessary part of women’s ‘struggle for self determination’; its goal was ‘to understand the world and to change it.’”⁷⁵ Early Women’s studies courses focused extensively on understanding the ways in which women have been historically and culturally placed in a disadvantaged position. Courses on the position of women in literature and women’s history were early courses within the field, primarily because, as Boxer notes, they “represented ‘more than just a desire for a female heritage’; [...] [but] also ‘a search for ways in which a successful female revolution might be constructed.’”⁷⁶ As such, these new courses functioned to make women aware of the history of their subjugation while simultaneously attempting to pose alternatives for society.

Beyond simply offering a woman-focused curriculum, Women’s Studies programs also frequently employed feminist derived and oriented pedagogical strategies. Boxer writes:

The double purpose of women’s studies — to expose and redress the oppression of women — was reflected in widespread attempts to

⁷⁴ Ibid. 665.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 664.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 663.

restructure the classroom experience of students and faculty. Circular arrangements of chairs, periodic small-group sessions, use of first names for instructors as well as students, assignments that required journal keeping, 'reflection papers,' cooperative projects, and collective modes of teaching with student participation all sought to transfer to women's studies the contemporary feminist criticism of authority and the validation of every woman's experience.⁷⁷

In many ways, the classrooms within women's studies programs very closely resembled consciousness-raising sessions and Radical feminist group meetings, and their purpose was the same. Because feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was oriented around the individual, adherence to these participatory strategies functioned to facilitate the moment of the "click" within the classroom. The discussion of women's history, women in literature, or women in the arts within these courses was meant to illustrate the many ways that women's oppression has and does exist in society, resulting in the raised consciousness of the students.

Not Simply Sisterhood: Feminisms of Color

While the efforts of the women in the "Women's Liberation Movement" did make great strides to illustrate the ways in which women experienced sexism and discrimination to the broader public, the articulation thereof was in many way representative of the experiences of a select few. The Radical and Liberal feminist movements were generally comprised of white, middle class, well-educated women and as such the issues they raised reflected their social and class position. Yet the manner in which they did so generally failed to acknowledge the interplay of various

⁷⁷ Ibid. 667.

intersectional factors, specifically class and race. As had been the case when women in the New Left raised the issue of sexism in the movement, the experiences they highlighted were not those of women of different races, while the language they used seemed to imply this was the case. White women frequently employed a rhetoric that championed unity and universal sisterhood, arguing that gender — and gender alone — was the defining factor of women’s subjugation within society.

Many poor women and women of color found this perspective myopic and reflective of the privilege that white women have in society. The issues that they believed were central to “women’s liberation” did not account for the many struggles women of color faced in their daily lives. White feminists worked off the assumption that what was beneficial to them as a group would be beneficial to all women. Such a perspective, however, failed to acknowledge the differences among women and as such, many women of color felt disinclined to participate in the movement. As Audre Lorde notes:

Poor women and women of Color know there is a difference between the daily manifestations of marital slavery and prostitution because it is our daughters who line 42nd street. If white american [sic] feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting differences in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color?⁷⁸

Lorde’s criticism points out the myopic and misguided attempts made by many white feminists to speak on behalf of all women. This failure of white feminists across

⁷⁸Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider : Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984). Kindle Edition. 112.

the spectrum to recognize the ways in which their racial privilege contributes to their understanding of sexual discrimination was a point of contention amongst many women of color activists.

Part of this nearsightedness was due explicitly to the informal nature of the movement's structure and the nature of its membership. As Freeman points out: "Like the older branch, [the younger] tends to be predominantly white, middle class, and college educated. But it is much more homogeneous, and, unlike the older branch, has been unable to diversify. This is largely because most small groups tend to form among friendship networks. Most groups have no requirements for membership (other than female sex)." Many of the women who came together to form these various and only tenuously linked Radical feminist groups were from the same demographic subsection. The commonalities in experience that united them within their political efforts were largely those that existed within their racial and class conditions. While they undoubtedly did experience first hand discrimination, sexism, harassment and violence, the nature of these encounters and the degree to which they were defining characteristics of these women's lives was very much so tempered by many of the privileges afforded to them on the basis of their class and race. Because their groups lacked any class or race diversity, however, many of these women came to believe that because these struggles were common to them, they must also be common to all women in the same way.

Regardless of the reasons behind this near-sighted perspective, many women of color found white feminism — particularly Radical feminism — exclusionary and

off-putting. As such, many women of color sought to establish their own form of activism that addressed the issues of racism and sexism that so often worked to subjugate women of color doubly. In her article on the origin of the Chicana feminist movement, Alma Garcia notes the similar origins of various forms of feminism, particularly amongst women of color. She writes:

In the United States, Chicana feminists shared the task of defining their ideology and movement with white, Black, and Asian American feminists. Like Black and Asian American feminists, Chicana feminists struggled to gain social equality and end sexist and racist oppression. Like them, Chicana feminists recognized that the nature of social inequality for women of color was multidimensional. [...] Like Black and Asian American feminists, Chicana feminists struggled to gain equal status in the male dominated nationalist movements and also American society. To them, feminism represented a movement to end sexist oppression within a broader social protest movement.⁷⁹

Similar to white feminists, many women of color began to develop a sense of feminist consciousness during and through their participation in activist politics. Yet unlike many white feminists, many women of color did not wish to separate their activism on behalf of their gender from that of the broader movement. Most women, initially, remained active in the nationalist movements to which they belonged, imbuing their work with feminism and championing the women's issues as a part of the larger struggle against racism. Eventually, many women did form explicit feminist groups of their own, however they generally remained active within the larger movement on the whole.

⁷⁹ Alma M. Garcia, "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980," *Gender and Society* 3, no. 2 (Jun., 1989). 219-20.

The histories of the Chicana feminism, Black feminism, Asian American feminism, and Native American feminism thus have a similar and common trajectory, one that is not entirely dissimilar from the origins of radical feminism. As Garcia notes: “Chicana, Black and Asian American feminists were all confronted with the issue of engaging in a feminist struggle to end sexist oppression within a broader nationalist struggle to end racist oppression. All experienced male domination within their own communities as well as in the larger society.”⁸⁰ For many women of color, feminism was intrinsic to their activism within these nationalist movements; they advanced and championed the position of women within these movements as a central part of the struggle against racism and the colonial legacy. Because of the impacts of colonialism or slavery on how masculinity and femininity have historically been articulated among people of color, the issue of gender was central to many of the nationalist movements that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. In several cases, the establishment of an alternative form of gender expression was meant to resist and counter the gender constructions that were imposed through colonialism and the continuation of which helped to support racial inequality.

Perhaps the most cogent example of this existed within the Black Nationalist movements, which championed a form of powerful masculinity in effort to counteract the ways in which Black men’s masculinity had been undermined during slavery and Jim Crow. The erosion of Black masculinity through slavery and segregation was, in the 1960s, understood as related to — and arguably the cause of — the rampant

⁸⁰ Ibid. 220.

poverty in the Black community. In his (in)famous 1965 report entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued that the poverty that was endemic to Black communities across the United States was the result of a “Black matriarchy.” He argues:

In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well./ There is, presumably, no special reason why a society in which males are dominant in family relationships is to be preferred to a matriarchal arrangement. However, it is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating on one principle, while the great majority of the population, and the one with the most advantages to begin with, is operating on another. This is the present situation of the Negro. Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage.⁸¹

As a result of such criticisms, members of the Black Nationalist movement sought to actively reassert the position of the black man in the family system. Benita Roth notes: “Black nationalists condemned the report as racist, but many responded that the patriarchal family had to be reinstated so as to right the historical wrongs done to the Black male.”⁸² To members of the Black Nationalist movement, reaffirming Black masculinity was considered to be essential to the fight against racism and the subjugation of the Black community within American society.

⁸¹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," Blackpast.org, <http://www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965#chapter2>. n.p.

⁸² Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 84.

Yet this affirmation of Black masculinity came at a considerable cost to Black women. Because, as Schippers argues, hegemonic femininity exists to support hegemonic masculinity and the characteristics that comprise the masculine ideal are prohibited to women, the reconstitution of Black masculinity within Black Nationalism thus excluded women from exhibiting characteristics that had at one point defined their femininity. While women had been central to both the labor force and to the political activity of the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist Movements in the early 1960s, Black women's roles were becoming increasingly diminished in an effort to affirm the strength, autonomy, and authority of Black men. Roth writes: "The behind-the-scenes roles that women played in the Civil Rights movement were no longer far enough behind the scenes; women were to be supportive and subordinate, producing 'male warriors for the revolution' within newly patriarchal families."⁸³ The shifting definition of hegemonic femininity within the Black Nationalist movement thus created yet another challenge for Black women, who found themselves both subordinate to white masculinity and femininity, but to hegemonic Black masculinity as well.

Like in the case of the Black Nationalist movement, the ideology of Chicana femininity was thus informed by an emphasis on masculinity. Roth notes: "Thus, Chicanas in the student movement began to experience contradictions in their expected and desired roles in the movement. On the one hand, college attendance and social movement experience expanded their sense of their own capabilities; on the

⁸³ Ibid. 86.

other hand, masculinist versions of Chicanismo focused on traditional sex roles.”⁸⁴ Women in the Chicano movement, like women in the Black Nationalist movements, did occupy similar and confining positions defined by a reevaluation of gender with regard to cultural identity; attempts to reclaim masculinity in an effort to combat racism were often dependent on subjugating and subduing women’s explicit participation within the activist movements, thus putting Chicanas in the precarious position of agitating against sexism within the Chicano movement and racism in the broader world. Parallels to this kind of double discrimination can also be seen in the case of Asian American women and Native American women, who like Chicanas and Black women worked within the movement to combat racism and sexism.⁸⁵ As a result of the double discrimination that they faced in society and within the various activist movements, many women of color began organizing their own groups and establishing their own political agendas. They established their own forms of feminism, aimed at addressing their iniquitous treatments within the movement.

While there are numerous similarities between both the origins and foci of the various strains of feminism practiced by women of color, these various movements were distinct from one another and the issues they faced were distinct. Although in many cases the colonial legacy did play a part in the subjugation of minority women, the specific articulation of colonialism differed substantially across the various groups.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 137.

⁸⁵ For more information see: Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, "The Development of Feminist Consciousness among Asian American Women," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1987). and Donna Hightower Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2003).

The experiences of Native Women with colonialism, for example, varied drastically from that of Chicanas or Black women. As such, the American Indian Movement had a distinct focus from the Black Liberation movement when it came to cultural identity, derived from the experience of Native Americans as colonized subjects in the United States. As Donna Hightower Langston notes: “American Indians had faced a history of forced assimilation. [...] A central focus of their activism was on gaining enforcement of treaty rights, not civil rights. [...] The Indian movement focused more on empowering the tribe, not individuals, the more common reference point of Civil Rights groups.”⁸⁶ Thus the engagement with feminism and with broader nationalism within the American Indian Movement by Native American women was heavily influenced by the ways in which the colonial presence had attempted to stamp out Native culture through centuries of assimilationist policies, which was specific to the treatment of American Indians. Black, Chicana, Asian American and Native American feminists thus had to develop appropriate feminist strategies that would reflect the way in which their racial and ethnic background have informed the hegemonic femininity against which they are compared.

Given the hierarchical and multifaceted nature of gender expression, the criticisms launched by women of color against the chorus of universal sisterhood sung by white feminists is quite apt. Because femininity reflects the intersection of multiple factors, including race, class, and sexuality, the myopic perspective of white feminists that gender alone is the source of women’s subjugation seems inaccurate, at best, and

⁸⁶ "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s." 115.

downright harmful, at the worst. However exclusionary their perspective may have been, the criticisms they launched against their exploitation and subjugation on the basis of their gender were not altogether insignificant. As such, in my examination of feminist art in the remainder of this chapter and in subsequent ones, I will illustrate the ways in which the challenges posed by white feminists reflect their privileged gender and class positions.

Feminism, Art, and Feminist Art

Having thus discussed the forms of actions that were practiced by women in the various feminist movements, let us now examine how women in the arts engaged with the ideology of women's liberation in their work during this period. With the increasing number of women entering art related professions — including, but not limited to artists, curators, critics and art historians — and the rise and expansion of new forms of feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s, many women in the arts began to engage with the issue of gender inequality in their work. The origin of women's activism in the arts — specifically the formation of the “Women's Art Movement” — follows a similar trajectory to the emergence of radical feminism. In the early 1960s, many women in the arts had been involved politically with various activist groups, both within and beyond their work in the art world. Drawing on their experiences with art activism and feminist activism, many women artists developed art practices and pedagogical methods aimed at examining the social and political status of women in midcentury America. Women art historians, critics, and curators also turned their attention to feminist issues, raising the question of women's iniquitous

treatment in society and in art institutions, forming various art activist organizations aimed at advocating for greater representation for women artists within galleries and museums. Across the country, women curated feminist exhibitions, established alternative art spaces, and provided collective resources for career development for women artists all in order to increase the visibility of women within the arts and to draw attention to the pervasive gender discrimination in the United States. Nationwide, women were forming a feminist movement within the artistic community, aimed at simultaneously addressing the iniquitous treatment of women in America and women in the arts.

During the 1960s and 1970s, women's engagement with feminism in the arts took on myriad forms. As such, I will distinguish the terms "feminist art," "women's art," and the "Women's Art Movement" as separate but related entities. In particular, I use the term "feminist art" to refer to art that engages with the discourse of gender and that examines how womanhood exists and functions within society. I differentiate "feminist art" from "women's art," the latter referring to work created by women artists, as the two categories are not the same; I maintain that not all work made by women artists is feminist, nor is all feminist art made by women. Moreover, I argue that "feminist art" must be distinguished from the "Women's Art Movement," a term that describes the various forms of arts activism carried out by feminists in the art world in the 1970s. While women artists were a large part of the "Women's Art Movement," art historians, designers, critics, curators, gallerists, and administrators were also involved in many of the feminist organizations founded during this period.

The “Women’s Art Movement” as such refers specifically to the various forms collective organizing of women in the arts, while “feminist art” refers more specifically to the work of an individual, regardless of her (or his) affiliation with particular feminist arts groups.

Art Activism in the 1960s: Artists’ Protest Committee, Angry Arts, and the Art Workers Coalition

For many in the Women’s Art Movement, the establishment of feminist art organizations followed a long period of engagement with other forms of (arts) activism. In the 1960s, a number of activist arts organizations emerged nationwide with the explicit purpose of advocating for peace, racial equality, and/or the fair treatment of artists and other art workers within art institutions. As Francis Frascina argues: “Artists and intellectuals were, like many other groups, caught up in the dilemmas of [the 1960s] [...] and in finding ways of combining a broad historical understanding of postwar developments with which they disagreed. Their dissent was manifest both through the ‘non-compliance’ of members of a burgeoning counter-culture at odds with moral, social, sexual, and political norms of Cold War American and through organised [sic] interventions by artists, writers, and intellectuals who called for Americans ‘to end your silence’.”⁸⁷ In the mid-1960s, artists, writers, and various other individuals working within cultural production began to organize collectively in an effort to use their work do advocate for social change.

⁸⁷ Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999). 16.

In 1965, a group of artists, writers and intellectuals in Los Angeles established the Artists Protest Committee. According to a poster cited by Frascina, “The Artists Protest Committee was formed in May 1965 as a spontaneous action on the part of artists in Los Angeles who wanted to actively participate in the ferment of dissent that had gripped the American cultural community faced with the escalation of the war in Vietnam. Demonstrations were organised [sic] in Los Angeles during the Spring and Summer of 1965.”⁸⁸ On the weekend of May 15, 1965, the Artists Protest Committee’s sponsored a “White-Out” wherein “ a dozen or more La Cienega galleries [...] [covered] all the paintings on display with a wide strip of paper bearing the ‘Stop Escalation’ symbol of the protest”⁸⁹ and a “Happening/Protest in the galleries and on the streets.”⁹⁰

Following these initial demonstrations, the Artists Protest Committee organized the construction of the *Artists’ Tower of Protest* or the *Peace Tower* (Appendix: Figure 5) in Hollywood at the Corners of La Cienega and Sunset Boulevards,⁹¹ The structure, “designed and built under the direction of Mark di Suvero and the architect Kenneth H. Dillon, was a steel octahedron, tetrahedron, and double tetrahedron tensional configuration,” measuring just over 58 feet, and “painted yellow

⁸⁸ Text from the poster “A Call From the Artists of Los Angeles,” produced by Hardy Hanson for the Artists Protest Committee, quote in *ibid.* 21,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 31.

⁹⁰ Art Kunkin, “Teach-Ins, Teach Outs, White-Outs: Protest Grows Over Vietnam, *Los Angeles Free Press*, 2:20 (14 May 1965) cited in *ibid.*29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 16. The placement of the tower was extremely purposeful, marking the intersection of the Sunset Strip and La Cienega Boulevard, which had during the 1950s become known as “Gallery Row” and at the time played host to the Monday night “Art Walks,” wherein galleries would stay open late, hosting artists, collectors, and the general public for exhibitions of the latest work by Los Angeles artists.

and purple.”⁹² All around the structure were “418 two-foot square works by individual artists,” comprising a “continuous hundred-foot-long billboard wall, which stretched either side and in a U shape behind the Tower.”⁹³ Among the artists who contributed to the work were Abstract painters like Frank Stella, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and Elaine de Kooning, Pop Artists such as James Rosenquist and Roy Lichtenstein, as well as many younger artists, working in new media such as Claes Oldenburg and Judy Chicago.⁹⁴

The *Peace Tower* was dedicated on February 26, 1966, “with speeches by the artist Irving Petlin, ex-Green-Beret Master-Sergeant Donald Duncan, writer Susan Sontag and the ‘releasing by children of six white doves to symbolize peace’.”⁹⁵ The dedication was seen by many as a protest action in and of itself, bringing together a large collective in order to voice dissent.⁹⁶ Due to struggles with the land lord and the constant effort required to combat repeated vandalism, the *Peace Tower* only stood for a few months,⁹⁷ but it was profound and influential demonstration of the collaborative efforts of artists and intellectuals to use their work politically. As a monument, the *Peace Tower* functioned as a public display against the escalation of the war in Vietnam, reminding passersby as they carried out their daily activities.

At the same time as the Artists Protest Committee was organizing and constructing the *Peace Tower* in Los Angeles, members of the arts community in New

⁹² Ibid.17.

⁹³ Ibid.17.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 17.

⁹⁵ Ibid.17.

⁹⁶ Ibid.17.

⁹⁷ Ibid.17.

York were organizing their own exhibitions and actions. Groups like Artists and Writers Dissent, Artists Protest,⁹⁸ and Angry Arts formed in New York City in the mid-1960s and began engaging in their own artistic activism. In April 1965, “Writers and Artists Protest sponsored a large-format protest statement in *The New York Times*, entitled ‘End Your Silence’ and signed by 407 writers and artists.”⁹⁹ In the winter of 1967, the group Angry Arts sponsored a wide number of events throughout the city aimed at protesting the war in Vietnam. Over the course of the week from January 29 to February 5, 1967, the organization sponsored “over 50 concerts, exhibits and other events, most of which were filled to capacity.”¹⁰⁰ Angry Arts week brought together a large number of disparate artists from a wide variety of media and fields — from painters to poets, musicians to filmmakers — all with the expressed purpose of dissenting against the American military presence in Vietnam.

The various programs were structured to bring art to the public spaces of the city and to disrupt the normal course of daily life with artistic effort. Organizer Grace Paley described some of the scheduled works in a fundraising letter in early January 1967, stating:

there will be Bach Cantatas in railway stations; ‘play-ins’ in various museums and in the lobbies of concert halls, recital halls and business buildings; dramatic presentations in laundromats and supermarkets; poetry readings and mime performances on street corners from Brooklyn to Harlem; a ‘paint-in’ in which known artists will cover fences and billboards throughout Manhattan and sign their work; and

⁹⁸ Ibid. 21.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Carol B. Grosberg, "Angry Arts Letter to Howard Moody, March 1, 1967," in *Judson Memorial Church Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 094, Series A.01, Folder 83, 1967). n.p.

concerts, recitals, readings, art-shows, stage plays, film showings and happenings.¹⁰¹

Angry Arts week brought artists out of their regular venues and directly to the public, in order to “through art [...] reach the American people as human beings [...] to show them, and our government, that the artistic community does not share our government’s profound contempt for the ways and aspirations of people different from themselves.”¹⁰² As such, Angry Arts Week, like the *Peace Tower*, was a collaborative effort by hundreds of artists to use art as a means of public protest.

The collective organizing of various members of the art community also focused on the problems endemic to the art world. Artists banded together to agitate against the mistreatment they experienced at the hands of major institutions including but not limited to the blatant disregard of the wishes of the artists’ whose work they collected and the exclusion of the works of women artists and artists of color. According to Julia Bryan-Wilson, the major impetus for this kind of arts activism was the demonstration by Vassilakis Takis in January 1969, wherein the artist “marched into New York’s Museum of Modern Art, unplugged his kinetic piece *Tele-sculpture* (1960), and retreated to the MoMA garden with the piece in hand” after the museum included the work in the show without his permission.¹⁰³ Takis’ followed up the removal of his sculpture with the dissemination of a flyer that implored artists to “unite [...] with scientists, students with workers, to change these anachronistic

¹⁰¹ Grace Paley, "Angry Arts Letter to Howard Moody, January 4, 1967," *ibid.* n.p.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* n.p.

¹⁰³ Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*.

situations into information centers for all artistic activities.”¹⁰⁴ Many artists and critics heeded Takis’ call, banding together to form the “Art Worker’s Coalition” and soon after “the AWC was busy telegraphing the need for comprehensive changes throughout the New York art world.”¹⁰⁵ Members composed a “preliminary list of demands, many of which emphasized concerns about artists’ rights to control their work, including ‘copyrights, reproduction rights, exhibition rights, and maintenance responsibilities,’” which was subsequently circulated to the directors of major New York museums.¹⁰⁶ Over the next several years, the Art Worker’s Coalition organized a number of protests focused on these and other issues, levying demands of institutions like the Museum of Modern Art to include more artists of color, lower admissions costs, and to divest itself from corporations and supporters that profited off the war in Vietnam (Appendix: Figure 6).

Various groups and factions formed from the members of the Art Worker’s Coalition. Some organizations, including the Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG) and the Art Strike, formed out of frustration with “the AWC’s lack of interest in [...] ‘more effective’ protests,” choosing to engage in performative demonstrations of their own.¹⁰⁷ Other groups had a more narrow focus than the general advocacy efforts of the Art Worker’s Coalition, specifically with regard to the issues pertaining to women and people of color in the arts. Groups like the Ad-hoc Women Artists’ Committee, Women Artists in Revolution, and Women Students and Artists for Black Artists’

¹⁰⁴ Vassilakis Takis as cited in *ibid.* 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 14.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 17.

Liberation focused more on the politics of representation and the discrimination facing women and people of color in the arts. These factions eventually distanced themselves from the Art Worker's Coalition altogether in order to focus on their primary objectives, and these internal divisions led to the movement's eventual dissipation in late 1971.¹⁰⁸

The Women's Art Movement: The Intersection of Feminist and Art Activism

Women artists had been active within all of the art activism of the 1960s and early 1970s. They had contributed works to the *Peace Tower* and had been active participants in the Angry Arts Week. In 1970, the AWC offshoot "New York Art Strike against Racism, War, and Repression" elected both a man, Robert Morris, and a woman, Poppy Johnson, as its chairs.¹⁰⁹ Yet despite this inclusion, many women did not feel that their interests were being adequately represented within these broader movements. As Bryan-Wilson notes of the Art Worker's Coalition: "While there were often gestures towards inclusion, [...] by the fall of 1969 many women felt that they needed their own organization in order to address their systematic exclusion from the art world."¹¹⁰ Numerous feminist art activist groups emerged both in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere across the country. Groups like Women Artists in Revolution, the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, West-East Bag, Where We At?, and Women Students and Artists for Black Artists Liberation employed tactics derived from women's experiences within other activist art movements and those used by women in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 160.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 114.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 153.

the larger feminist movements of the time in order to engage with gender inequality in the art world and in American society. Just as the younger generations of feminism emerged from the student movements, the Women's Art Movement originated in the larger activist art tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s and then narrowed women's focus on combating institutional(ized) sexism.

In their own actions, members of the Women's Art Movement drew on the tactics employed by arts activist organizations and the broader feminist movement in order to advocate for gender equality in both the art world and American society. They organized protests that engaged both with the tradition of collective action — such as picket lines — as well as those that focused more on including specific artworks as a part of a gesture of dissent, such as the picketing actions of collectives like Ariadne: A Social Art Network in works such as *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977) (Appendix: Figure 7). They formed alternative art spaces and developed resources and opportunities for women artists to engage in cultural production. Feminist artists and art historians imbued their teaching practices with feminist pedagogical strategies, creating educational and scholarly approaches that challenged the systematic and historical methods that had hindered women's career success in the arts and had written out women's contributions to the history of art. Most importantly, they created art works aimed at raising public consciousness in an effort to challenge the patriarchal assumptions responsible for the gender inequalities perpetuated in American culture. In so doing, members of the Women's Art Movement used various

avenues of artistic production and display in order to challenge the patriarchal structure of the art world and society on the whole.

When women in the arts began organizing on their own, separate from larger activist groups such as the Artists Protest Committee or the Art Workers Coalition, one of the first forms of feminist oriented arts activism tactics that they employed was protest. Women's art groups coordinated several demonstrations that specifically targeted art museums by setting up picket lines in front of their doors. For example, in 1970, the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee organized a protest at the Whitney Museum of American Art to demand that the museum include 50% women and people of color in the prominent Whitney Annual exhibition. As Bryan-Wilson notes: "Their organizing took the form of nearly four months of picketing, leafleting, the production of fake tickets, forged press announcements, and a guerilla installation in which they left eggs and unused menstrual pads saying '50%' around the museum during the opening."¹¹¹ That same year a group of women in Los Angeles "organized to protest the 'Art and Technology' show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which opened without a single woman artist in it."¹¹² Participants in this protest formed the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, who "pressured the museum to show women's work, and served as a networking agency: its members came out of isolation to share stories of discrimination. Their testimonies were collected by the council,

¹¹¹ Ibid. 160.

¹¹² Mary D. Garrard, "Feminist Politics: Networks and Organizations," in *The Power of Feminist Art : The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude, Mary D. Garrard, and Judith K. Brodsky (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994). 91.

turned into statistics, and made the basis for political demands.”¹¹³ These demands circulated in a letter dated June 15, 1971, that, explicitly and clearly laid out ways in which the museum could “alter certain procedures to allow more exhibitions, purchase awards, and new talent scholarships for women,” and included a clear indication that the members of the LACWA were willing to sue the museum for civil rights violations if their pleas were ignored.¹¹⁴

The protests of the Ad-Hoc Women Artists’ Committee and LAWCA employed tactics used by both arts activist organizations, like the AWC, and those employed by mainstream feminist groups. The production of fake tickets during the Whitney Protest, for example, recalled Joseph Kosuth’s contributions to the Art Strike of 1970, wherein the artist produced and circulated forged museum passes to members of the Art Worker’s Coalition. Similarly, the LACWA’s list of demands for museums in Los Angeles were not altogether dissimilar from those circulated by the Art Worker’s Coalition following Takis’ action in 1969. Moreover, the members of the Women’s Art Movement employed the tactics used in other feminist protests to garner media attention, including performative displays during their pickets, which paralleled the spectacle that radical feminists created in Atlantic City, and the use of clear, legible signs aimed at getting the message across quickly and to a broad audience, like those carried during liberal feminist protests including the Women’s Strike for Equality

¹¹³ Ibid. 91.

¹¹⁴ Los Angeles Council of Women Artists, "Los Angeles Council of Women Artists Report, June 15, 1971," in *Lawrence Alloway Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, <http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/i143/>, 1971). n.p.

In addition to creating spectacle in the form of picket lines, feminist art groups, like Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) and later Women In the Arts (WIA) also worked to garner attention to women's iniquitous treatment both within and beyond the art world in the form of feminist-oriented exhibitions. Frustrated with the lack of inclusion of women within major museum shows, members of the Women's Art Movement began organizing their own exhibitions, aimed at challenging the pervasive preference of male artists by major museums. They frequently held these shows at smaller, independent or alternative galleries; museums outside of New York and Los Angeles; and on college campuses. For example, the exhibition "X to the 12th Power," which was hosted by WAR, included the work of twelve women artists who "issued a statement objecting to the sexist oppression of the art world." was held at Museum, an alternative gallery in New York that had a reputation of being friendly to art activism.

¹¹⁵ Alternative art spaces and independent or university-run galleries became central to the Women's Art Movement as these spaces frequently afforded women the opportunities to show their work in both solo and group shows at a time when major institutions continued to overlook women's artistic production.

Many women in the arts viewed these exhibitions as forms of political activism in their own right. As Lucy Lippard wrote of the show she curated at the Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield, CT in 1971, entitled "Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists":

¹¹⁵ Judith K. Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces," in *The Power of Feminist Art : The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude, Mary D. Garrard, and Judith K. Brodsky (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994). 106.

I took on this show because I knew there were many women artists whose work was as good or better than that currently being shown, but who, because of the prevailingly discriminatory policies of most galleries and museums, can rarely get anyone to visit their studios or take them as seriously as their male counterparts. [...] The restriction to women's art has its obviously polemic source, but as a framework within which to exhibit good art it is no more restrictive than, say, exhibitions of German, Cubist, Black and white, soft, young or new art.¹¹⁶

For Lippard, exhibitions of this nature were forms of feminist activism in that they created an opportunity to prove that work by women was just as deserving of critical and curatorial attention. Lippard continued to curate several more shows of women artists and, in an effort to create more opportunities for women artists, Lippard helped to organize a slide registry of women artists and their work, to provide examples of the work of women artists to museums and galleries alike.

The success of these smaller museum and gallery shows and the effectiveness of previous artists' protests led several members of the women's art movement to demand that women artists be given their own show at a major museum. According to Cindy Nesmer:

In the fall of 1971, instead of waiting to be offered an exhibition, a coalition of women artists' groups approached the Brooklyn Museum to demand a major women's show. Turned down but undaunted, they attended the Open Hearing at the Brooklyn Museum, organized by Patricia Mainardi, to listen to artists, critics, and curators address themselves to the question of whether museums were relevant to women artists. For the first time a consciousness raising session took the form of a public event.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976). 38.

¹¹⁷ Cindy Nesmer, "The Women Artists' Movement," *Art Education* 28, no. 7 (November 1975). 21.

This action was the impetus for the New York-based organization Women in the Arts (WIA) to circulate a letter to “six New York Museums demanding an exhibition of approximately 500 women artists to be entitled Women Choose Women and to be selected by the group itself.”¹¹⁸ The letter was accompanied by a picket line at MoMA in April 1972, and, eventually, a location was secured for the show by Mario Amaya of the New York Cultural Center.

Although a number of concessions and compromises had been made in the negotiation process, “Women Choose Women” was successful at garnering attention for women’s contributions to the arts. As New York Times art critic Grace Glueck wrote in December 1972: “It’s not quite the super colossal, citywide show envisioned last spring when women artists demonstrated at MOMA, demanding a simultaneous exhibition at our six major art museums. But ‘Women Choose Women,’ opening January 11 at just one museum, the New York Cultural Center on Columbus Circle, will do for starters.”¹¹⁹ Although the organizers had initially wished for 500 women artists to be included, the exhibition ended up presenting the work of 109 women artists. Even with this largely reduced number, “Women Choose Women” was “The largest major museum show in New York to focus entirely on the work of women” to date, and the mission of its organizers was palpably felt by visitors.¹²⁰ Many critics, including Glueck and Rosalyn Drexler both of the *New York Times* praised the show for compellingly presenting the issues surrounding women’s lack of representation

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 21.

¹¹⁹ Grace Glueck, "Pinks and Pastels and Parabolas," *New York Times* December 10 1972. n.p.

¹²⁰ Ibid. n.p.

and success — both in terms of commercial sales and in career advancement — and highlighting the profound body of work created by contemporary women artists. In her review of the show, Drexler lauds the show for demonstrating that “women have been working nevertheless, and the question ‘Where are the women artists?’ is at last answered. They are everywhere; they are together and they have come out.”¹²¹ The show made clear to viewers inclined towards feminism and those who were dismissive of it that women were quite capable of making meaningful and significant works of art by highlighting a large swath of women’s recent artistic production.

In addition to demonstrating the breadth and variety of women’s art practices at the time, “Women Choose Women” was a successful illustration of the power of collaboration as a tool for social change. As Nesmer notes: “[the show] demonstrated that women artists working together can gain entry into the male establishment and alter its structure even as they create alternate power structures of their own. *Women Choose Women* [...] has proved, conclusively, that women artists united are a force that the male art world can no longer ignore.”¹²² While the show lacked a cohesive direction with regard to media or subject matter, the collective ethos of women artists collaborating together to create such as show served as a clear unifying factor within the exhibition’s curation. This unification both demonstrated to the art establishment the power of women artists as a collective entity and provided women with the impetus to collaborate further, a strategy that was essential to the establishment of

¹²¹ Rosalyn Drexler, "Women on Their Own," *New York Times*, January 28 1973. n.p.

¹²² Nesmer, "The Women Artists' Movement." 21.

alternative institutions and feminist educational tactics employed by members of the Women's Art Movement throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.

A Space of Their Own: Alternative, Women's Art Institutions

The establishment of separate, feminist oriented art spaces, publications, and programs is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the Women's Art Movement. Like the mainstream Women's Liberation Movement, that had established feminist journals and presses in order to more widely produce and circulate their own publications, women in the arts established feminist galleries, art programs, women's art periodicals and other forms of institutionalized support. Recognizing that more than advocacy and protests were necessary to get women up to parity within the masculinist art climate that had taken hold during the postwar period, members of the Women's Art Movement took matters into their own hands.

In New York City, feminist oriented arts organizations focused primarily on establishing gallery spaces for women and creating opportunities for women to show their work. In 1970, a group of women who had participated in WAR established the Women's Interart Center, "the first alternative feminist space, [which] provided a succession of exhibitions of work by women artists throughout the 1970s."¹²³ While the Women's Interart Center offered women a space to show their work, it did not offer them the visibility and marketability of gallery representation. In 1972, however, the Artists In Residence (A.I.R.) gallery opened (Appendix: Figure 8), filling the niche for a women- oriented art gallery in the New York art market. According to Judith

¹²³ Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces." 106.

Brodsky, “The planning for the establishment of A.I.R. began in 1971 when the sculptor Barbara Zucker and the painter Susan Williams, who had met in a women’s consciousness-raising group, a couple of years earlier, decided to start a gallery.”¹²⁴ The two women reached out to several friends and colleagues, and with the help of Lucy Lippard, “viewed slides of some six hundred women artists and visited fifty-five studios in their search.”¹²⁵ When A.I.R. opened in 1972, the gallery represented 20 women artists, with varying degrees of career success and with different practices, although all primarily worked in more traditional media — specifically painting or sculpture — at the time of their acceptance, although many, like Mary Beth Edelson and Howardena Pindell, eventually integrated other forms such as performance and video art into their practices.

In addition to focusing on women’s art practices, A.I.R. gallery employed feminist tactics in its administration as well. Like other feminist organizations of the day, A.I.R. gallery employed a non-hierarchical approach to the division of labor; the gallery was run as a co-operative and all members were required to pay dues as well as work a set number of hours in the gallery or contribute money to hire someone else to work their allotment.¹²⁶ The labor involved ranged from helping with the building renovation to sitting in the gallery during open hours. Moreover, the broader administrative duties of the gallery — including securing grant funding, handling legal

¹²⁴ Ibid. 108.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 108.

¹²⁶ A.I.R. Gallery, "A.I.R. Gallery Member Letter, June 20, 1972," in *A.I.R. Gallery Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 184, Series I, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 21, 1972). n.p.

issues, publicizing gallery events, coordinating programming, and maintaining the building — were carried out by committees of four or five women.¹²⁷ The sharing of duties among the members of A.I.R. gallery was so central to the women involved, that in their early years, they frequently rejected the membership of women for whom travel would prohibit this kind of participation, and even discussed revoking the membership of women who were neglected their duties with regularity.¹²⁸

In exchange for their contributions, artists who belonged to the A.I.R. gallery had a number of resources at their disposal in order to help facilitate their participation in shows not only at the gallery but elsewhere. They regularly circulated calls for submissions from other galleries to their membership and were frequently approached by curators, artists, and instructors from high schools and universities interested in showing the work of women artists.¹²⁹ Members of the gallery regularly participated in solo and group shows, which rotated regularly so that each artist showed her work in a solo show approximately once every two years.¹³⁰ The gallery helped to circulate and publicize the shows of each artist, and provided clear guidelines for how to maximize the visibility of each exhibition, and they were clearly quite successful in doing so. As Brodsky notes: “All of the exhibitions mounted during the first year were reviewed in

¹²⁷ Daria Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, and Maude Boltz, "A.I.R. Gallery Member Letter, November 26, 1972," *ibid.* n.p.

¹²⁸ The issue of gallery work negligence was raised in multiple letters between members and Susan Williams between 1972 and 1974. "Internal Correspondences," *ibid.* (1972-5). n.p.

¹²⁹ Many of these interactions are documented in A.I.R. Gallery, "Log Book," *ibid.* (Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 184, Series I, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 59). n.p.

¹³⁰ "Who We Are and What We Do," in *A.I.R. Gallery Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 184, Series I, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 62, 1984). n.p.

the weekly newspapers and the monthly art magazines.”¹³¹ In addition to helping the career of somewhat established women, A.I.R. also provided an apprenticeship program for younger, college-aged women who wanted to pursue careers in the arts. A.I.R. therefore became a useful resource to women artists in New York by providing them access to both gallery space and the critical and media attention that could help to further develop the careers of many women artists.

A.I.R. was extremely influential for artists in New York and elsewhere. In addition to showing the work of the gallery members, they regularly hosted exhibitions of women artists from all over the United States and the world. In 1973, A.I.R. hosted the exhibition “Women Artists from Washington, D.C.” and the interest in non-New York based art practices continued to grow. By the end of the decade, A.I.R. began offering 10 affiliate memberships to women from other parts of the country, providing them an opportunity to show their work in an annual affiliates show at the gallery in SoHo.¹³² A.I.R. also helped women artists establish their own co-operative galleries in other places. According to the gallery’s administrative records: “In the latter part of May 1973, several members of A.I.R. Gallery consulted and advised a number of women forming a gallery in Chicago.”¹³³ The A.I.R. members provided insights on legal issues such as incorporation, how to structure the cooperative aspects of the gallery like membership and committees, and advice on

¹³¹ Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces." 108.

¹³² For more information see: A.I.R. Gallery, "Administrative Records," in *A.I.R. Gallery Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 184, Series I, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 62). n.p.

¹³³ "Administrative Records- Gallery Announcements," in *A.I.R. Gallery Archives* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, MSS 184, Series I, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 54). n.p.

exhibition planning and gallery programming. The gallery named itself “A.R.C. (Artists in Residence of Chicago)” drawing inspiration from its New York City counterpart.¹³⁴ In the subsequent years, other co-operative women’s only galleries emerged all over the country including SoHo 20 in New York City; Artemisia in Chicago; FOCUS in Philadelphia; Hera in Wakefield, Rhode Island; and Front Range in Denver, Colorado.¹³⁵

Instead of capitalizing on the resources afforded to women artists within the gallery system, members of the Women’s Art Movement in California developed feminist art institutions within educational venues, including the university system. Because the artistic community in California was more intertwined with the university system, which in addition to supplying artists with a steady income, also provided spaces for artistic experimentation in new media including performance, conceptual art, and light and space/finish fetish practices. As Peter Frank argues:

The presence of art on college, even community college, campuses [...] continued to burgeon, as did the prominence of art schools. The generation of artists supported in their education by the G.I. Bill had become the teachers for a younger, even more sophisticated generation, one that critically refracted what they learned into attenuated variations on their professor’s styles and attitudes. This is how, for instance, the Finish Fetish and Light and Space practices that promulgated at such places as the University of California, Irvine, and California State University, Northridge, could result in the superficially different but similarly sensorial/perceptual experiments of ‘material abstraction’; how the ‘orthodox’ Conceptualists and mono gestural Fluxus and Fluxus- adjacent artists at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)

¹³⁴ Ibid. n.p.

¹³⁵ Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces." 109-113.

In Valencia and the University of California, San Diego, could breed a flock of expansive, narrative-oriented performance artists.¹³⁶

Within the university system, artists were given more opportunity to develop their own practices, one that reflected individual interest and conceptual frameworks, and one that continued to expand the definition of art and the artist.

Given the experimental climate of these institutions, schools within the California system were to some degree amenable to experiments in socially engaged art practices, including feminist art. As a result Judy Chicago founded the very first “Feminist Art Program” at California State College, Fresno in California’s Central Valley in 1970. Drawing from her own experiences in art school, her time teaching at the UCLA extension after graduate school, and her own engagement with the New Left and feminist movements, Chicago decided to establish a women-only course at Fresno State. She writes: “I had convinced the department chair that this was a good idea by saying that I needed to work intensively with the students. I pointed out the discrepancy between the large number of women in undergraduate art classes and the paucity of their representation in professional art practice.”¹³⁷ The Feminist Art Program flourished at Fresno State and, in 1971, Chicago was invited to CalArts to help Miriam Schapiro establish a similar program in Los Angeles. Chicago petitioned for the students who had participated in the program at Fresno State to be allowed to

¹³⁶ Peter Frank, "Plural Isms: California Art and Artists of the Mid- to Late 1970s," in *Under the Big Black Sun : California Art 1974-1981*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark, et al. (Los Angeles Munich ; New York: The Museum of Contemporary Art ; DelMonico Books, Prestel, 2011). 23.

¹³⁷ Judy Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education* (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2014). 19-21.

continue at CalArts, and many women from the class made the migration South alongside their professor.¹³⁸

The Feminist Art Program continued to grow at CalArts, although Chicago left the program shortly thereafter to pursue other avenues of feminist education, namely, the Los Angeles Woman's Building (Appendix: Figure 9), which she co-founded with art historian Arlene Raven and designer Shelia Levrant de Bretteville in 1973. When the three women decided establish the Los Angeles Woman's Building, their mission was to create "a public center for women's culture with art galleries, classrooms, workshops, performance spaces, bookstore, travel agency, and a café — all dedicated to women's culture."¹³⁹ They wanted to create a space that could seamlessly integrate women's art with the broader feminist activism of the time. As Terry Wolverton writes: "Central to the founders' vision was the notion that the arts should not be separated from other activities of the burgeoning women's community, and the three looked for a space that could be shared with other organizations and enterprises."¹⁴⁰ As such, the Los Angeles Woman's building became a community center that offered a wide range of resources to women, from classes on women's spirituality to workshops on managing finances.

Among the many programs under its auspices, the Woman's Building is perhaps best known for its engagement with feminist art. The Woman's Building

¹³⁸ See Letter to CalArts Admissions Committee in *Judy Chicago Papers*.

¹³⁹ Meg Linton and Sue Maberry, eds., *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building* (Los Angeles, CA: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 11.

¹⁴⁰ Terry Wolverton, "Introduction," in *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (Los Angeles, CA: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 23.

housed a number of feminist art entities, most notably the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW), which began as an independent series of courses and eventually became an accredited, degree-granting program. According to Terry Wolverton: “The FSW focused not only on the development of art-making skills (in visual arts, writing, performance art, video, design, and the printing arts), but also on the development of women’s identities and sensibilities, and feminist practices of art-making, and the translation of these elements into their art.”¹⁴¹ In addition to the FSW, the Los Angeles Woman’s Building was home to “The Center for Feminist Art Historical Studies (Raven and Ruth Iskin); the Women’s Graphic Center (de Bretteville); Womanspace, which moved from its original location in an old laundromat; Gallery 707; Sisterhood Bookstore; Associated Women’s Press; the Los Angeles Feminist Theatre; Women’s Improvisation; and Grandview I and II, like Womanspace, also women artists’ galleries.”¹⁴² As such, the Woman’s Building was home and host to a wide range of feminist art organizations and institutions, providing resources not only for women to expand their practices through educational opportunities, but to also further develop their careers through presenting and displaying their work.

In addition to establishing alternative art spaces, many members of the Women’s Art Movement also established and circulated a wide variety of publications to promote these exhibitions. Between 1971 and 1980, at least seven distinct periodicals were founded across the country, varying in scope and focus, all of which

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 23.

¹⁴² Brodsky, "Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces." 109.

focused exclusively on the subject of women in the arts.¹⁴³ Just as in the broader Women's Liberation Movement, feminist art publications ranged in scope from newsletters — such as the *Women Artists Newsletter* which was founded in 1975 — and magazines — like *Heresies* and *Chrysalis*, founded in 1975 and 1977 — to academic publications, such as *The Feminist Art Journal* and *Woman's Art Journal*, established in 1972 and 1980 respectively.¹⁴⁴ Despite the differences, each of these publications served to foster dialogue about women's participation in the arts. The *Women Artists Newsletter*, for example, included not only reviews of women artists' shows and a long and detailed section announcing upcoming feminist art events, but also frequently included discussions of the challenges faced by women in the arts.

Feminist scholars in the arts also created opportunities to discuss their ongoing work both in separate, women only conferences and at larger scholarly venues, specifically the College Art Association. In January 1972 Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, the directors of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, hosted the “West Coast Women Artists' Conference” in Los Angeles. The aim of the conference was to engender cooperation, collaboration, and coordination between women in the arts in order to help foster support for each other's work and to help collectively advance the status of women in the arts. Miriam Schapiro pleaded in her opening remarks for women artists “to come out of our dining room workshops, our bedroom and kitchen studios,” and citing her own experience along with others such as Joan Mitchell and

¹⁴³ For more information see: Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," *ibid.* 123.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 120-129.

Helen Frankenthaler entering the “male art world” individually as women, sharing collegiality with each other, all the while fighting each other for the measly scraps allotted to women artists, never reaching a legitimate seat at the table themselves.¹⁴⁵

The conference brought together artists and art historians from all over the Southwest and West Coast, and offered them an opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions about feminist art history, consciousness-raising (as pedagogy), mounting feminist exhibitions, and the women’s current work. As Mary Gerrard notes: “Networking of this kind continued throughout the seventies and beyond, through personal exchanges and through the prominent women in the movement [...] who crisscrossed the country to speak on college campuses and to women’s groups, bringing news and spreading ideas.”¹⁴⁶

In addition to coordinating stand-alone women’s art conferences, members of the Women’s Art Movement also sought to have their issues presented in larger, institutionalized venues, specifically the College Art Association (CAA) annual conference. A week after the West Coast Women’s Art Conference, “the Women’s Caucus for Art (WCA) was created on January 28, 1972, at the San Francisco convention of the College Art Association.”¹⁴⁷ Mary Garrard describes the event, stating: “The women from CalArts — Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and art historian Paula Harper — helped to wrest a meeting space from a bemused College Art Association. Thanks to groundwork laid by art historian Ann Sutherland Harris,

¹⁴⁵ Alexis Radael Krasilovsky, "West Coast Women Artists' Conference" (paper presented at the West Coast Women Artists Conference, Los Angeles, CA, 1972). n.p.

¹⁴⁶ Garrard, "Feminist Politics: Networks and Organizations." 92.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 93.

the meeting drew an overflow crowd.”¹⁴⁸ Just as had been the case at the West Coast Women Artists’ Conference a week prior, the first meeting of the Women’s Caucus for Art facilitated collaboration and networking between women working in various fields within the arts. Garrard notes: “Women artists met art historians and museum women; the traditional subdisciplinary boundaries between these groups dissolved in the heat of their new common energy.”¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the discussions that occurred at this meeting helped to further the momentum of the Women’s Art Movement, functioning to raise the consciousness of women from all over the country, who in sharing their stories of the sexism and discrimination they experienced within the professional art world “found they were not alone.”¹⁵⁰

As previously noted, feminist art educational institutions, like the FSW or the Feminist Art Program were developed to help foster the careers of the next generation of women artists. By providing spaces for exploration and critical feedback in a separate, woman-friendly environment, these programs were able to create educational opportunities for women artists that were not overrun with masculinist and sexist tendencies, free from a great deal of the discrimination that had until then prohibited a great number of women from pursuing careers of their own in the arts. In addition to helping more women develop their art practices, feminist art education also helped women in the arts to understand the ways in which misogyny and sexism permeated

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 93.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 93.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 93.

American culture and the art world, and to establish a clear sense of themselves as women and the impact that identity has on their art practice.

“The Personal is Political:” Feminist Consciousness in Women’s Art Practices

In addition to bringing women artists together in order to advocate for better treatment and more career opportunities within their industry, the integration of feminism and art during the 1960s and 1970s also led women to use their own art practices as a means to advocate for gender equality. Whereas the movement unified disparate individuals in service of a collective goal, many women artists employed the tenet of consciousness-raising that “the personal is political” and drew from experiences with sexism and gender inequality both personally and systematically in the creation of their art practice. These works, in turn, functioned as a means of further consciousness-raising; just as the anecdotes of women in C-R groups, or the passages of feminist texts like those of Robin Morgan, Shulamith Firestone, or Adrienne Rich provided opportunities for women to experience “the click,” so too did these works of art function to draw attention to the pervasive and structural nature of sexism within American culture.

During the 1960s and 1970s, women artists developed a myriad of strategies for examining feminist issues within their work, either explicitly or implicitly. For example, women artists like Mary Beth Edelson created artworks aimed at explicitly calling attention to the iniquitous treatment of women in the art world, such as in her collage *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* (Appendix: Figure 10), in which she replaced the figures of Christ and the Apostles in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*

with images of women artists. Other women artists have used their practices to protest the pervasive misogyny and “rape culture” that has continued to promulgate violence against women, like the performance *In Mourning and In Rage* by the collective ARIADNE: A Social Art Network, in which a group of ten tall, veiled women emerged from a hearse parked in front of Los Angeles’ city hall. The performers gathered on the steps of city hall where, in front of a slew of news cameras and reporters, each woman recounted an incident of violence against women, in front of banners reading “In Memory of Our Sisters Women Fight Back,” a phrase that was chanted after each woman’s proclamation. In both of these cases, the engagement with feminist activism is clear; Edelson’s collage was created as a poster, intended for circulation like other feminist printed materials and clearly references women’s history as a form of feminist education, while ARIADNE’s actions employed the same performative protest tactics as practiced by New York Radical women and those of the Women’s Art Movement, creating a spectacle to garner media attention for feminist causes.

For other artists during this period, the engagement with feminist issues and the examination of gender in their work was more implicit and nuanced. For example, artists like Harmony Hammond examine issues of femininity and womanhood within explicitly minimalist sculptural practices (Appendix: Figure 11). Julia Bryan-Wilson notes: “[Hammond’s] *Floorpieces* are most often retrospectively understood as in dialogue with other 1960s and 1970s floor-based artworks, such as [...] the metal sculptures of Carl Andre. Much has been made of the differences between Hammond

and Andre in particular, in language that is [...] gendered: circular versus square; soft, warm fabric versus hard, cold metal; [...] and handcrafted domestic surfaces versus found industrial material.”¹⁵¹ Through the materiality, the engagement with the craft tradition, and the formal qualities of these pieces, Hammond imbued her sculptures with an investigation of gender and womanhood. Although her work does not as explicitly call into question the iniquitous treatment of women artists as Edelson’s collage, Hammond’s sculptures engage with the traditions in which women artists have worked for millennia, engaging with the discourse of craft and the domestic in service of creating her sculptures.

Regardless of the degree to which gender is addressed either explicitly or implicitly in these works, many women in the 1960s and 1970s sought to use their art as a form of feminist activism. Be they members of women’s art organizations — like WAR, WIA, A.I.R. or the Woman’s Building — or artists working independently, these artists used their work to investigate the conceptions and constraints of womanhood in America, and presented the results of these examinations to a public audience for consideration. Feminist art as a category, therefore, is highly variable and reflects the pluralistic ways in which feminism exists in culture in a particular moment. Because multiple feminisms do co-exist within a given moment, the feminist actions of one individual can — and frequently do — differ from those of another. An individual woman can be affiliated with multiple feminist groups simultaneously or she may be affiliated with none, and as such her actions and activism reflect that

¹⁵¹ Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Queerly Made: Harmony Hammond's *Floorpieces*," *The Journal of Modern Craft* 2, no. 1 (March 2009). 61.

intermingling of those affiliations. Different women, also, may have particular feminist issues that resonate more deeply with them based off personal experience; certain women may feel more passionately about women's access to reproductive health measures while others focus more on ending violence against women. Moreover, intersectional criteria such as race, class, sexuality, and age also have a profound impact on how different women experience and express their investment with feminism as an ideological and political entity. Considering the variety of women's experiences with feminism, when studying the history of feminist art, it is important to recognize that feminism is not a monolithic entity, and that different artists employ their idiosyncratic perspectives and experiences in creating art works aimed at addressing the social constructions of gender. Moreover, the ways in which these investigations into the form and function of gender ideology are manifest in art practices are highly variable.

Conclusions: Out of the Kitchen and Into the Studio

The status of women in the arts underwent several dramatic transformations over the course of the middle decades of the 20th century. From the rise of neo-domesticity in the early postwar period that served to undercut initial independence, financial success, and acclaim that women artists received as a result of the gender-blind policies of the WPA and Federal Arts Programs of the 1930s and 1940s, to the emergence of feminist-oriented women's art institutions and the collective actions of the Women's Art Movement, the place of women artists in America shifted drastically, as did the rhetoric. Where domesticity and hegemonic femininity had

previously been read into the work of women artists as a means to devalue their artistic contributions, by the end of the 1970s, the inclusion of explicit references and investigations into the cultural construct of womanhood by burgeoning women artists was often praised by curators and encouraged by their instructors, frequently women themselves. The rise of the “Second Wave” of feminism and the Women’s Art Movement during this period to both highlight the structural and systematic ways in which women experience gender-based discrimination in the art world and American society on the whole and to provide opportunities, resources, and advocacy for change, resulting in greater career opportunities for women artists.

These transformations helped to take women artists out of the domestic spaces — the living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens in which they frequently made their work — and bring them into the studios, the galleries, and museums in which their male counterparts flourished. The Women’s Art Movement (and the broader arts activism efforts of the period), along with the emergence of experimental forms of art practices, the rapid expansion of arts educational opportunities helped to foster opportunities for women to pursue and succeed in careers in the arts. Moreover, this progress also reflects the shifts in American politics and the changing conception of gender that occurred as a result of the activism of women in the “Women’s Liberation Movement.” While the rhetoric of Cold War domesticity had pushed women artists back into the kitchen, the Women’s Art Movement provided them with a studio of their own, and with that space, they created art aimed at raising public consciousness and advocating for social change.

Chapter 2: Cooking

Throughout much of history and across most societies, cooking has constituted a form of women's work. Women have been responsible for the preparation of food for the family in all societies, ranging from Paleolithic hunter-gatherers to contemporary capitalist republics. This clear affiliation has led to the "naturalization" of the act as something intrinsically feminine. As Laura Shapiro notes, this association is "so deeply rooted that over the centuries it has turned cooking into something tantamount to a sex-linked characteristic, less definitive than pregnancy but often just as cumbersome to deflect."¹⁵² Shapiro ties this notion to a biological imperative, stating "Women have the babies, women feed the babies, women feed everyone else while their at it; hence, women cook."¹⁵³ Yet, despite the apparent innate nature of the relationship between cooking and womanhood, the affiliation between the two is far more complicated and complex than the simple logic that women are naturally inclined to feed and thus to cook.

In many ways, the affiliation between cooking and femininity is the result of the same social process that delineates the distinction between subsistence upon found items and the act of preparing and transforming ingredients into a complete, cooked dish. As Claude Levi-Strauss notes, the difference between the raw and the cooked is indeed the difference between the natural and cultural activities of human beings.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004). XV.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* XV.

¹⁵⁴ In his work *The Raw and the Cook*, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss uses the idea of cooking as the symbol of cultural practices, drawing the distinction between those aspects of human life which are

As such, while it is true that women in all societies have been responsible for food preparation in some capacity, it is a gross oversimplification to assert that women have any natural inclination to do so. Women are by no means the only individuals capable of cooking; one need look no further than the realm of professional cooking, which still today is extremely male dominated, to note that there is nothing intrinsically feminine about cooking. Moreover, when men do engage in the practice of cooking, either professionally or domestically, it is seldom seen as performing a particularly feminized action.

Yet, while men can and do cook, the practice — particularly within the domestic context — is deeply rooted in the ideology of womanhood. Careful examination of the history of cooking and its delineation as feminized work reveals the complicated impact of capitalism on domestic labor, highlighting the difference between waged and unwaged labor, while simultaneously illustrating the complicated discursive tactics employed to entice women to continue the tradition of unpaid work. Thus, by examining the ways in which the discourse surrounding cooking has changed, we can understand the ways in which femininity has been encoded into this form of work and highlight how the arbitrary nature of this aspect of the gendered division of labor.

It is precisely this impetus — to explore the significance of cooking as a daily practice, and the gendered implications thereof — that is at the heart of the practices

the result solely of nature — which he has dubbed the “raw” — and those practices that are encoded in mythology and symbolism, which he calls the “cooked.” For more information see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, Introduction to a Science of Mythology / Claude Lévi-Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

of two women artists in the 1960s and 1970s: Alison Knowles and Martha Rosler. Common to many of their works during this period — and continuing to the present day — is a vested interest in the ways in the form and function of food within (American) culture, with regard to social roles, class positioning, and the acts of preparation and consumption. Both Knowles and Rosler engage with aspects of food preparation in their work in a way that explicitly calls to question the gendered signification of the act of cooking.

In *Make a Salad* (Appendix: Figure 12) and *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (Appendix: Figure 13), Alison Knowles and Martha Rosler, respectively, draw on the contemporary discourse surrounding the act of cooking in order to unsettle the implicit assumptions of the task as implicitly feminine and feminized. Alison Knowles decontextualizes the act of cooking from the domestic realm in *Make a Salad*, and in so doing creates a precondition of heightened attention and provides an analytical lens through which the audience can examine the role and function of cooking in daily life, including the gendered significance thereof. Similarly, Martha Rosler calls attention to the feminization of cooking as a task in the creation of her cooking-show parody, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, wherein she performs a series of absurdist gestures with a variety of cooking implements, thereby illustrating the arbitrary and genderless nature of the actions involved in the cooking process. As such, both artists take up the subject of cooking in their works in order to critique the performance of this action within the politics of domesticity in the everyday. In so doing, these works engaged with the challenges raised by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s against the presumptive

gendering of housework that occurred as a result of the neo-domestic rhetoric that emerged during the early years of the Cold War. Knowles and Rosler's works, as such, each function as forms of consciousness-raising in their own right, by illustrating the ways in which the assumptions about gendered labor are perpetuated through the practice of daily life and the process of linguistic signification.

Food, Daily Life, and the Semiotic Process

In their art practices, Alison Knowles and Martha Rosler have both, consistently, demonstrated a particular interest in the politics and practice of daily life as manifest in the form of food culture. For both artists, the various aspects of food as both a substrate and a practical element of daily life, have appeared in their work for decades and in myriad iterations. Moreover, both artists have demonstrated a vested interest in not only including food in their work, but also examining the linguistic and social signification of the use thereof in daily life. As such, taken on the whole, both Knowles' and Rosler's practices form critical investigations into the social and ideological significance of American food culture.

Alison Knowles began her work with food in 1962 when she performed her piece *#2 Proposition*, a score that comprised the simple instructions "Make a Salad," at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London.¹⁵⁵ Two years later, she created a variation to this work, entitled *#2A Variation on #1*, the score for which simply

¹⁵⁵ Over the years, the work has been titled many things, all variations on "*#2 Proposition: Make a Salad.*" For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the piece from this point on as *Make A Salad.*

reads: “Make a Soup.”¹⁵⁶ At the same time as Knowles was engaging with the process of food preparation in her event scores, she also began including food as a material component of some of her object-based works. In 1963, Knowles began using beans “in the form of a Fluxus multiple called *The Bean Rolls* [...] [which] consisted of a found tea tin containing fourteen tiny paper scrolls with text describing all manner of detail about beans,”¹⁵⁷ as well as numerous uncooked, dried beans (Appendix: Figure 14). While Knowles eventually abandoned her material examination of beans, she continued to explore their linguistic and cultural significance for several decades in works such as her sculptural installation *The Book of the Bean* (1982) (Appendix: Figure 15), her literary account entitled *A Bean Concordance* (1983) and her audio-recording consisting of spoken-word pieces, *Frijoles Canyon* (1992).

Knowles' interest in food extended beyond preparation and display and also took the form of consumption in the form of her work *The Identical Lunch* (Appendix: Figure 16), a work that was predicated on the translation of Knowles' actual lived experience into the artistic domain. As Hannah Higgins notes: “Beginning in 1967, Alison Knowles began each day to eat the same lunch — a tuna fish sandwich on whole wheat toast with butter, no mayo, and a cup of buttermilk or the soup of the day — at the same time and location, Riss Foods Diner in Chelsea.”¹⁵⁸ Knowles' consumptive patterns were thus transformed into an art work when her then studio-

¹⁵⁶ Jerome Rothenberg, "Alison Knowles: 17 Event Scores & Where They Happened " Penn Sound, Kelly Writers House, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, <http://jacket2.org/commentary/alison-knowles-17-event-scores-where-they-happened>.

¹⁵⁷ Julia Robinson, "The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations," *Art Journal* 63, no. 4 (Winter 2004).

¹⁵⁸ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 47.

mate and fellow Fluxus artist, Philip Corner “suggested the meditation could be explored as an artwork, which it was, resulting in a graphic and a book, *Journal of the Identical Lunch*.”¹⁵⁹ What began as an unconscious ritual thus became a “self-conscious reflection on an everyday activity.”¹⁶⁰

Knowles’ consistent examination of food and food culture throughout much of her body of work, moreover, demonstrates a clear interest towards meditating and ruminating on the various gestures and actions that comprise daily life. For example, in *The Identical Lunch*, Knowles examines the significance of daily activities by rendering them performative. Once Philip Corner called attention to the fact that Knowles was performing the same gesture every day without realizing it, Knowles began to attend to the process and make it conscious. By providing the activity with a score and opening it up to variations due to chance, she rendered what had been an insignificant gesture significant, and brought a meditative contemplation to the practice of daily life.

Knowles’ interest in the significance of the everyday extends beyond the performance of the gesture; consistently throughout her work she engages with the linguistic process of semiosis in order to critically examine the meaning of everyday activities and objects. For instance, in *Bean Rolls*, Knowles compiled a number of “tiny paper scrolls” which she placed in an old tea tin along with a number of dried beans. The rolls contained “text describing all manner of detail about beans —

¹⁵⁹ "Love's Labor's Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else " *Art Journal* 69, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 2010). 15.

¹⁶⁰ *Fluxus Experience*. 48.

including people named Bean, proverbs and stories about beans, bean recipes and ads for L.L. Bean.”¹⁶¹ In so doing, Knowles created a contemplative object aimed at highlighting the linguistic significance of a mundane and everyday object. As Julia Robinson notes: “This multifaceted representation of the bean — drawn from card files at the New York Public Library — is given as a kind of open research: one initiated in the process of the work’s conception that the invites the person contemplating the piece to pursue.”¹⁶² Knowles’ composition, therefore, opens up the semiotic process to the viewer, providing him or her with samples of sign, signifier, and signified for thoughtful analysis and observation. Thus, while she had initially chosen beans to work with because of their practicality as a substrate because of their commonplace nature, the resulting product of her *Bean Rolls* is an intense meditation on the various affiliations tied to such an innocuous legume.

This interest in the examination of the significance of food in daily life can be traced all the way back to some of her earliest Fluxus performances involving food, including *Make a Salad*. As will be discussed later, Knowles uses the context of the gallery space and the heightened attention affiliated with Fluxus performance — derived from the ideology of Zen Buddhism, an interest in reconceptualizing and even deconstructing the form and function of art, and the theory of chance operations — in order to call attention to the significance and signification of a simple, repeatable, and mundane gesture as a part of daily life. In so doing, Knowles’ removal of the gesture from the domestic context and her public performance thereof serves to call attention

¹⁶¹ Robinson, "The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations." 103.

¹⁶² Ibid. 103.

to how the act of making a salad is imbued with certain connotations, which in turn function within a larger ideological system.

The significance and signification of food in daily life has also been a central theme in Martha Rosler's work over the past 40 years. Rosler uses food thematically in her work to address issues of labor, globalization, class conflict, and gender. She began her examination of food culture in the mid 1970s, primarily in the form of conceptual projects and video works made while she was a graduate student at the University of California, San Diego. In 1974, for her MFA thesis Rosler created an "event or performance" entitled *A Gourmet Experience*, in which she invited guests to attend a banquet in the UCSD University Art Gallery.¹⁶³ According to Rosler: "The walls bore enlargements of the three postcard series I had previously mailed to those invited (and many others, fictional novellas about women and food. [...] A bank of three projectors projected slides above the tables on the longest walls. Many of these images were drawn from the pages of popular cookbooks; [...] others were of a local gourmet-cooking class."¹⁶⁴ In addition to the enlarged photographs and the slide projections, Rosler included her video work *A Budding Gourmet* on a constant loop on one table while "a series of audiotaped readings from cookbooks, featuring French, English, and Chinese cuisine, substituted for the formal food courses that never appeared [...]" Thus, rather than a banquet, the invited visitors were offered a series of readings and images on the geopolitics and gender and class considerations of food

¹⁶³ Martha Rosler, April 1, 2015. n.p.

¹⁶⁴ "Installed in the Place of the Public," *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2001). 62-3.

production and consumption.”¹⁶⁵ The video and the postcard series from this initial performance continue to circulate under the title *A Budding Gourmet* (Appendix: Figure 17).

Rosler continued to examine the issues of class, gender, and geopolitics of food culture in several video works during the 1970s. In 1975, Rosler created her best-known work on the subject of food, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*; in this video Rosler parodies television cooking programs — like Julia Child’s *The French Chef* — while performing absurdist gestures aimed at undermining the familiar connotations of the implements of daily domestic cooking. Rosler returned to the cooking show format in her video *The East is Red, The West is Bending* (1977) (Appendix: Figure 18), in which she examines the rising fad of Chinese cooking in American home kitchens, commenting on the impact of globalization in the American diet and average middle-class white “women’s somewhat confused relation to foreign cooking.”¹⁶⁶ In both works, Rosler examines the cultural signification of the act of cooking, as a form of gendered labor and as it pertains to the class issues at play with rapid globalization.

Rosler’s interest in the geopolitical consequences of American culinary patterns is also present in her videos about food consumption. For example, in her 1977 video *Losing* (Appendix: Figure 19), a fictionalized documentary about a family who has lost their daughter to anorexia, Rosler extends conversation beyond the daughter’s actions and compares the self-starvation of their own daughter to that of the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 63.

¹⁶⁶ Martha Rosler and Jane Weinstock, "Interview with Martha Rosler," *October* 17, no. The New Talkies (Summer 1981). 78.

millions of people living in poverty in the developing world.¹⁶⁷ As such the documentary of *Losing* serves to highlight the stark contrast in food politics with regard to the conditions of paucity and plenty, while also highlighting the complicated and problematic relationship between food, class, biology, and gender.

The paradox of American plentitude is also at issue in Rosler's three-channel video installation *Global Taste: A Meal in Three Courses* (1985) (Appendix: Figure 20). Installed in a "painted shed [that] has the air of a makeshift carnie (carnival) sideshow attraction," the three monitors are positioned so that the videos "cannot comfortably be viewed together (although the sounds can all be heard)."¹⁶⁸ On one screen plays a series of "ad clips featuring monumental images of food, especially fast food and candy; children and babies, talking animals, and English-speaking foreigners, all pitching a product."¹⁶⁹ The second screen focuses on "an illustrated lecture on global domination exercised primarily by the United States [...] over information flow and notably over advertising and cultural production, positioning it as the world's Imaginary."¹⁷⁰ The third screen shows "a tape of actors auditioning for roles in a singing commercial" for a soft drink.¹⁷¹ The juxtaposition of these videos thus facilitates a dialogue about the complicated and problematic nature of globalization and the conditions of gluttony and starvation that characterize the "First" and "Third" worlds, respectively.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 78, 82.

¹⁶⁸ Rosler, "Installed in the Place of the Public." 63.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 64.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 64.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 64.

Rosler explicitly engaged with both Marxist and feminist theory in her work in order to develop an art practice that centered around the ways in which elements of the everyday are laden with ideological significance, and how the signification of these entities in daily life. In some of her works, such as *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (Appendix: Figure 21) or *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, the investigation of signifiers is made explicit. In the former, the juxtaposition of text and image and the characterization of this pairing as inadequate presents the viewer with a clear apparatus through which to consider how spaces and sites function symbolically and how we attribute certain characteristics to particular places. In the latter, as we will examine further, Rosler uses the explicit reference to the linguistic theory in order to call into question the significance of the kitchen, particularly with regard to the social construction of gender.

In other works, such as the photo-collages *Body Beautiful or Beauty Knows No Pain*, this process is more implicit. For example, in the image *Cargo Cult* (Appendix: 22), Rosler places images of women applying makeup on to the sides of shipping containers, which are in the process of either being loaded onto the ship or the dock. In placing these commercial images directly onto the vessels responsible for global commerce, Rosler asks the viewer to consider the significance of these images within our culture through the de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing of these actions. Like Knowles does in her performance of *Make a Salad*, Rosler's removal of images of women applying make up from the pages of women's magazines and her placement within a foreign context — the active shipyard — serves to call attention to the oft

overlooked significance of such gestures and the symbolic system wherein they exist. She notes of this image: "I often like to show this image and say that this is an image of invisible labor because it's obvious that it's about women applying make up and about the transmission of western images, if you will, of cosmetic beauty, but it's also about the invisible work of women producing their faces."¹⁷² Had these images been placed within a domestic setting, one wherein the performance of these actions would be commonplace, they would continue to go unseen and unanalyzed.

However, the act of de-contextualization and more significantly the re-contextualization of the images of women applying make up therefore functions to challenge the significance of these actions in daily life. By removing these images from the media that promote women's adherence to a certain standard of beauty and placing them specifically in a masculinized, industrial space — like the shipyard — Rosler is thus able to call attention to the function of these images and gestures both within the context of gendered labor and within industrial capitalism. By creating a scene that seems discordant, Rosler is able to call attention to the fact that they emerge from realms that are highly gendered. The stark dichotomy between the subject of these amalgamated photographs serves to highlight the ways in which certain spaces signify either femininity or masculinity particularly through calling attention to the invisibility of labor. The act of putting on make up is considered, as she states, a part

¹⁷² "Visiting Artist Lecture Series: Martha Rosler," (La Jolla, CA: University of California, San Diego, Visual Arts Department, University Art Gallery April 22, 2013). n.p.

of women's invisible, domestic labor.¹⁷³ The shipyard, on the other hand, is a highly masculinized space. Moreover, like the act of making ones' self up, the loading and unloading of cargo ships is — although monetized — a “form of invisible labor” as well. Consumers seldom acknowledge or even consider the effort required to move goods from production site to marketplace. As such, the juxtaposition of images depicting these two, disparate and gendered spaces calls into question the ways in which these oft-overlooked actions are emblematic of a particular gendered schema. In so doing, she highlights the ways in which the performance of everyday actions is highly significant and brings to the forefront the contrasting signification of these two forms of labor.

While the process of semiosis is a consistent theme in Rosler's work, her engagements with food and food culture are perhaps the most salient examples of this interest in understanding the meaning of various everyday items and activities. As previously noted, Rosler has consistently examined various aspects of food culture throughout her work over the course of several decades. In works from *A Gourmet Experience* (1973) to *Global Taste* (1985), Rosler has examined how food circulates and is given meaning within culture. In particular, she has demonstrated a vested interest in how food relates to issues of class — particularly how food cultures differ across class groups and how the acquisition of certain food stuffs serves as a clear

¹⁷³ The portrayal of the act of putting on make-up further highlights the ways in which women's labor is supposed to be rendered invisible to the eye. Women, conventionally, put on make up in the private space of the home prior to entering any form of public realm. The implication is that women are not to be seen without make up or applying it, but rather they are to maintain the illusion that this is a form of natural appearance. Similarly, housekeeping, particularly the labor of cooking and cleaning, is also meant to be appraised only when the task has been completed. A woman is to perform these actions in private and convey the notion that the home is always and easily kept in good order.

marker of class. She is particularly interested in exposing the conditions of both the Marxist base and superstructure with regard to food production, regularly creating works that acknowledge the distinction between consumer and producer, both domestically and with regard to globalization. As such, she uses the idea of signification and semiotics in order to expose the cultural signified of various foodways, highlighting the ways in which gender and class are transcribed onto such practice.

Both Martha Rosler and Alison Knowles therefore use food culture consistently in their work in order to deeply examine the conditions of daily life, be they experiential or political (or some combination thereof). Moreover, their examinations of food are predicated on the linguistic and cultural process of signification. Unlike conventional representations of food in art — such as the portrayal of citrus fruits by Dutch still life painters, who used the substrate to demonstrate technical skill, or the inclusion of symbolic food items, like the Edenic apple in Biblical scenes — Rosler and Knowles approach employs an in-depth analysis of the function of food in society. Both Knowles and Rosler have created works with the explicit purpose of analyzing the linguistic and cultural signification of elements of food culture. The text in Knowles' *Bean Rolls*, and her various other projects on the subject of beans, serve to highlight, in a Saussurean interpretation, the various signifieds associated with the specific signifier of the “bean.” Rosler's explicit invocation of the “semiotic” in the title of her video work, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, and the performative gestures included in the work, as we will see, similarly convey

an interest in understanding food beyond its narrative or allegorical function. Instead, Rosler seeks to illustrate — and ultimately unsettle — the conventional connotation of particular elements of food culture.

Moreover, both artists are acutely aware of the functional significance of food within a social context and as such use their work to highlight the ways in which food culture both reflects and dictates the various social forces at play within the practice of daily life. Knowles' Zen-like meditations on the act of preparation and the pattern of consumption serve to illustrate the form and function of the acts of cooking and eating in daily life. Moreover, her reconsideration of the acts of cooking and eating by either decontextualizing the gesture totally — through performing the act in the space of the gallery, as in *Make a Salad* and *The Big Book* — or by rendering an act of daily life into an art work, such as in *The Identical Lunch*, Knowles challenges her audience to consider the implications of these activities more broadly, bringing awareness to the socio-political elements embedded within the gesture of the everyday. Rosler's projects similarly demonstrate a vested interest in examining the implications of eating in daily life, but her interest in the social and political consequences thereof is far more explicit than that of Knowles. While Knowles brings conscious mindfulness to these activities, Rosler draws out directly the connections between the act of food preparation/consumption and class conflict, the consequences of globalization, and the paradoxical relationship experienced by women with regard to food culture.

As such, Knowles' and Rosler's work on the subject of food — and particularly their interest in its semiotic and practical properties — provides a unique

insight into the ways in which women artists have used particular elements of food culture to challenge the normative social structures that dictate gender ideology. Taking the work of these artists together, we can thus understand the complicated and varied interpretations of the relationship between cooking and gender in the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will focus explicitly on how each artists' examination of cooking serves to highlight the gender politics of domestic labor that existed in midcentury America and how their works constitute a feminist challenge (in the form of consciousness-raising) to the ideological construction that hinged American womanhood to the performance of housework in general and food preparation in particular during this period.

Women's Work and Labor as Femininity

In order to best understand the significance and signification of cooking within Knowles' and Rosler's work from this period, we must first understand how cooking and womanhood became intertwined. At the heart of this relationship is the broader and more complicated relationship between domestic labor and femininity, which has over time transformed from the idea of "women's work" into a form of ideal womanhood in Western gender ideology. That is to say, certain tasks that have for centuries been performed by women have, since the emergence of (industrial) capitalism, been translated into an integral component of their femininity; we must understand how cooking went from being simply "women's work" to the "mark of a good woman."

Prior to the rise of industrialization in the late 18th and 19th century, the concept of women's labor was not as definitively linked to the ideology of femininity. For instance, during the colonial period, when much of the American economy was centered on the home, wrapped up in farm production and small-scale manufacturing, women's labor was considered essential to the family income. Women occupied a central position in the family labor-force, carrying out work that was necessary to support and maintain the family's subsistence, including both the preparation and the procurement of a wide variety of foodstuffs.¹⁷⁴ As Mary Ryan notes: "It was the wife's duty, with the assistance of daughter, womenservants, and neighbors, to plant the vegetable garden, breed the poultry, and care for the dairy cattle. She transformed milk into butter and cheese and butchered livestock in addition to presiding over the kitchen."¹⁷⁵ Women thus provided labor essential to both the maintenance of the farm, but also to the health and wellbeing of its workers. Beyond their productive work, women in early America were responsible for managing the household, "[organizing] and [supervising] an economic system, allocating labor to children and servants, overseeing the home production that supplied the basic needs of the colonial population."¹⁷⁶ While men's waged labor was still of extreme import to the colonial economy, women's domestic labor was hardly considered inconsequential, nor was it invisible. Because of the centralization of the family economic system around the

¹⁷⁴ See Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*. 11.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 28.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 28.

space of the home, little separation or mystery surrounded the practice of women's work.

With the rise of industrialism in the mid-nineteenth century, however, came a significant shift in the cultural understanding of labor, gender, and the relationship thereof, a transformation that directly coincided with the decline in subsistence farming and a shift towards urbanization. As a result of this transformation came an increased amount of import placed on the idea of waged labor and the conditions of its performance. As Ryan notes, "The new order dictated that economic production be removed from the household unit."¹⁷⁷ This separation, therefore, resulted in women's work being considered as non-essential to the income of the family. Thus, their role within the family structure and the nature of their labor was relegated to the private realm of the domestic sphere. Ryan notes: "their sex was identified primarily with specialized domestic functions, supplying the immediate physical and emotional needs of husbands and children."¹⁷⁸ The labor these women performed was, therefore, rendered invisible within the economic system, and simultaneously encoded into the discourse of femininity.

Because housework is essential labor, the performance of domestic tasks including cooking, cleaning, and childrearing had to be maintained and regulated. As such, the practice of this form of labor came under the jurisdiction of appropriately performing a woman's gender. Silvia Federici parses the distinction between women's unwaged, feminine labor and the waged, masculine work, stating: "The difference

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 12.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 12.

with housework lies in the fact that not only has it been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework was transformed into a natural attribute, rather than recognized as work, because it was destined to be unwaged.”¹⁷⁹ The gendering of housework as an attribute of ideal femininity thus creates a different value system to the practice thereof, applying a social and discursive pressure upon women to participate in the patriarchal capitalist system and to donate their labor without the promise of financial compensation by virtue of an “innate need” to perform these tasks. Women who did not adhere, who could not or did not maintain a well kept home and well-fed family, were considered less feminine. Because “gender-policing” can and does have well documented consequences, this pressure was extremely effective at maintaining this patriarchal labor system and entreating women to occupy themselves primarily with the performance of this private and invisible domestic labor.¹⁸⁰

Maternal Cooking and Scientific Cookery

Cooking is one of several forms of essential yet invisible domestic labor that has, in the industrial world, been rendered intrinsically feminine in order to assure its

¹⁷⁹ Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA, Brooklyn, NY, London: PM Press ; Common Notions : Autonomedia, 2012). 16.

¹⁸⁰ The research of both R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt and of Mimi Schippers has demonstrated how subordinate masculinities and femininities have been suppressed through the exertion of both social and at times even physical pressures and how defiance of a hegemonic norm has profound consequences. For more information see: R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19 (2005). And Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony," *Theory and Society* 36, no. 1 (February 2007).

continued performance. While this affiliation is robust and firmly entrenched, the articulation thereof is far more complex. Because gender identity and performance is derived from an intersection of myriad factors, it would be a gross oversimplification to say that the relationship between cooking and femininity is directly related. As previously noted, women are not alone in the practice of cooking, nor is there anything intrinsically feminine about the act of food preparation. As such, other factors, such as cultural discourse and other ideological apparatuses — including pedagogy and instruction; mass media outlets; and diverse forms of iconography — play a central role in how this relationship is articulated in a given moment.

In examining the rhetoric employed in culinary media — including cookbooks, magazine articles, and television and radio programs — we can identify the ways in which the feminization of cooking has been promoted and perpetuated throughout history. Specifically by looking at cookbooks and other instructional culinary media as primary sources, we can identify the ways in which the act of food preparation has been encoded with the discursive construction of femininity in a particular moment. As historian Jessamyn Neuhaus writes: “Cookbooks [echo] a national debate about women’s social roles in general and [represent] particular kinds of food as gendered. They helped to reinforce the notion that women had inherently domestic natures.”¹⁸¹ From examining cookbooks and television cooking programs as primary sources, we can see the myriad ways in which femininity has been and is articulated through culinary practice. Moreover, in examining the longer history thereof, we can unpack

¹⁸¹ Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). 2.

some of the many and complicated factors that contribute to the way that womanhood has been and is defined.

Culinary historians and food studies scholars have identified two common trends within the literature with regard to the approach employed by cookbook authors and cooking instructors. Scholars such as Jessamyn Neuhaus, Laura Shapiro, and Sherrie Inness have illustrated that cookbooks either follow a methodical and procedural approach to the act of food preparation — steeped in the discourse of chemistry and nutrition, which Shapiro has termed “scientific cookery”¹⁸² — or a more sentimental, family oriented tone, calling upon the nurturing aspects of discursively constructed womanhood, which I have termed “maternal cooking.” Cooking literature in the United States has continually fluctuated between these two frameworks, and the oscillation between the two is directly related to the cultural conception of femininity in a given moment.

Of these two formats, maternal cooking was the first to emerge. In fact, in many ways, maternal cooking predates the formalization of cooking instruction into recipe books and culinary media. As Jessamyn Neuhaus notes: “Women in the American colonies during the seventeenth century may have occasionally exchanged handwritten ‘receipts’ (as in ‘received rules of cookery’), but they more likely handed down recipes to the girls in the family by word of mouth. A colonial woman would receive instructions in cooking from her mother and other women in the household

¹⁸² For more information, see: Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1986).

and later might be advised by friends and neighbors.”¹⁸³ This kind of transmission of recipes was often therefore folded into the transmission of femininity and of women’s work. The language of cookery instruction thus approximated the gender norms of the time, championing women’s positions as wives and mothers — specifically within the dominant Adam’s Rib ideology common in the American colonies — and using the centrality of this role in order to teach women how to perform such labor.¹⁸⁴

While culinary instruction occurred primarily from mother to daughter and woman to woman in the 17th century, this practice was further supplemented by the use of cookbooks and household manuals during the later years of the colonial period through the post-revolutionary era. Prior to the 18th century, cookbooks had primarily functioned as manuals for professional cooks, but, as Neuhaus notes: “In the 1700s cookbooks began to function less as exclusive manuscripts for the most wealthy or the titled and more as manuals for the rest of the population.”¹⁸⁵ This change in focus led to an increase in the publication and circulation of cookbooks, both in England and in the colonies. Moreover, this shift helped to formalize the maternal tradition of transmitting recipes from one generation to the next. Manuals of this sort codified a whole host of information needed by any woman in order to properly run her home

¹⁸³ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 8.

¹⁸⁴ Since this tradition does predate the rise of industrialism, it would be an oversimplification to say that maternal cooking only functioned as a form of social regulation — as it came to do in the 20th century. Rather, I assert that the transmission of recipes from mother to daughter and the association with a particular type of femininity, one based upon certain essentialist qualities — such as caretaking, constitutes a particular form of culinary discourse, which given the prevailing understanding of gendered labor in a given moment *can* be used in order to coerce women into performing forms of housework as an extension of their femininity.

¹⁸⁵ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 9.

and care for her children, and frequently championed such ideas as an extension of the construct of Republican motherhood.

Maternal cooking did fall out of favor in the late 19th century, being replaced instead by the Victorian concept of “Scientific Cookery.” The rise of the “separate spheres” ideology of the 19th century and the dramatic transformation of women’s roles within society — particularly the advancement of middle- and upper-class women within education and particular forms of extra-domestic labor, such as work with charity organizations, social welfare programs, and in “feminized” fields like teaching and nursing — contributed to a reevaluation of the role of cooking in daily life and its relationship to femininity. Unlike in previous generations, where housework had been considered a task developed from “feminine intuition,” in the late Victorian era the act of housekeeping became encoded in the discourse of both science and business management. As Laura Shapiro notes: “Under the scrutiny of persistent study, and discussion, domesticity expanded into an objective body of knowledge that had to be actively pursued; it was no longer to be treated as a God-given expertise commanded by all women.”¹⁸⁶ The rhetoric of housework during this period was transformed from florid, sentimental treatises on domesticity as an extension of an intrinsic maternal impulse, to the emergence of a domestic “science,” which, as Shapiro notes “meant rational, objective, and methodical — traits that gave the term a definite air of maleness.”¹⁸⁷ Just as Victorian womanhood was being expanded to

¹⁸⁶ Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*. 35.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 35.

include access to previously masculine spaces, so too was domestic rhetoric being transformed to incorporate certain, particularly manly traits.

Cooking literature and culinary instruction in late Victorian America followed this similar scientific bend. Where cookbooks of previous generations described the act of cooking in maternal and sentimental terms, frequently favoring vague language and imprecise proportions as if insinuating some sort of natural inclination towards cooking, culinary instruction at the end of the 19th century focused on both the employment on rational and procedural cooking techniques using standardized measurements as well as the chemical, biological, and nutritional science involved in food preparation. As Neuhaus notes: “The era saw a growing field of expertise in health and nutrition, and cookbooks very much reflected this trend. Homemaking and cooking, argued such [domestic science] advocates, should be as exact and demanding a profession as the study of chemistry or biology.”¹⁸⁸ Culinary schools developed their curricula around scientific principles, and cooking publications regularly employed scientific rhetoric in their discussion of cooking. As such, the scientific cookery and its’ emphasis on homemaking as an intellectual pursuit for women served to affirm the prevailing gender ideology of the 19th century, wherein women regularly pursued career fulfillment within their particular and distinct sphere of influence.

Over the course of the 20th century, American culinary discourse oscillated between these two primary formats. At the beginning of the century and through World War I, American culinary discourse did continue to uphold the values of

¹⁸⁸ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 23.

scientific cookery, calling upon the disciplines of domestic science and home economics in order to entreat housewives to maintain the principles of nutrition even in the face of wartime paucity.¹⁸⁹ As Neuhaus notes: “Still very much influenced by the principles of scientific cookery, cookbook authors during World War I emphasized the nutritive values of food and careful food preparation. [...] Cookbooks stressed that as in a time of war, housewives had a patriotic duty to fulfill their domestic duties by utilizing all the tools of nutrition and science.”¹⁹⁰ Stressing the employment of sound household management and the rigorous study of diet and nutrition, these books emphasized the use of scientific cookery as an extension of American womanhood, in terms of both national and gender identity.

The conclusion of World War I and the economic peril of the Great Depression ushered in a new period for maternal cooking rhetoric, which lasted from the late 1920s through the late 1950s and coincided with a dramatic cultural reevaluation of the position of women within American society. Because of the labor shortage nationwide following the war and during the Great Depression, the relative extra-domestic freedom that women enjoyed in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras was replaced by a reaffirmation that women belonged exclusively in the home. As Neuhaus notes: “the perception that men’s livelihood could be threatened by the changing nature of women’s role in society added another dimension to the emergence of a reinvigorated domestic ideology in the 1920s and 1930s. Women, according to this familiar but newly energized version of gender norms, belonged at home and not in the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 25.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 25.

marketplace.”¹⁹¹ Cookbooks from the World War II era further promoted the idea that women’s central position in American society was as wife and mother, even if she did take on extra-domestic labor in order to help further the wartime effort. Moreover, with the return of soldiers again from war during the postwar period, as we have seen in chapter one, concerted efforts were made across a wide variety of mass cultural outlets in order to reaffirm women’s primary role within the domestic sphere, including and especially within culinary media. As such, maternal cooking remained the primary form of culinary instruction within the United States until the early 1960s, when, as we shall see, the democratization of the gourmet and the challenges of the Women’s Liberation movement facilitated another shift in the cultural conception of cooking.

Alison Knowles: The Woman of Fluxus

Having thus established how cooking as an action was transformed into a form of invisible labor and rendered part of the Western gender schema, let us now examine how women artists have used their art practices to unpack the complicated relationship between the two. Because her art is so deeply entangled with both the process of semiosis and the iteration of American food practices, Alison Knowles’ Zen-like meditations on food and the lexicon thereof provide unique insight into the practice of food culture in daily life. Moreover, her singular position within Fluxus as a movement, which as we will see was markedly different from that of women artists in previous generations — particularly with regard to her personal relationships and with

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 60.

her willing embrace of personal subject matter — combined with her persistent analysis of the practice of the everyday provides a framework through which we can examine these works as a form of implicit feminism.

Alison Knowles was born in New York City in 1933. Her mother Lois worked as a nurse and her father was an English professor who taught at a number of universities in and around New York, including New York University and Pratt Institute of the Arts. The Knowles family eventually left the city and settled in Scarsdale, primarily so that Alison could receive a better education. Knowles was academically quite successful and due to her father's position as a professor, she was able to attend college for free.¹⁹² She attended a number of different universities between 1952 and 1957. She initially pursued a degree in French at Middlebury College in Vermont, but eventually transferred to Pratt Institute in 1954 where she received a BFA. Between 1954 and 1959, Knowles “studied with Richard Lindner, Adolph Gottlieb and Josef Albers,” the former two at Pratt, and the latter at Syracuse.¹⁹³

Knowles credits her tutelage under Gottlieb with helping to formally introduce her to the art world. She notes: “at Pratt, because of Gottlieb, I was able to get to a lot of openings and I got to meet [Willem] de Kooning and actually Pollock [...] because

¹⁹² Alison Knowles and Judith Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2," (Washington, DC: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2010). n.p.

¹⁹³ Alison Knowles, "Alison Knowles, Curriculum Vitae," in *Dick Higgins Papers* (Getty Research Institute, 1980). 1. And Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

he was teaching and comrades with those other Expressionists.”¹⁹⁴ Gottlieb would regularly invite his students to hang out with prominent artists from the New York School of Painting in the habitat in which they were most regularly found, the barroom. She notes; he’d tell to students that, ‘Thursday night, we’ll all be at the tavern.’ And so we’d all go hang out and look in the window and even as I said sometimes meet these people and sit with them.”¹⁹⁵ Gottlieb’s influence on Knowles’ career extended this exposure to the prominent figures of the art world; she states “he had a lot of suggestions and he would — each class in the evening he would spend a little time with you and your canvas and he thought I was really good. He encouraged me to have a show.”¹⁹⁶ During her time at Pratt and the years immediately following, Gottlieb was an ardent supporter of Knowles’ career in the arts.

In stark contrast to her experience with Gottlieb, Knowles butted heads considerably with Josef Albers. Where she recalled fondly never being mistreated at Pratt on the basis of her gender,¹⁹⁷ the same cannot be said for her studies with Albers. As Hannah Higgins notes “As she was ill-suited to Albers’s rigid methods, he moved her to a room in the basement, periodically checking in and expressing relief that her textured, representational painting wouldn’t influence his more docile students.”¹⁹⁸ The fact that Albers permitted Knowles to pursue representational painting at a moment when abstraction was the dominant oeuvre could be attributed to the gendered

¹⁹⁴ "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. n.p.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. n.p.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. n.p.

¹⁹⁸ Higgins, "Love's Labor's Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else ". 12.

assumptions about the media. Representational painting was understandable coming from a woman artist, but Albers feared that Knowles' pursuit of a lesser style would taint the work of her male colleagues and thus treated her remarkably differently on the basis of her gender. Albers' disdain for Knowles' preferred style, did not, however, preclude his appreciation of her talent. As Higgins notes: "Even so, he said she was an excellent painter."¹⁹⁹

Although the issue of gender did impact the way some of her instructors treated her, Knowles was singular in her resolve to pursue a career in the arts. With regard to her formal training, Knowles seized every opportunity to work with the artists she wanted to learn from. While at Pratt, she took a mixture of day classes and night classes, primarily because the men she "wanted to study with were not in the day school."²⁰⁰ Yet Knowles was also aware that the only people to guide her in her career goals were men. She notes: "at the time when I was becoming an artist, that's all there was to work with."²⁰¹ Even without good mentorship and models for being a woman and an artist, and in spite of the fact that she was very often the only woman artist in the art circles within which she ran, Knowles was resolved to not let her gender be a hindrance to her success. When asked by Judith Olch Richards if her teachers ever discounted her work on the basis of her gender, Knowles' replied "Fortunately I didn't. I didn't, and I think I never have because I just don't accept it."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 12.

²⁰⁰ Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

²⁰¹ Ibid. n.p.

²⁰² Ibid. n.p.

In many ways, Knowles' unique position as a woman in the arts originates from her own determination to work consistently for her own money. She notes: "I took a job right after Pratt to have my own money. I've always done that."²⁰³ From the mid-1950s to around 1961, she worked "primarily [as] a painter, making silkscreened paintings on canvas," supplementing her income through work in graphic design for greeting card companies.²⁰⁴ In a rather unorthodox move, Knowles insisted on securing her own income during this period, despite the fact that she was married and her husband's family was willing to support them.²⁰⁵ Knowles' first marriage, however, dissolved quickly due to her husband's problems with gambling, but her fiscal independence did ensure her ability to continue to live and work in the SoHo loft space she had established at 423 Broadway, as she would remain doing for the next several decades.²⁰⁶

Knowles was one of several artists to take up loft space in the areas around SoHo, Greenwich Village and Washington Square park in the early 1960s, and it was through her connections in the area that she became involved with the movement with which she is most closely associated: Fluxus. Knowles notes: "I had kind of a circle of underground friends who I imagined understood what I was doing and Dorothy Podber was the name of this other friend."²⁰⁷ Podber introduced Knowles to a number of key figures in the avant-garde art world of Lower Manhattan in the late 1950s and

²⁰³ Ibid. n.p.

²⁰⁴ Higgins, "Love's Labor's Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else ". 13. And: Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

²⁰⁵ "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. n.p.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. n.p.

early 1960s. For instance, Knowles credits Podber with introducing her to Skid Shalby and the Nonagon gallery, where she had her first solo show in 1958.²⁰⁸ Podber also introduced Knowles to the artist Ray Johnson, who would eventually become one of her collaborators in Fluxus. As Knowles recalls: “her dear friend was Ray Johnson and Ray would come with Dorothy to visit [...] sometimes in the evening and try to get me to go out with them and play the streets we’d call it and we’d just walk and talk.”²⁰⁹ They would frequently invite Knowles to parties and events with other artists, musicians, dancers, writers and members of an underground and avant-garde New York art world.

On one such evening, Johnson and Podber brought Knowles to a party on Christopher street hosed by “a fabulous guy — kicked out of Yale” named Dick Higgins, whom she took to immediately and who was on and off her partner until his death in 1998. Knowles and Higgins relationship — which was extremely complicated and multifaceted — was one of collaboration, support, and independence. Higgins had been a student in John Cage’s composition class at the New School for Social Research during the 1958-59 academic year and this experience was highly influential for both Higgins and Knowles. According to Hannah Higgins, “the class participants dominated Dick’s social and creative life for years: George Brecht, Al Hansen, Allan Kaprow, Jackson Mac Low, and Larry Poons were all in it.”²¹⁰ The relationships that burgeoned in this course, as well as the projects that emerged from it, have widely

²⁰⁸ Ibid. n.p.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. n.p.

²¹⁰ Higgins, "Love's Labor's Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else ". 11.

been acknowledged as the origin of Fluxus, as well as some of the other experimental art forms that characterized the New York City avant-garde scene in the early 1960s. As such, through Higgins, Knowles was introduced to a burgeoning art movement premised on the ideas of chance operations and the practice of the everyday. After the class, Higgins continued a friendship with Cage, which extended to Knowles as well. All three, for instance, were members of the New York Mycological Society and “frequently hunted mushrooms together.”²¹¹ This friendship undoubtedly impacted the work of both Knowles and Higgins, who drew on Cage’s interest in Zen meditation and the idea of chance operations in their works in the 1960s.

Beyond the personal and art world connections that Knowles made through Higgins, their relationship also helped to foster her career by expanding the realm of media in which she was working. While Knowles had always worked in a wide variety of media and had been highly experimental with her process, when she met Higgins, she was primarily a painter. Higgins, on the other hand, was a poet and a performance artist, whose “outrageous performances” were the basis of his expulsion from Yale.²¹² Shortly after they began their life together, she began to explore different forms of media. Knowles recalls: “I began to write books and poems myself. And it wasn’t that I had left painting but I definitely was doing other things. I began to think about sound, for instance. Words like ‘intermedia’ were coming into the culture. I used to do a whole evening of sound and I’d call it sound and poetry or sound poetry.”²¹³ Traces

²¹¹ Ibid. 14.

²¹² Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

²¹³ Ibid. n.p.

of Higgins work in poetry, performance, and bookmaking, and his experiences with the Cage class can clearly be seen in Knowles' initial exploration of new media and "intermedia" practices.

Yet, although it was Higgins' influence that led to Knowles' exploration of other media, her work could hardly be considered derivative of his. Their relationship was clearly mutually influential; her experiments in form and media had as significant an impact on his projects as the other way around. As Hannah Higgins notes: "Their relationship played an important role in the day-to-day texture of their lives and works and maybe explains some of the parallels and disjunctions in their practices, even if it may not be absolutely clear how. They both have made books, they have both written performance events about food, they have both made work that responds to the flatness of the page and the grids of moveable type, they both made sound works, and they both art Fluxus artists."²¹⁴ The relationship between Knowles and Higgins — unlike that of many other women artists and their partners, such as Krasner and Pollock or the deKoonings — was neither competitive nor hierarchical; on the contrary, the two seemed to push one another to explore new ideas on his or her own terms, providing each other with the impetus to experiment and create and the support to take such risks.

Moreover, while it was through Higgins that Knowles made a great deal of connections and became involved in the group that would eventually form Fluxus, their partnership was not the primary basis for her inclusion. Knowles was considered

²¹⁴ Higgins, "Love's Labor's Lost and Found: A Meditation on Fluxus, Family, and Something Else ". 9.

a Fluxus contributor and participant of her own accord. To this day, Knowles is known as “the first woman in Fluxus.”²¹⁵ Her work embodies the central tenets of the movement specifically employing “scores that operated as templates, open to the expansion in the arena of realization. Elements of chance were incorporated into the temporal framework so that each performance of a single score might differ greatly, far beyond the expectations of the composer.”²¹⁶ Knowles’ work was very much aligned with the ideas that art can and should come from the everyday and as such, she was recognized as an equal contributor by the fellow members of Fluxus. She traveled with the group and performed a number of her works at the initial Fluxus festivals and programs in London and Germany in 1962.

Knowles was not only an active member of the movement, but her work was considered central to it. For instance Knowles’ *Bean Rolls* was included by George Maciunas in his very first Fluxkit, “the many small boxes of inexpensive materials assembled for personal use that Maciunas invented in 1962” entitled *Fluxus 1*.²¹⁷ The

²¹⁵ Emily Elizabeth Goodman and Julia Robinson, "Skype Conversation with Julia Robinson," (San Diego, CA; New York, NY November 13, 2014). While other women, most notably Yoko Ono, Shigeko Kubota, and Carolee Schneemann, have also been associated with Fluxus, Knowles’ position in the movement and its formation and evolution, I argue is undeniably unique. Of the women listed, only Ono could be considered as influential — having hosted a large number of early performances by artists involved in Fluxus. While Ono was involved with Fluxus, she also operated largely independently from the group. Similarly, Kubota and especially Schneemann were involved with Fluxus on a greatly diminished scale when compared to Knowles.

²¹⁶ Robinson, "The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations." 98. This conception of the score is radically different from the use of similar scripts in other performance oriented art practices from this period, specifically those employed by members of the Happenings circles. While Happenings artists, like Allan Kaprow and Bob Whitman did incorporate some room for variation and did reduce their scores to a simple set of instructions, the performance of these actions was highly scripted, especially with regard to the duration of action and the temporal elements of the performance. The degree to which chance was central to the performance was greatly diminished in the Happenings when compared to Fluxus.

²¹⁷ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*. 34.

Fluxkits were meant to transform mundane and daily objects into a multisensory experiential item that is emblematic of the ideological tenets of the movement. Maciunas, more than anyone, had a clear vision for what he wanted Fluxus to be — even going so far as to write a manifesto thereof in 1964 — and thus his inclusion of Knowles' work in the Fluxkit serves as an endorsement of her position within the movement.

Moreover, her influence on Fluxus can be noted in the fact that she was specifically implicated when a schism erupted in the mid-1960s over George Maciunas' proposed directions for Fluxus. Maciunas had a clear interest in rendering fluxus “a politically motivated, centrally organized, anti-art group,” a dogmatic stance that many of the more experientially and experimentally oriented practitioners did not agree with. Several participants, including Jackson MacLow and Dick Higgins, wrote to Maciunas to express their concern for this new direction; Maciunas responded to Higgins and Knowles “expressing his opinion of these responses: ‘I do not understand your statement (& Jackson’s) that there ‘is no point in antagonizing the very people and classes that we are most interested in converting.’ Terrorism that is very clearly directed ... Can reduce the attendance of the masses to these decadent institutions.’”²¹⁸ That Maciunas considered Knowles' work and perspective central enough to the group to warrant a discussion of the future of the movement is indicative of the fact that she was a key figure in the movement of her own accord.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 77.

In addition to Knowles' gender being neither a barrier of entry to her participation nor a criteria for her marginalization within Fluxus, Knowles also did not shy away from engaging with her own experiences as a woman. While women artists of previous generations had either engaged with the various "feminized" elements of their lives recognizing that their work would thus be categorized as a feminine — such as the maternal subject matter that litters the works of women impressionists such as Berthe Morisot or Mary Cassatt — or conversely had eschewed subjective experience for fear that it would render them "frivolous" in the eyes of curators and collectors, as was definitively the case for many women involved in Abstract Expressionism, Knowles engaged with the various aspects of her daily reality in order to examine the condition of daily life, doing so from the position that she occupied within society: being a woman.

In works like *The Identical Lunch* and *The Big Book*, Knowles drew from the elements that compromise her daily reality, and in so doing, she calls attention to the various elements that contribute to how womanhood is both understood and practiced. In *The Big Book*, for instance, Knowles constructed monumental "walk-through environment that offered the 'reader the opportunity of thinking about the book in radically new terms, principally in relation to his/her own body.'"²¹⁹ The "pages" of the book — seven in total, each one measuring eight feet by four feet — literally open a new world and a different approach to the environment to the audience.

²¹⁹ Robinson, "The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations." 103.

Yet the world that is depicted within the pages of *The Big Book* is far from any fantastical representation; on the contrary the book is littered with everyday objects crammed together in a way that seems “excerpted from Knowles’s own experience of downtown loft living.”²²⁰ As Robinson notes: “It contained Canal Street crockery, a Chinatown tea kettle, makeshift heating coils for cooking, even a toilet and telephone.”²²¹

Knowles filled the pages of her book with everyday items and as such presented her viewers with the opportunity to contemplate their significance and signification as well as well. On the one hand, by placing these household items in a book, Knowles has rendered them essential devices for the narrative content of the book itself. These banal objects create the story within *The Big Book* and dictate the ways that the viewer is to “read” the book. On the other hand, the positioning of these items within such a format serves to open up the discursive meaning of such items, much as the texts of the *Bean Rolls* do for their referent object. The presence of a literal kitchen, complete with cookware, in the space of the book thus calls to mind the various ways in which such spaces are replete with complicated significance, highlighting the way that discourse — especially in the form of the printed word — does function to imbue elements of the everyday with ideological significance.

Although she did have a relationship with the various apparatuses of the Women’s Art Movement and worked with avowed feminist artists, Knowles herself has not enthusiastically adopted the label herself. Julia Robinson has anecdotally

²²⁰ Ibid. 103.

²²¹ Ibid. 103.

recalled being asked by Knowles “Julia, am I a feminist?”²²² Regardless of Knowles’ questioning ambivalence towards feminism, Knowles’ efforts and her works do employ some of the characteristic strategies employed by feminist artists. Her use of the everyday and her own experiences serves to highlight the realities of lived womanhood, a practice that would be later employed by women artists seeking to use their work as an explicit form of consciousness raising. Because many of Knowles’ works pre-date the emergence of the Women’s Art Movement and because her engagement with gender was secondary in her creation of these works, this engagement with the politics of the everyday and the resulting critique of gender cannot be read as an explicitly feminist. Even so, because Knowles was able to gain legitimacy of her own accord within the art world and did so without necessarily adhering to a masculinist schema for art making, and even included explicitly gendered material in her work, we can unquestionably recognize an underlying, implicit feminist tendency within her art work.

Cold War Domesticity and Cooking in the Early 1960s

Having thus established that the process of signification was central to Alison Knowles’ work in general and with food specifically, we now must ask the question: “what then was signified in Knowles’ work?” In 1962, when Alison Knowles first performed the work *Make a Salad*, the prevailing gender politics around food preparation were for the most part still entrenched in the neo-domestic ideology of the early Cold War period. As such, domestic cooking was understood as both a mainstay

²²² Goodman and Robinson, "Skype Conversation with Julia Robinson." n.p.

of femininity, as well as a practical apparatus through which to maintain the American way of life. The rhetoric surrounding cooking during this period in many ways reflected a staunch anti-communist sentiment and further cemented the notion of the American home kitchen as both safe haven for American capitalism and the central battleground of the war on Communism. In addition to the political rhetoric and capitalist consumerism that promoted the neo-domestic ideal of femininity, culinary discourse too functioned to affirm the idea that American women “belonged” in the kitchen. As Sherrie A. Inness notes: “Fifties cookbooks and cooking articles went beyond merely instructing a woman about how to cook a chiffon cake that would not fall flat or how to carve a radish into a rose. They also conveyed ideological messages about how she was expected to lead her life.”²²³

As previously mentioned, cooking publications from the years leading up to and immediately following World War II generally fall in the category of maternal cooking. That is not to say that the conception of gender was the same in all of these moments; on the contrary, the social, political, and economic realities of the Great Depression, World War II and the postwar period all had significant ramifications for how womanhood was understood. Rather, during all of these particular moments, the conception of gender included the idea that cooking was an extension of a particular intrinsic femininity. In each of these eras, this notion was exploited in the service of a

²²³ Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles : American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001). 142. While these sources are hardly indicative of any American woman’s lived experience, they do convey the ideal to which many American women aspired. Moreover, the disconnect between aspirational postwar feminine ideal promoted in culinary media and the real, lived American womanhood, as we will see, at the root of the significant transformations in both culinary rhetoric and gender ideology that occurred in the early 1960s and 1970s.

larger gender and nationalistic ideology, and this conception was further affirmed through the kinds of culinary literature produced and circulated widely throughout the United States at this time.

During the Cold war, cooking publications regularly employed a maternal tone in order to emphasize the “naturalization” of the cooking task. Volumes from this period depend heavily on anecdotes and sentimental prose in order to implore women to venture into the kitchen. In many cases, these texts emphasized the ease and simplicity associated with learning to cook good, nutritious food. For example, in a section describing satisfaction in meal-planning, instead of entreating readers to follow careful instructions and to learn essential lessons as was more common in scientific cookbooks, the immensely popular *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook* — first published in 1950 — presented readers with a simple, and easy to remember rhyme. They write: “Something soft and something crisp/should always go together,/And something hot with something cold/No matter what the weather;/Something bland needs the complement/ Of something with tang and nip./Follow these rules and all your meals/ Will have taste appeal and zip.”²²⁴ In presenting their readers with a simple poem to remember the basic principles of cooking, the General Mills Company under the guise of Betty Crocker sought to simplify the task of cooking to something almost mindless and innate. Instead of requiring laborious study and intellect,

²²⁴ Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book*, First Edition (Second Printing) ed. (Minneapolis, MN; New York, NY: General Mills, Inc; McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. , 1950). While the attributed author of the text is “Betty Crocker,” I have referred to the authors as a collective because Crocker was a fictional character invented by the General Mills Company to both provide support to home cooks and to sell products for the brand. For more information on the history of Betty Crocker, see: Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*.

nutritional science could be ascertained by simply remembering a series of rhyming verses.

Yet beyond simply employing a maternal rhetoric, cookbooks during the postwar period promoted a particular form of femininity that is inextricably linked to the consumer culture and anti-capitalist Neo-domestic rhetoric of the early Cold War: Friedan's notion of the "Feminine Mystique." American cookbooks in the 1950s promoted the centrality of women's roles as wives and mothers. As Neuhaus notes: "Many post-World War II cookery books bolstered the feminine mystique [...] They insisted that preparing meals meant more than producing nutritious and tasty food on time — it meant devoting oneself wholly to caring for the home and the family and doing so with the right attitude."²²⁵ No longer was simply performing the task of cooking considered a virtue of femininity, but rather a good woman — one who adheres to the prescriptions placed upon her gender — is eager and content to perform such labor. Instead of being an intellectual pursuit and an active interest, postwar cookbooks championed women's culinary practices as an expression of her innate femininity, and one that she should be proud to perform.

Despite its entrenchment within the rhetoric of Cold War neo-domesticity, postwar cooking and the discourse of Cold War food culture was ripe with intrinsic paradoxes. On the one hand, home cooking was promoted as a central tenet of American femininity. On the other hand, the consumer marketplace continually promoted new labor saving devices and convenience foods aimed at reducing the labor

²²⁵ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 231.

involved in the process. During the 1950s, both the quality and the price of convenience foods — including packaged, frozen, and canned goods — made them an appealing alternative to the laborious process of cooking from scratch with fresh ingredients.²²⁶ Advertisements and cookbooks regularly promoted the use of canned and convenience foods outright, but they did not suggest that women employ these goods in an effort to avoid the task of cooking. As Neuhaus notes: “Convenience foods might ease some of the drudgery of cooking, so wrote authors and editors, but that just meant women would have more time to give food preparation that extra special touch.”²²⁷ They sought to avoid the trepidations of housewives who were inclined to feel guilt due to the effortlessness of the process,²²⁸ valorizing instead the repeatability and unpredictability of the results.

Moreover, cookbooks and culinary media that promoted the use of shortcuts and convenience foods frequently did so in order to circumvent the intended use of the product. As Shapiro notes, the American postwar housewife “developed a skill for ‘doctoring up’ the contents [of packaged foods], thus convincing herself she was personally involved in preparing the meal.”²²⁹ “Doctoring” was not only used in the service of preparing daily meals. The concept reached beyond the harried preparation of weeknight dinners and into the realm of gourmet food culture. Shapiro writes: “Prewar gourmets made coq au vin from scratch; some postwar gourmets did the

²²⁶ Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. 24-25.

²²⁷ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 237.

²²⁸ Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. 63.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* 64.

same, and it was also possible to fashion coq au vin from canned chicken and cooking wine and call yourself a gourmet, too. All it took to become a gourmet the easy way was a simple technique known as ‘glamorizing.’²³⁰ “Glamorizing,” like “doctoring up” involved adapting packaged ingredients to form “gourmet” meals, although the additions to the final product were frequently chosen specifically for the purpose of imbuing the food with a sense of sophistication and luxury.

At the same time as housewives were approximating the mainstays of haute cuisine through the use of convenience food, gourmet culture in America was undergoing a significant, and similarly paradoxical transformation. On the one hand, many notable figures in American gourmet culture were becoming increasingly more trenchant in their beliefs and were vocal advocates against the rise of “convenience cooking.” Prominent culinary personalities like legendary chef James Beard and cookbook author Helen Evans Brown advocated that gourmet cooking was only achieved through a cultivated palate and effortful cooking. As Shapiro notes: “As far as Beard was concerned, what he and Brown undertook in the kitchen and at their typewriters was ‘missionary work’ — bringing the gospel of fine homemade meals to Americans pathetically satisfied with shortcuts and fake pizzazz.”²³¹

On the other hand, however, the definition of gourmet was expanding during the 1950s. As Shapiro notes: “the exclusivity of the word *gourmet* was slipping away.”²³² Haute cuisine was no longer limited solely to the upper echelons of

²³⁰ Ibid. 65.

²³¹ Ibid. 4.

²³² Ibid. 65.

American society; the social mobility of the postwar period and the increased physical mobility afforded by the development of the interstate highway system and growth of the commercial airline industry functioned to expand the palates of middle class American diners.²³³ Americans were able to sample exotic forms of cuisine, either through travel or in the form of ethnic restaurants, and domestically “gourmet restaurants [made] a concerted comeback, at least in major cities,” during the 1950s.²³⁴ As more and more Americans were becoming exposed to the luxuries of fine dining, they too wanted to enjoy some of this opulence in the context of the home.

As such, the cookbook market responded in two primary ways. Authentic gourmet texts, like Beard’s and later those of MFK Fisher and Julia Child, were published widely, advocating that the home cook learn about the nature of good ingredients, master essential skills, and cultivate his or her palate through tasting and seasoning. At the same time, figures like Poppy Cannon — author of *The Can Opener Cookbook* (1951) — published volumes that advocated that the same results could be achieved without the extensive effort. While figures like Brown, Beard, Fisher and Child considered Cannon’s approach a form of culinary heresy, to Cannon “shortcut cooking was a branch of great traditional cuisine, not a departure from it.”²³⁵ This inherent paradox in the mere definition of the word gourmet in culinary literature is yet another example of the conflicted nature of Cold War American food culture.

²³³ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 180.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 178.

²³⁵ Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. 100.

Moreover, the expansion of gourmet culture in the 1950s, and particularly in the early 1960s, had a significant impact on the relationship between cooking and gender. While convenience cookbooks like Cannon's were primarily written for a female readership — her follow-up text being explicitly titled *The Bride's Cookbook* — gourmet cooking was considered predominantly a masculine endeavor. Because the restaurant industry has been and remains a central component of gourmet culture and because professional chefs were, until the 1970s, almost exclusively male, fine dining has always been associated with manliness. Part of this association is the association between men's cooking and culinary innovation in culinary discourse. As Neuhaus notes, "cookery instruction for men in the 1950s consistently emphasized that men naturally possessed the ability to cook more creatively and with better results than women."²³⁶ Men's palates and intuitions in the kitchen were understood as far more advanced than that of women, and their pursuits in cooking were valorized in a way that housewives daily preparations were not. Yet, the expansion of gourmet culture problematized this assumption. As cookbooks and cooking columns aimed at women also began providing women with the tools necessary to create haute cuisine at home — be it with the help of convenience foods or altogether from scratch — the male domination of the gourmet arena began to wane. Over the course of the 1960s, the expansion of the gourmet — particularly with the rise of new culinary media, specifically the emergence of a new generation of television cooking programs that took off following the premiere of Julia Child's incomparable "The French Chef" —

²³⁶ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking : Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*. 202.

did come to pose a significant challenge to the gendered assumptions about cooking. Yet, even with the opening of the domestic kitchen to men and the professional kitchen to women, the association between home cooking and femininity remained and remains significantly strong.

Performing Cooking and Gender: *Make a Salad*

Considering the gender dynamics of postwar cooking, what then is the significance of Knowles' performance of the act of food preparation within the space of a gallery? In many ways, *Make a Salad* can be read as a form of gender critique, illuminating the underlying assumptions surrounding the daily practice of cooking. Recognizing Knowles' position as a woman artist for whom gender was neither considered prohibitive to her career goals nor necessarily a taboo subject matter, we can therefore examine the significance of such a gesture as a form of implicit indictment into the gender dynamics that surround the act of cooking in midcentury America. As such, we can examine the ways in which the work was informed by Knowles' daily life and how that reflects broader gender ideology. Moreover, in so doing, we can examine the ways in which Knowles' engagement with food reflects this positionality and is remarkably distinct from that of her male counterparts.

Knowles' relationship to feminism can be best categorized as implicit. Knowles made works that dealt with various aspects of her gender, despite the fact that such an engagement was not necessarily the explicit intent at the outset of their creation. This implicit feminism is most notably manifest in the fact that Knowles drew from her own lived experience as a woman in order to create her works. In many

ways, this engagement with the practice of gender in daily life was the byproduct of the Fluxus approach to art making, which privileged the inclusion of non-art, mundane and worldly goods in the creation of an aesthetic experience. In creating experimental works of art that employed the ideas of the everyday championed within the Fluxus circle, Knowles translated aspects of American womanhood into her art. In her continued examination of the meaning and significance of certain activities, she drew attention — implicitly — to the affiliation between these practices and the dominant gender ideology.

In *Make a Salad*, Knowles drew from her own, familiar and everyday experiences in order to create a work that calls attention to the nature and function of cooking as a form of daily action. Although the initial conception of *Make a Salad*, was somewhat the result of a momentary impulse — Knowles conceived of the work in a taxi cab in London the week of its initial performance as a part of the the “Festival of Misfits” in October 1962 at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) — the performance does illustrate the complicated entanglement of food and femininity. To begin with, these ideas were not and are not separate for Knowles. When discussing her work with the curatorial team at the Smart Museum for the show *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, Knowles notes that her “obsession with food” is related to her upbringing and her relationship with her mother. She states:

When I said ‘obsession’ I was thinking of the importance food given the circumstances in our family. My mother, who did the cooking, was from a family that was much more abundant financially and they had guests all the time. Her situation with eating was very different and very elegant. She had learned to bake [...] She was able to bake different kinds of cinnamon and molasses cakes, and so within the

economy of our family there would be at least once a week, along with meals that were minimal but good, this amazing cinnamon-molasses cake.²³⁷

For Knowles, food in general and cooking specifically is tinged with memories of her mother. When considering the role of food in her own work, she turns to the moments of her childhood when her mother almost exclusively performed all of the family cooking, as was the case in the majority of American homes during this period.

Knowles herself also did a considerable amount of cooking for herself, her family, and for the many artists that she was associated with. Julia Robinson has noted that Knowles approached the task out of a genuine interest in caretaking.²³⁸ She regularly prepared meals for other artists within the Fluxus circle and for the people associated with Higgins' Fluxus publishing endeavors, the *Something Else Press*. This practice of cooking for members of Fluxus directly impacted her work. She notes that her use of beans, for example, came about because George Maciunas had called her to inform her that there was a backer for their work, but that he needed to know what she planned to do immediately. She recalls: "I didn't really have a thought but I had been cooking pots of beans for the Something Else Press people at the 22nd Street house, kind of just without even thinking about it. I'd soak out beans and there would always be beans to eat if there was nothing else. So I called George the next day and I said, 'Well, it will probably be something to do with beans because I discovered I have

²³⁷ Stephanie Smith and David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art., *Feast : Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Exhibition Catalogue. 68.

²³⁸ Goodman and Robinson, "Skype Conversation with Julia Robinson." n.p.

quite a bit of knowledge about that legume.”²³⁹ Her performance of the act of cooking, which she did as a means of caretaking for others, thus became the basis of her work with food. Like the maternal dynamics associated with her memories of cooking, her own performance of the action was thus coded in the ideological gendered constraints placed around the activity. She cooked in order to feed herself and others, just as generations of women before her did, and she used this experience as the basis of her works.

The fact that Knowles cooked as a form of caretaking and that her affiliations with food are coded in femininity does not negate the fact that her work provided an avenue through which to critique these assumptions. On the contrary, although Knowles was not explicitly challenging this gendered structure in creating *Make a Salad*, her work does serve to highlight the presumptive connotations between the act of cooking and femininity. As previously noted, the idea of connotation and signification is one of central importance to Knowles’ work; consistent throughout her practice is the idea of exposing the various assumptions and meanings affiliated with a particular word, item, or activity. In *Make a Salad*, Knowles uses the space of the performance hall to decontextualize the act of cooking from its place in daily life. In so doing, she makes apparent the ways in which the practice is ingrained in the everyday and the common assumptions that function around it, of which the performance of gendered labor is central.

²³⁹ Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

When Knowles performs the act of making a salad, she thus highlights the ways in which womanhood is associated with cooking. If — or rather when, as the work has been reperformed in several iterations — a man performed the piece, the associations with cooking are quite different. As we have already established, men’s cooking is associated either with the preparation of meats, such as the backyard barbeque, or it is seen as a pursuit of the gourmet. Women’s cooking, on the other hand, is associated with her position within the domestic realm. Cooking has continually been understood as an off-shoot of the maternal impulse considered intrinsic to womanhood; women cook because they want to care for their loved ones, and this caring impulse is hard wired into women on the basis of their ability and desire to become mothers.²⁴⁰ This affiliation was even more apparent in 1962, when Knowles first performed the work, as the most significant challenges to this association by “Second Wave” Feminists would not be lobbed for another 6 years, and the prevailing gender ideology of the time was still significantly steeped in Cold War domesticity. As such, by decontextualizing the gesture of cooking from the domestic space, and presenting it for public contemplation in the form of her performance, Knowles provided an apparatus to critically engage with the associations and connotations of cooking as an articulation of the prevailing gender ideology.

²⁴⁰ The validity of this assumption is highly questionable, however. As we know from Levi-Strauss’s seminal work *The Raw and the Cooked*, cooking is considered the paragon of the cultural realm, and the affiliation between maternity and cooking is entirely culturally determined. Moreover, other than the biological reality of pregnancy, birth, and nursing, motherhood also is a culturally determined set of practices and thus cannot solely be understood as some form of innate desire. While all humans, like other species do feel a bond between mother and offspring, the ways in which that bond is articulated is highly variable. Therefore the relationship between motherhood and cooking, particularly in a Western context, should be understood as a form of ideology rather than the result of any kind of biological destiny.

Moreover, Knowles' questioning of the signification of cooking as an activity of daily life further serves to call attention to the naturalization and neglect placed upon housework as a form of gendered labor. The relationship between femininity and cooking in midcentury America served to undermine the productive nature of this form of labor, rendering it invisible. As previously noted, the assumption that women intrinsically want to and need to perform house work by virtue of their gender and the fact that by and large the performance thereof is unwaged has served historically to render such labor invisible. Therefore, by performing the process of preparing a salad in a non-domestic, non-kitchen oriented space, and engaging with the meditative preconditions that existed within the space of a fluxus concert, Knowles' performance of *Make a Salad* serves to call active attention to the oft-overlooked process of cooking. For example, on the evening when Knowles first performed the piece, she also performed another simply scored work, entitled *Shoes of Your Choice*, wherein audience members removed and described the shoes they were wearing into a microphone at the front of the room. Dick Higgins also performed his piece *Danger Music* that night, wherein "he screamed six times."²⁴¹ Thus, as an aggregate, the works of this Fluxus Concert were meant to foster a certain phenomenological awareness within the audience, rendering them active participants who were consciously cognizant of the gestures being performed, as opposed to passive consumers or distracted passersby. As such, the context from which *Make a Salad* emerged helped to further underscore the analytical component of the work; as a Fluxus performance,

²⁴¹ Knowles and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2." n.p.

Make a Salad serves to examine crucial elements of the non-art everyday through the decontextualized performance of such gestures. The audience thus experiences these actions in a new way, and thus is provided with an apparatus through which to meditate on the significance of these mundane practices.

In so doing, Knowles is making visible the invisible labor of cooking as a form of housework. As Judith Rodenbeck notes: “The Zen principles adopted might be said in some way to typify ‘women’s work,’ understood in its conventional limitation to the domestic sphere. In Knowles’s practice, the emphasis on the concrete and mundane at once draws from and revalues such activities, redefining the everyday (and women’s work in particular) as productive, meditative, collaborative, interpretive, and even poetic.”²⁴² The work, therefore, presents a critique of the invisibility of women’s labor in the practice of the everyday, calling attention to one of the many overlooked elements of daily life that exists in a particularly gendered manner.²⁴³

Moreover, the way that Knowles employs food in her practice, and in *Make a Salad*, is explicitly distinct from the ways in which her male contemporaries do. Knowles was not the only fluxus artist to engage with food in her art practice; most notably Ben Vautier and George Maciunas regularly involved foodstuffs in their art practice. For example, in Vautier’s *Flux Mystery Food*, the artist “purchased unlabeled

²⁴² Judith Rodenbeck, “Alison Knowles,” in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). 185.

²⁴³ In many ways, this implicit critique in Knowles’ work can be understood as an articulation of the same impulse that underlies much of Mierle Laderman Ukeles work from the early 1970s, wherein she sought to explicitly call attention to the practice of domestic labor — especially cleaning work — by performing these tasks in both galleries and public spaces in her multiple “Maintenance Work” pieces.

cans of identical size in the grocery store and ate whatever was inside them — whether lychee nuts (as at the first performance) or salmon, canned sausages or sauerkraut.”²⁴⁴ Similarly, Maciunas used food in the creation of both performative/experiential works. Throughout the late 1960s, Maciunas hosted a series of “Fluxbanquets” wherein attendees would consume foods ranging from “distilled coffee, tea, and tomato and prune juices (‘all clear like water but retaining the taste’) at one meal, to eggshells filled with cheese, brewed coffee or noodles at another, two of rainbow foods at a third.”²⁴⁵ Although Knowles’ work for the most part does pre-date these endeavors, she clearly was not the only Fluxus artist to consider the role of food in daily life.

Yet, even though Knowles is not unique in using food in her work, her work is singular in its analytical and meditative approach to the role of food in daily life. Consistent throughout much of her practice with food, and particularly her performance *Make a Salad*, is an interest in examining how an individual engages with food on a daily basis and how neglected these practices can be. Maciunas and Vautier’s work with food, on the other hand, draws from the everyday in the inclusion of food items in the work, but their pieces focus much more on the experiential dynamics of food consumption, examining the relationship between presentation and taste and the sensational experience of eating. While food consumption is part of Knowles’ work — as the audience did eat the salad and soup she prepared in this performance, and the act of eating is the central element of *The Identical Lunch* —

²⁴⁴ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*. 47.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 46.

Knowles' engagement with food extends beyond simply the experience of eating and instead seeks to examine the broader social function that food performs in daily life.

In so doing, Knowles' investigation of food and food culture examines far more than the simple sensations of eating; her work serves to illustrate the complicated significance that food has within culture. Unlike her contemporaries, Knowles' examination of food is rooted in the everyday practices associated with food. The novelty of Knowles' work does not come from the consumption of unconventional items, but rather from resituating common practices into a new context, wherein the viewer is provided an opportunity to attend to the subtleties and signification of these activities in daily life. In so doing, Knowles' examination of food in general and the act of cooking more specifically serves as a form of implicit feminist critique. The work itself performs the same functions that works explicitly designed in order to perform consciousness-raising does; Knowles transforms her personal, daily experiences into a statement about the ways in which cooking and by extension gender function within society.

Martha Rosler: Art Education and Activism in New York and California

While the critique of gender and cooking in Alison Knowles' work exists as a form of implicit feminism, Martha Rosler's examination of cooking and womanhood is overt and explicit. In many ways, this explicit engagement with feminism is the result of a generational difference with regard to political ideology and artistic training. When Knowles began her work with food, "Second Wave Feminism" was a nascent political and social movement, and the central tenets that permeated into the

art world and art education had not come to bear. However, when Martha Rosler, born exactly a decade after Knowles, was beginning her career as an artist, feminism was very much in the social and political ethos, and Rosler — who has always been very politically engaged — drew upon her experiences with “Second Wave Feminism” and the Women’s Art Movement explicitly in the creation of her art. While Rosler’s engagement with social and political issues is hardly limited to examining the role of women, the issue of gender — specifically gendered labor and the position of women within a class-based hierarchy — has been central to her work for the past 40-odd years.

Martha Rosler was born to Jewish parents in Brooklyn, New York in 1944. Her father was a lawyer and she was brought up with a substantial religious education, both facts that she cites as a central to her development of a political consciousness at a young age. Growing up in a Jewish community during the McCarthy era, Rosler developed both a sense of distrust for the establishment — including and especially the government — as well as a deep-rooted sense of ethics.²⁴⁶ By the time Rosler was in high school and especially in college, she became very active within the activist circles of both the political Left. She notes in an interview with Benjamin Buchloh: “I grew up in New York, where there was a fairly active non-CP [Communist Party] left, and it included young people. Despite my early religious schooling, by high school I had friends involved in various forms of activism. American ideals of inclusiveness and democracy led to the movements of the sixties. I naturally gravitated to the left,

²⁴⁶ Martha Rosler and Craig Owens, "On Art and Artists: Martha Rosler," *Profile 2* (Spring 1986). 4-5.

first over inequality and injustice — reinforced by those religious values — then over the nuclear threat.”²⁴⁷ This activist tendency, fostered in her adolescence, would eventually serve the basis for much of Martha Rosler’s art practice. As such, her upbringing exposed her to and provided her with an inclination to critique and challenge the dominant structures and oppressive forces at play in American culture.

Beyond her inclination towards social justice, Rosler’s childhood also served to foster her artistic impulses. She recalls to Buchloh: “My family had always designate me as ‘the artist,’ not necessarily in a positive way — from the earliest grades I got in trouble for drawing in class. I was convinced I would grow up to be either an outlaw or an artist — and that they were very similar.”²⁴⁸ This early artistic impulse was in many ways nurtured by the urban environment in which she grew up. Rosler notes: “I would go to MoMA and the Whitney, which was attached to it [...] I wrote a paper in high school — where I majored in art, by the way — on Giacomo Balla. I was fascinated by futurism and surrealism — an early painting of mine showed a railroad train and tracks in the sky.”²⁴⁹ Rosler’s exposure to modern art combined with the strong arts foundation offered to her in high school provided her with the opportunity to explore her artistic inclinations and foster her interests in eventually becoming an artist.

²⁴⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, "A Conversation With Martha Rosler," in *Martha Rosler : Positions in the Life World*, ed. Martha Rosler, M. Catherine de Zegher, and Ikon Gallery. (Birmingham, England, Vienna, Austria, Cambridge, Mass.: Ikon Gallery; Generali Foundation; MIT Press, 1998). 23.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 23.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 23.

Rosler further pursued her interest in art during her undergraduate studies at Brooklyn College. Throughout her career, Rosler has been characterized as an intermedia or transmedia artist — never working solely in one form or another — and this impulse can clearly be traced back to her early artistic education in New York in the 1960s. During college, Rosler studied to become an “Abstract Expressionist painter” but also found herself beginning to experiment with new media, specifically with assemblage and photography. She recalls: “I started with assemblage. That grew out of my understanding of Pop Art. I was making small, rather ramshackly [sic] environments [...] Inside were cut-outs from magazines, photographs of interiors and political paraphernalia as well as dime-store favors.”²⁵⁰ At the same time as she was creating these assemblage works, Rosler also began working with photography at Brooklyn college under the guidance of Walter Rosenblum and his students, who ran the dark room.²⁵¹ She recalls her photographic projects of the time as “street photography, but not of people. It was photography of streets and vehicles.”²⁵² Rosler also combined this interest in photography and assemblage, along with her vested interest in political activism, into her work with photomontage and collage in the late 1960s and early 1970s, creating works like her anti-war photomontage series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967-1972) (Appendix: Figure 23), and her feminist series *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain* (1966-1972).

²⁵⁰ Rosler and Owens, "On Art and Artists: Martha Rosler." 3.

²⁵¹ Buchloh, "A Conversation With Martha Rosler." 24.

²⁵² *Ibid.* 24.

Rosler continued this exploration of new and varied media during her time in graduate school at the University of California, San Diego. Professors, and close friends of Rosler's, David and Eleanor Antin encouraged Rosler to come to UCSD for her Masters of Fine Arts. Rosler recalls that she had "in fact, entered UCSD as an abstract expressionist painter, because Ellie thought that I should show my montages to, my antiwar photomontages to get in and David said 'She will not' because I would have been rejected, so I arrived as a painter."²⁵³ Rosler did continue to paint when she arrived at UCSD, but during her time in the Visual Arts Department, she began working primarily across different kinds of media and integrating performance and video into her work.

Video, in particular, was a new art form for her (and indeed was a new art form at the time), and she learned how to cut, edit, and produce video works through an instance of collaboration between the Visual Arts department and the UCSD Medical School. At the time, the medical school was using video to document work with corpses and a number of UCSD graduate students and faculty, including David Antin, Allan Sekula, Phel Steinmetz, and Rosler, were given the opportunity to learn how to shoot and edit video. She notes: "There were a bunch of guys and me studying video in the basement of the medical school, and I had my moment where I looked around and I thought 'uhhhh' ... and then I remembered I'd studied physics in college and

²⁵³ Rosler, "Visiting Artist Lecture Series: Martha Rosler." n.p.

that I probably could do it.”²⁵⁴ Following those initial classes, Rosler began using video regularly in her practice, and continues to work in the medium to this day.

Moreover, for Rosler video art, like performance and photomontage, provided her an arena to engage with social and political commentary and to use her art as a form of activism, rather than to produce high culture. She notes:

Like many others, I was intensely interested in bypassing commercial meditations and making a more ‘organic’ or integral sort of art — or cultural work — that bore direct relation to political and theoretical transformations. Cultural work was supposed to be part of a general social transformation that was neither precious nor commodity-bound, and in which theory — theories of art and social positioning, theories of meaning, theories of production of audience and individuals — would necessarily play a part.²⁵⁵

Video, performance, and photomontage, thus provided her with a platform through which to engage with mass culture and to criticize it, drawing on the frameworks of its production and the media of its dissemination in order to call attention to the problems within society on the whole.

Her time at UCSD was further influenced by the activist tendencies of her fellow students and the conceptual framework embraced by the department. She had a very close group of colleagues from the department, including Fred Lonidier, Phel Steinmetz, and Allan Sekula, with whom she met and worked regularly throughout her time at UCSD. She recalls to Buchloh:

Everybody had an interest in critique, but we had various degrees of direct political activism and orientation. We met every week for several years and considered ourselves in many ways a working group [...] We

²⁵⁴ Ibid. n.p.

²⁵⁵ Rosler and Owens, "On Art and Artists: Martha Rosler." 13.

read political theory and art and film theory and criticism, especially *Screen* magazine, discussed contemporary work, talked and argued with David Antin, met with a literary group organized by Fred Jameson, and interacted with Herbert Marcuse and his students — who included Angela Davis — in class situations and in conjunction with the constant protest events.²⁵⁶

Rosler drew upon these experiences in her work, imbuing them with not only leftist political content, but embracing the intellectual tradition of Marxism as the basis of her social critique in her art practice.

In addition to her embrace of Marxism, Rosler was also deeply invested in feminism and women's activism during her time at UCSD, an engagement that further led her to work in new and different media. She recalls: "By the time I entered the university, I was already working with women artists, often on collective exercises, and also with a politically oriented women's liberation group. My feminist concerns led me to sculpture — I saw that the reason I wanted the work to be in the room, as opposed to on the wall, had to do with the representation of a physical presence, a physical body, and often a woman's body."²⁵⁷ Through her work within feminist groups and with other women, Rosler began engaging with the experience of womanhood, from the physicality of the body to the gendering of labor in a wide variety of media. While at UCSD, she integrated these concerns into sculptural, performance, video, photography, and installation works.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Buchloh, "A Conversation With Martha Rosler." 32.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 29.

²⁵⁸ Although we can clearly see the effect of Rosler's transcontinental migration on the kinds of media and strategies she began working with while in San Diego, it is important to note that Rosler

Moreover, Rosler's feminist activities brought her into closer contact with the broader community. She notes: "I was a member of the Women's Liberation Front at UCSD, and the group frequently got requests from high schools, community groups, and nearby colleges to send women to talk about women's liberation. I was working publicly as one of the speakers, learning to develop points in straightforward ways to get across the ideas."²⁵⁹ Her engagement with the public and her interest in conveying clearly and directly the ideas of members of her women's liberation group had a direct impact on how she chose to engage with feminism in her art practice. She worked with these groups to create and disseminate literature and visual materials in the interest of raising public consciousness to the realities of women's domination within a patriarchal society.

Moreover, she began combining her interest in Marxist theory with this feminist impulse in the creation of her work, using her art practice to reach a broad public in the hopes of inciting social change. She began using easily or

was in many ways a bi-coastal artist during the 1970s. While at UCSD, she made works that explicitly dealt with the conditions of life in Southern California — such as the *Monumental Garage Sale* (1973), *Know Your Servants* (1976), and *Tijuana Maid* (1975-6) — but she also continued to make works in and about New York City, as well, such as the photographic series *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*. Rosler continually traveled between the two locales and her work clearly demonstrates both an interest and influence of the distinct ways that art functions and circulates in both regions. As such, in reading these works, we must attend to the fact that her projects during her years living in San Diego are neither completely of one ethos or the other, but rather are emblematic of a bicoastal impulse and exchange.

²⁵⁹ Rosler and Owens, "On Art and Artists: Martha Rosler." 17.

unconventionally disseminated media — such as video works, public performances, mail pieces, and printed materials —in order to bring her work to a public beyond the art world and bring this population into the space of the gallery in the hopes of inciting deeper contemplation.²⁶⁰ She also turned her attention explicitly to the class positioning of women in American society and using these works to call attention to the gendering of labor, space, and daily praxis in the interest of challenging the iniquitous conditions that render women subordinate.

The Gourmet and the Housewife: Food Culture in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s

In order to fully understand the relationship between food practices and explicit feminism in Rosler’s work, we must therefore return to our examination of food culture in midcentury America, particularly the history of domestic American cooking. As previously noted, American food culture in the 1960s was marked by a significant transformation with regard to the practice of “gourmet cooking.” In many ways, the 1960s can be understood as a moment of revolution for American eaters. On the one hand, culinary mass media — such as television, magazines, and cookbooks — provided a new class of Americans with the opportunity to experience what had

²⁶⁰ Rosler herself has said on several occasions that this was the driving force behind her performance *Monumental Garage Sale*, wherein she hosted a garage sale in the University Art Gallery at UCSD. Rosler advertised the sale in a wide variety of media, including the student newspaper and the *Pennysaver* in order to draw “people who had little or no relationship to the university.” In so doing, Rosler sought to present this diverse, non-university/non-art world audience with a work aimed at challenging the delineation of gender-roles within the market place and the issue of consumerism and commodity fetishism in American culture. She states: “I wanted to make a point about the wholeness, the all-togetherness, of a woman in the world, in our culture, as opposed to a male self, which makes a separation between the activities of life — private life and public life. I wanted there to be no possibility of separating out a public role from a private role in this garage sale.” For more information see: *ibid.* 17 and Rosler, “Visiting Artist Lecture Series: Martha Rosler.” n.p.

previously been limited to a select few. While the expansion and democratization of gourmet culture in the 1950s was characterized by an unabashed struggle between trained chefs and can-opener cooks, during the 1960s, the war over home cooked haute cuisine was unequivocally won by the former. In many respects, this victory was ultimately secured by the most iconic figure in midcentury American cooking: Julia Child.

While Child was by no means the first American chef to reach out to American home cooks through the television — both James Beard and Dione Lucas had hosted television programs in the 1940s and 1950s — Child’s program was watershed in its broad appeal and its approach to the subject of good cooking. As Kathleen Collins notes: “She was the first to present a purely food-centered cooking show as opposed to a homemaking show, and at the same time, as if by accident, a host-centered cooking show.”²⁶¹ Not only did she present her viewers with enticing food, but Child herself was interesting to watch, and her personality was central to her popularity as well. Julia Child was unquestionably a culinary giant, both literally and figuratively. She had an unmistakable presence in the kitchen, due, at least in part, to her distinctive voice, her standard costume — a button down blouse with a button reading “L’Ecole des Trois Gourmandes,” a black half apron, and a string of pearls — and her formidable height of six foot two inches.

Despite her formal training and her personal comfort in the kitchen, Child is probably best known for being recognizably human and relatable while performing her

²⁶¹ Kathleen Collins, *Watching What We Eat : The Evolution of Television Cooking Shows* (New York: Continuum, 2009). 73.

cooking demonstrations. She imbued her tasks with levity and humor, such as when in a Season 7 Episode 14 she introduced “The Chicken Sisters” as if she was announcing a beauty pageant. One by one, she introduced “Miss Broiler, Miss Fryer, Miss Roaster, Miss Caponet, Miss Stewer, and Old Madam Hen,” before noting “But we’re spotlighting Miss Roaster of the year, measuring in at 14 15 14. We’re roasting Miss Chicken, here today on the French Chef,” after which the theme music to the program was replaced by a symphony of clucking hens.²⁶² Not only did Child make cooking seem like an enjoyable task in and of itself, she also was effective at demystifying the idea that perfection is a key ingredient in a good meal. Child made many mistakes herself in the kitchen, both on and off camera.²⁶³ Most famously, in the first season episode “The Potato Show,” Child missed the pan in the process of flipping a potato pancake, and remarked, “Well that didn’t go very well. See when I flipped it, I didn’t have the courage to do it the way I should have. You can always pick it up when you’re alone in the kitchen. Who is going to see? But the only way you learn how to flip things is just to flip them.”²⁶⁴ Perfection in cooking, to Child, meant creating food that was good to eat, and she maintained through all her demonstrations that presentation was always secondary to taste, and that mistakes were essential to the

²⁶² “To Roast a Chicken,” in *The French Chef* (Boston, MA: WGBH, 1971). n.p.

²⁶³ Child was a terrible cook until her mid-30s, although she became determined to improve due partially to her relationship with her husband Paul Child, who was something of an epicurean himself. Child began her formal study of cooking at the Cordon-Bleu in 1948, and it was her training there that led her ultimately to become one of the most accomplished chefs in American history. For more information see: Joan Reardon, *M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and Alice Waters : Celebrating the Pleasures of the Table* (New York: Harmony Books, 1994). And: Laura Shapiro, *Julia Child*, Penguin Lives Series (New York: Lipper/Viking, 2007).

²⁶⁴ Julia Child, “Fan Mail,” in *Julia Child Papers, 1925-1993* (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA). n.p.

learning process. Her distinctive voice and her awkward mannerisms — particularly her characteristic clumsiness, which was frequently parodied including Dan Ackroyd’s famous Saturday Night Live sketch — endeared her to her viewers and made the subject of gourmet cooking seem more approachable.

Another significant aspect of Child’s popularity and legacy is the fact that her approach to the subject of food was generally genderless. Unlike her television predecessors, who spoke specifically to housewives attempting to feed their families, Child favored the use of personal pronouns and appealed to the traditional epicurean nature of food. She presented cooking as a noble pursuit for all, highlighting its ability to increase one’s *joie de vivre*. As such, from the very beginning of the show’s broadcast history, men were prominent members of her audience. Among the many fan letters she received in the early years of the television program, men were some of her most ardent supporters, and this appeal was noted to the network. For example, in 1963, the producers compiled a document 28 excerpts from fan letters on three separate episodes. Of the contributors, five were men writing on their own, and one couple wrote collectively, all to praise Child’s entertaining expertise in presenting the art of French cooking.²⁶⁵ Child’s program appealed to whole families, who watched both to learn and to savor. One viewer, Mort Friedlander, wrote to Child in 1964 to convey his satisfaction with her recipe for “Turkey Ballotine” and to express “how much we all love you and your broadcasts, others of which have led us to experiment too. Even my eldest boy, not at all interested in the cooking end of eating, watches

²⁶⁵ Ibid. n.p.

too.”²⁶⁶ As Kathleen Collins notes: “Child was the main attraction on public television in the 1960s [...] Child appealed to a relatively diverse cross-section, given the typical viewers of other types of cooking shows.”²⁶⁷ As such, Child’s portrayal of domestic cooking as an art form rather than a woman’s chore helped to open the home kitchen to a new host of participants, and in turn provided a significant shift away from the maternal cooking rhetoric of the 1950s towards a more intellectual approach, which characterized the “gourmet revolution” of the 1960s.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of gourmet cooking — both in terms of who prepares it and what is considered haute cuisine — underwent a significant transformation. On the one hand television and celebrity Chefs such as Julia Child and James Beard, and later Jacques Pepin and Graham Kerr actively sought to bring good gourmet cooking to the average American home in the form of traditional French cuisine. At the same time, the supremacy of French cooking as the paragon of haute cuisine began to wane, being replaced by more exotic cuisines like Chinese, Mexican, regional-Italian, Japanese, and Indian food, just to name a few. In many ways, the embrace of these “foreign” foods functioned to indicate the refinement of an individual’s palate and the pastiche of being an “adventurous eater.” Eating ethnic was considered a sign of cosmopolitanism and of a form of epicurean

²⁶⁶ Ibid. n.p.

²⁶⁷ Collins, *Watching What We Eat : The Evolution of Television Cooking Shows*. 88.

intellectualism. By Harvey Levenstein notes, “by [the end of the 1960s] ethnic food had become the subject of almost as much food snobbery as French food.”²⁶⁸

To be a true gourmand in the 1960s meant not only eating foreign cuisines, but also cooking them. As Harvey Levenstein notes: “The ethnic food boom was also connected to the rebirth of cooking as a status symbol in the 1960s.”²⁶⁹ Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a massive increase in the number of publications focused solely on ethnic home cooking. According to Levenstein, “The trend in cookbook publishing, said *Time* in 1977, was ‘towards the more esoteric books on specialized foreign cuisines ... The best cooks are learning Indian, Indonesian, Indo-Chinese and Chinese (especially Szechuan and Hunan) and Japanese recipes.”²⁷⁰ To be a well-rounded gourmand in the 1960s and 1970s meant to not only embracing foreign cuisines, but also a dedicated effort to recreate them at home. Just as many other avenues of midcentury high culture involved the process of culture shopping in order to indicate a certain worldliness, so too did American foodways. Drawing upon the experiences and the desires of middle-class Americans and providing them with both the physical and educational resources to reproduce haute-cuisine at home, midcentury culinary media facilitated the expansion of the gourmet to a new class of people, and with it, provided opportunities for a new class of people to take pride in their culinary endeavors. As such, the rise of ethnic cuisine along with its French counterpart, did contribute to the re-gendering to some extent of the domestic

²⁶⁸ Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003). 218.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 217.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 219.

kitchen. That is, because of the status afforded to gourmet cooking and because of the long legacy of masculinity in the realm of professional cooking, the expanded and democratized gourmet culture did facilitate men's entrance into the home kitchen.

Yet, just because the gourmet did provide men with the opportunity to take pleasure in domestic cooking with impunity towards their adherence to gender norms does not mean that home cooking was suddenly de-gendered. On the contrary, as Martha Rosler notes of culinary media in the 1960s and 1970s,

it was the first time when pictures of food and not only food, but of the nice women who prepare it for us often... the *Time Life* series was the main example for me at the time. The lovely brownskinned women sitting below you handing you the food in Morocco or in Mexico or wherever it is, and this was a persistent trope, so on the one hand you have the architectural food and on the other hand you have the ladies who serve it. But then there is the reader who is supposed to be the servant who makes the food and then jumps across the consumer-producer divide.²⁷¹

Because women by and large are in charge of home cooking on a global scale, and because preserving authenticity was central to this gourmet ethnic culinary media, the images associated with haute cuisine by and large reinforced the gendered stereotypes that dictated women's roles within the kitchen. Moreover, such presumptions were deeply entrenched in the American psyche and even as more and more women were continuing their educations and working outside the home, the prevailing sentiment of the American public was that women were "better suited" to domestic labor.

²⁷¹ Rosler, "Visiting Artist Lecture Series: Martha Rosler." n.p.

Starve a Rat Today!: Second Wave Feminism's Challenges to Domestic Labor

The resurgence of maternal rhetoric and the championing of “traditional” domestic femininity in the interwar and postwar periods had created a climate wherein the concept of housework was a central component of American womanhood, regardless of a woman’s other interests or pursuits. As Christine Stansell notes: “Even the kindest of men in the 1960s seemed to feel in their very bones that women were born to do housework and they were not, that they, the men, had no reason to wipe off the stove; no know-how to wash dishes; no skill to diaper the baby properly or entertain fussy children.”²⁷² Among the many issues raised by women involved in Second Wave feminist movements, the question of domestic labor was central to women across several of the various factions. From Friedan’s assertions about the oppressive conditions perpetuated through the feminine mystique to the symbolic domestic labor-force walk out during the Women’s Strike for Equality in 1970, the encoding of housework as a fundamental aspect of American womanhood was one of the major issues touted by feminists in the Women’s Liberation movement.

Feminist activists and thinkers were not united in their answer to who should be responsible for the performance of domestic labor in general. On the one hand, some feminists believed that domestic labor should be a shared endeavor. For instance, in her essay “Marriage Agreement,” first published in a feminist journal in 1970 and then re-published by *Redbook Magazine* in 1971, novelist and Radical feminist Alix Kates Shulman detailed her solution to the iniquitous division of labor

²⁷² Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 250.

she came to feel in her marriage. Examining from her “raised-consciousness,” Shulman a clear system for dividing up labor amongst partners, in which “[t]he Job Breakdown was divided into two categories, Children and Housework. [...] The Schedule divided everything strictly and efficiently and the ‘Principles’ declared that the work that brought in more money (that is, the husband’s) was not automatically more valuable and exempt from the claims of the family than the wife’s, and that ‘each member of the family has an equal right to his/her own time, work, value, choices.’”²⁷³ In delineating the duties of domestic labor as such, Shulman created a contract that would ensure her own rights within her marriage and that would help undermine the cultural predisposition to assign all domestic labor to women. In so doing, Shulman promoted the idea that gender equality is dependent upon equality in the home and beyond it.

While the division of domestic labor seemed appealing to some feminists, other women thought that a revaluation of housework was necessary in order to bring about gender equality. The feminist group Wages For Housework, which was founded initially in Italy and then expanded in the United States with the help of Marxist feminist scholar and activist Silvia Federici, proposed that the issue of gender inequality was the explicit result of the devaluation of women’s labor. As she noted in 1975:

It is important to recognize that when we speaking of housework we are not speaking of a job like other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation and the subtlest violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class. [...] By

²⁷³ Ibid. 251.

denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all, it has gotten a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: 'Yes, darling, you are a real woman'). At the same time, it has also disciplined the male worker, by making 'his' woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy and most of all loving servants of the 'working class.'²⁷⁴

In their writing and activism, *Wages for Housework* presented the case that women's exploitation is the direct result of a capitalist system that depends on the performance of both waged and unwaged labor, and that has effectively entreated the performance of unwaged labor through the construction and perpetuation of a particular gender ideology.

The solution, therefore, put forth by Marxist feminists, like the members of *Wages for Housework*, is to challenge the role given to women within the socio-economic structure of Western capitalism. Federici writes:

When we struggle for wages for housework, we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role. [...] Wages for housework, then is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us and consequently more favorable to the unity of the class. [...] the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Federici, "Wages against Housework." 17.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 19.

As such, the demand of organizations like Wages for Housework was to challenge the invisibility of women's domestic labor and to advocate for its valuation within the economic system. The result of such actions, therefore, would serve to unsettle the tacit assumptions about women's predisposition towards housework and create a system wherein these efforts were understood as labor outright.

Regardless of their proposed solutions, feminists ranging from Shulman to Federici to Friedan all sought to expose the ways in which the gendering of housework is intrinsically oppressive to women. As Christine Stansell argues:

The conclusion was obvious: The pretense that somehow housework was suitably female was a way men veiled the facts of exploitation. It was one of women's liberation's most potent ideas, with immediate consequences for gender relationships. There was a political economy to domestic labor, an organized system of power, not just a happenstance arrangement dictated by individuals' different skills ('I never learned to use the washing machine and you did'). The insights produced a revelatory account of just how much housework handicapped women.²⁷⁶

As part of their attack on the ideology of feminized labor, second-wave feminists argued that cooking was a fundamental tenet of women's oppression. As one woman's sign said during the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality: "Oppressed Women: Don't Cook Dinner! Starve A Rat Today!" (Appendix: Figure 24) The kitchen, long understood to be the heart of the domestic realm became a site of resistance; the space once rhetorically understood to be a woman's domain was thus transformed into the site of her domination.

²⁷⁶ Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise : 1792 to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2010). 249.

The *Semiotics of the Kitchen*: Food Discourse in the Work of Martha Rosler

Having thus examined the discourse surrounding cooking, class, and gender in America during the 1960s and 1970s, let us now return to the question of significance in Martha Rosler's examination of food and cooking during the 1970s. In many ways, her projects with food from this time were born out of an interest in both of the challenges of second wave feminism and the consequences of the democratization of gourmet culture. Of her work with food, Rosler asserts: "it was multiply determined, both in relationship to an analysis that was derived from the women's movement [...]. It contained, as well, an analysis of the world system — I'd done quite a lot of reading about, on the one hand, culinary history and the aesthetics of food production and, on the other, the concrete structures of imperialism and revolution and their relation to the patterns of food production and consumption."²⁷⁷ As such, Rosler's work with food can be read as critique of gender, class, and the intersection thereof; in works such as *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Rosler uses food as a means to examine the position of women in the labor economy as well as the ideological constructions and constrictions that render women subordinate within a patriarchal system.

The issue of gendered labor is of central importance in Rosler's 1975 video work *Semiotics of The Kitchen*. A roughly six-minute long video, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* features Rosler in a rather small home kitchen, standing directly in front of the oven/stove, refrigerator, and a bookshelf adorned with a few items of kitchenware, cookbooks, and a sign that reads "mother" in all capitals. Before Rosler is a table with

²⁷⁷ Rosler and Owens, "On Art and Artists: Martha Rosler." 22-23.

a variety of kitchen tools and cooking appliances laid out as if she were going to use them to demonstrate specific cooking techniques. She begins by putting on an apron, naming the article as she does so, and then proceeds to identify a different appliance/dish for each letter of the alphabet, demonstrating its potential use after reciting the name. In most cases, Rosler's expository gestures are impractical in nature, involving violent gesticulations that are both loud and absurdist. She continues through the alphabet until the letter U, at which point she picks up a large meat fork and a chef's knife and proceeds to make the remaining letters with her arms in the air, excepting the letter Z, which she cuts in the air with her knife in the style of the famed television masked man Zorro.

The video itself, like much of Rosler's work, is predicated on the employment of mass media conventions in order to explore and unsettle the familiar rhetoric surrounding certain social and political issues. Rosler clearly quotes the format of cooking shows — such as Julia Child's extremely popular *The French Chef* — in an effort to provide a familiar framework for her viewers that her actions will disrupt. *Semiotics of the Kitchen* features Rosler in a rather small home kitchen, standing behind a table with a variety of kitchen tools and cooking appliances laid out as if she were going to use them to demonstrate specific cooking techniques. Rosler's scene thus calls to mind Julia Child's Cambridge Kitchen, which was strategically designed in order to engage with the rhetoric and form of home cooking. Like Child, she stands behind a table and in front of the oven and stove as she begins her absurdist cooking lesson. By incorporating aspects of a popular television series into her work, Rosler

engages with a predetermined set of expectations for the nature of such programming. Rosler primes a specific schema within her viewer, which she proceeds to subvert throughout the course of the work.

As the title suggests, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* is fundamentally about the connotations of various kitchenwares and their status as signifiers. Yet, Rosler consistently undermines the conventional usage of many of the articles she presents to her viewers, forcing her viewers to reconsider the significance of each item. Rosler's exploration of the symbolic aspect of each utensil or dish functions as a criticism of the gendered implications of cooking within a larger cultural ideology. By alluding to and ultimately undermining the conventional understanding of cooking implements, Rosler criticizes the role that cooking plays in the social discourse of midcentury America. Through her engagement with many of the items in the video, she demonstrates quite clearly that cooking wares have the potential to be violent articles. As such, she almost weaponizes even the most mundane cooking utensil — such as a ladle or whisk — and thus renders them into symbols of oppression, much in the same way that Friedan renders the domestic kitchen into a warzone or site of a forced occupation. Furthermore, the awkwardness of her gestures and the rigidity of her body as she engages with many of the items unsettles the naturalism with which women are expected, by virtue of their femininity, to approach cooking as a task. In so doing, Rosler illustrates that these assumptions about women's intrinsic culinary ability and innate comfort in the kitchen are premised on a fallacy and are the result of cultural constructions of gendered labor.

Rosler's absurdist parody of Child's programming therefore constitutes a form of explicit feminist art; Rosler created the work for the expressed purpose of calling attention to the iniquitous treatment of women and the to critique the prevailing gender order. Unlike Alison Knowles — whose performances were intended to call attention to avenues of daily life in accordance with the principles of Fluxus, which resulted in the illustration of gendered preconceptions about cooking as a form of daily practice — Rosler intended, first and foremost, to raise public consciousness to the ways in which the inextricable link between cooking and womanhood functioned to maintain a patriarchal gender order.

Like other works of consciousness-raising, Rosler's engagement with this subject matter was derived from her own experiences. She notes: "I saw my relationship, most women's relationship, to food as a kind of bondage [...] I had become very involved with cooking since I'd moved out of my parent's house, where I'd never cooked an egg. I realized that I'd let food preparation eat up a lot of time, energy and thought. Typically, I'd thought it absolutely basic for a wife and mother to be a good cook and nurturer."²⁷⁸ Rosler used her own preoccupations with cooking and her own experiences with the patriarchal ideology that rendered cooking into a central component of ideal or normative femininity into art that explicitly challenged the creation of these affiliations. As such, Rosler used her art practice to call attention to the issues of domestic labor and to illustrate how the discourse surrounding housework — particularly the gendering thereof and the rendering of women's labor

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 23.

as economically invisible — served to maintain a patriarchal capitalist system. In so doing, Rosler hoped to challenge this conception by illustrating in works like *Semiotics of the Kitchen* the fact that this connection is cultural rather than biological.

Conclusion

In *Make a Salad* and *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Alison Knowles and Martha Rosler use their art practices in order to examine the significance of cooking — a highly fraught component of gendered labor — in the practice of daily life. Although their expressed intentions differ, as did their relationships to feminism as a social, political, and artistic movement, during the 1960s and 1970s, both artists used their art practice to examine how food culture in general — and cooking in particular — is related to the social construction and lived reality of American womanhood. Moreover, in so doing, both artists presented a significant challenge to the prevailing assumptions about a “natural” and inextricable link between womanhood and cooking.

While there is an undeniable affiliation between gender and certain forms of domestic labor — and especially cooking — works like Knowles’ and Rosler’s serve to illustrate the degree to which this affiliation is the result of discursive pressures and ideological constructions of gender. By examining these works in conjunction with the prevailing discourse surrounding cooking and gendered labor, we can see how this relationship has been constructed and transformed over time. We can therefore understand how and why women’s labor has been rendered invisible in the patriarchal capitalist system and we can examine the way in which culinary media has

perpetuated the mythological construction of cooking as a form of femininity in order to ensure its unremunerated performance.

Moreover, by examining these works within their historical context — both in terms of art and food history — we can see how different women artists engaged with the issue of gender in distinct ways. On the one hand, some women artists, like Martha Rosler use gendered content in order to create works that are explicitly intended to be feminist; these women use their art practice in order to pose a specific challenge to the patriarchal strictures that have and do subjugate women. On the other hand, many women artists, like Knowles make work that deals with gendered issues, even though that is not their stated intent. Their works do, in turn, facilitate consciousness-raising, regardless of the fact that this is an unintended byproduct. By analyzing these two works in conjunction with one another, we can see some of the diversity that exists within feminist art practices.

Finally, by examining the work of women artists from two subsequent generations, we can see some of the distinctions within women's art practices throughout the almost two decades that comprised the so-called Second Wave of feminism. Through exploring these differences, we can understand the factors that contributed to the career trajectories of each of these women, highlighting the educational opportunities that helped and hindered them as they pursued their professional training in the arts. We can also see the difference in ideological approach to art that occurred with the shift from one generation to the other. While both Rosler and Knowles engaged with experimental and intermedia art forms, the impetus and the

politics thereof was radically different. Although Fluxus had some anti-establishment tendencies, Knowles examinations of the everyday were far more ingrained in the principles of Zen and chance than for any overt or explicit political endeavor. For Rosler, the examination of daily life and the practices that comprise it was intended to challenge the social and political order that maintained gender and class-based distinctions and that served to subjugate one group to another.

As such, by taking these works together, and by examining them in relation to the larger debates surrounding the subject of food and food culture during this moment of American history, we can further understand that feminism and gender critique is neither singular nor ubiquitous. Moreover, in so doing, we can understand how two women, from different generations, backgrounds, and political affiliations have both created work that directly challenges the way in which the social construction of gender extends far beyond biological roles and into the cultural, or in Levi-Strauss's terms, how gender transcends the realm of the raw, occupying instead the domain of the cooked.

Chapter 3: Serving

For centuries, women's servitude has been considered a central component of their femininity. Like cooking, the reorganization of women's labor under emergent (industrial) capitalism further cemented the ideas that there is something intrinsically feminine about the act of serving others. In many ways, service can be understood as an extension of caretaking, a form of feminized behavior with its root in biological maternity and that has historically fallen under the auspices of the "lady of the home." While variations on who performs labor exist depending on class and race, women have, for centuries, been the managers of the housework that is carried out within their own homes.²⁷⁹ With the decline of servant labor in the twentieth century, service labor has been folded into the forms of labor reserved for women. The feminization of

²⁷⁹ The relationship between service and femininity is deeply complicated. Class and racial factors are particularly pronounced when addressing the issue of women's roles within service, especially domestic service. Poor women and women of color disproportionately have performed the vast majority of all service labor since for centuries. At the same time, the management of domestic service has, for the most part, fallen under the auspices of the lady of the house. Even in the case where the Butler is the senior-most member of the household staff and in certain contexts footmen have primarily functioned as servers in the most upper class of homes, aristocratic women still, for the most part, are considered in charge of the management of service labor. Moreover, while there are masculine arenas in domestic service, these positions were — and continue to be — only found in the highest echelons of society, and are therefore not representative of service labor on the whole. On the contrary, women — primarily in the role of housekeepers, cooks, nannies, and maids — have by and large made up the vast majority of the historical labor force involved in domestic service.

service labor even stepped beyond the boundaries of the domestic space and into industrial service. Both within the context of professional domestic service and in the restaurant industry, the process of serving is heavily gendered.

The femininity of domestic service is not simply related to the nature of the household tasks performed by women, it is fundamentally related to the idea that women are to be subservient and subordinate to men. In the post-war era, there was a great resurgence of the rhetoric of female subservience in relation to women's migration back into the home following their contribution to the American workforce during World War II. The discourse of neo-domesticity championed women's service in the home as essential to the American way of life during the Cold War. Housework was considered to be a woman's part of the bargain when it came to the home economy. Her husband would leave the home daily to work in order to provide for her and the children, and she was expected to maintain an orderly home and to serve him a hot, home-cooked meal upon his return.

Members of the Women's Liberation Movement extensively criticized this rhetoric of female servitude in their actions and literature. Recognizing that the discourse of domesticity created a system that perpetuated the oppression of women by men, Second Wave Feminists openly criticized the ideology of servitude as a part of their criticism of domestic labor.²⁸⁰ They used consciousness-raising as a means to

²⁸⁰ Since the rise of industrialism and the development of clear and separate gendered spheres, housework as a form of female labor has been understood as a form of invisible work, one that does not contribute to the overall income of the home. As such, the laborious nature of housework has been written off as inconsequential since it does not provide the requisite capital essential to provide for the needs of the family. While the discourse on homemaking has varied over time, during the Cold War era

illustrate to women nationwide the oppressive nature of the normative femininity of the time, imploring women to recognize that the notion of female subordination was inscribed in the actions and expectations of daily life symbolized in the form of domestic service. Their goal was to make women (and by extension the greater society) aware that women's oppression is perpetuated in the rhetoric of female virtue.

The issue of women's servitude was a central focus for several women artists and collectives working in the Los Angeles women's art community in the 1970s. Many of the women artists involved in feminist art organizations like the Los Angeles Woman's Building and the Feminist Art Program at CalArts used their art work to address the issue of female servitude in domestic labor, drawing on their experiences with feminist activism, pedagogy, and theory in order to create works that were meant to explicitly raise public consciousness to the subjugation of women's labor in society. Among these artists and collectives, both Judy Chicago and the performance collaborative The Waitresses, raised the issue of women's food service labor in their work in order to address broader concerns of women's mistreatment in society. In this chapter, I will examine the way that both Judy Chicago and the Waitresses examine the nature service and servitude in the cultural delineation of gender roles. In particular, I will compare and contrast how this conception of service exists both within a domestic and industrial context and the common origin of these two distinct feminized roles.

in the United States housekeeping was discussed in the terms of feminine duty, comprising an essential part of the conception of American womanhood.

Moreover, I will illustrate how each artist or collective uses the language and format of women's servitude in order to challenge broader issues of gender inequality, both historically and during the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, I will examine the ways in which Judy Chicago occupies the position of the server in *The Dinner Party*; specifically, I will analyze the ways in which the format of a dinner party functions as a form of honorific memorial to women's contributions to history and how such a format is deeply entangled in the cultural delineation of women's roles in society. Moreover, I will illustrate how Chicago engages with the issues of women's invisible labor in the creation of the work; I will delineate how her use of craft and her performance of certain codified practices of hostessing calls attention to the labor that has shifted from the work of a servant class to the inherent role of the housewife with the decline of service labor in the first half of the twentieth century. Having done so, I will then compare the role of women within domestic service to that of women working in the food service industry, elucidating the historical trajectory from one to the other through which waitressing became a particularly feminized form of labor. I will then examine the way that the performance art collective The Waitresses explored the significant social ills perpetuated by the feminization and thus devaluation of food service labor in their performance series *Ready to Order?*, arguing that they used their performances to raise public consciousness to the iniquitous treatment of women both in the restaurant business and beyond it, using the figure of the waitress as a metonymy for all women. In so doing, I will illustrate the ways in which women artists working in a familiar context and environment have used dramatically different

methods in order to illustrate the problematic relationship between femininity and food service.

Judy Chicago and Feminist Art

When Judy Chicago began working on her monumental installation *The Dinner Party* in 1974, she had already been a working artist and educator for over a decade. Born Judy Cohen in Chicago on July 20, 1939, Judy Chicago began studying art at a young age at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). In 1956, at the age of 17, she was awarded a one of three scholarships to the Junior School at SAIC based on her submission of a sketchbook.²⁸¹ After high school, Judy Cohen moved to the West Coast and pursued both a BFA and then an MFA at the University of California, Los Angeles. Chicago recalls “I graduated from UCLA in 1964 [...] with a master’s degree in painting and sculpture. A part-time teaching job, along with the occasional sale, allowed me to spend a minimum of sixty hours a week in my studio.”²⁸² From the outset, Chicago was determined to be a working artist and made a commitment to putting in the arduous labor and sacrifices that such a pursuit entails.

In addition to fostering her interest in the arts, Chicago’s upbringing fostered a deep-seated political consciousness. Her parents were avowed “political radicals” and they continually encouraged Chicago and her younger brother, Ben, to “make a difference.”²⁸³ She remembers: “my mother and father, children of the Depression, were caught up in the revolutionary politics that persuaded many intellectuals to think,

²⁸¹ Judy Chicago, "Biographical Information," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502). n.p.

²⁸² *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. 8.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* 7.

wrongly, that the adoption of Soviet-style Communism would transform a world full of injustices into some type of utopia with equality for all.”²⁸⁴ Although retrospectively, Chicago has expressed some trepidation about her parents’ zealous idealism, she does credit her parents with her early desires for self-sufficiency and her pursuit of gender equality. Her upbringing as a “red-diaper baby” did instill within Chicago a sense that her gender was not intrinsically a hindrance to her achieving success. Like Alison Knowles, the encouragement Chicago received from her parents — due in large part to their political affiliations — helped to insulate her early on against the cultural pressures that for generations have hindered women’s advancement in the arts.

Yet, even in spite of her persistent work ethic and her belief in gender equality, Chicago encountered a great deal of resistance and sexism as she began her career as an artist. She notes: “During this period, I discovered with some shock that not everyone shared my parents’ belief in equal rights for women. As a result, I spend a considerable amount of time battling the art world’s insistence that one couldn’t be a woman and an artist too.”²⁸⁵ Chicago’s struggle against the masculinist art world was further exacerbated by the artistic climate of Los Angeles in the mid-1960s, wherein the dominant art styles were assemblage and finish fetish sculpture. As Laura Meyer notes, “As a student and young artist in Los Angeles in the 1960s, [...] Chicago had to negotiate her path in an environment that rewarded technological know-how, formal mastery of materials, and an attitude of cool machismo. All of the best-known artists

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 7.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. 8.

in Los Angeles were men, and women students were generally not encouraged to pursue professional careers.”²⁸⁶ As such, Chicago became acutely aware of the many obstacles that stood in her way on the basis of her gender.

Chicago did aggressively pursue a career in the arts despite these challenges, and she began working in the same styles and media as her men contemporaries, primarily minimal sculpture and finish fetish. Like many other Los Angeles finish fetish artists, Chicago began working with industrial materials, learning to use spray paint and automobile paints by enrolling in “auto-body school, where she was the only woman in a class of 250 men.”²⁸⁷ She created minimal sculptures out of a wide variety of resins and polymers, that were in many ways comparable to the work of light and space and finish fetish artists including Larry Bell, DeWain Valentine, Peter Alexander, and John McCracken. As such, Chicago enjoyed a particular amount of acclaim early on in her career. As Meyer notes: “Her Solo debut at the Rolf Nelson Gallery in Los Angeles in 1966 received a favorable review in *Artforum*, which compared her work to the minimalist structures of Donald Judd and Robert Morris. Her 1965 *Rainbow Pickett*, consisting of six rainbow-colored rectangular columns leaning against a wall in descending order of length, was included in the 1966 *Primary Structures* show [...] New York, the first formal group exhibition of minimalist

²⁸⁶ Laura Meyer, "From Finish Fetish to Feminism: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in California Art History," in *Sexual Politics : Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones, Laura Cottingham, and Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996). 52.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 52.

sculpture in the United States.” (Appendix: Figure 25)²⁸⁸ Yet Chicago was primarily able to achieve this success because her work — like that of the women abstract expressionists discussed in chapter 1 — avoided all apparent engagement with gender or femininity; since her work was comparable, or even indistinguishable from her male counterparts, Chicago was able to be garner some initial critical success.

But Chicago was not content to simply make minimal and “gender-neutral” (or even masculine) art works. She notes: “One challenge was that, in order to be taken seriously as an artist in L.A., I had severed my artmaking style from my personal impulses as a woman.”²⁸⁹ Recognizing this disconnect, Chicago began examining forms, shapes, and colors that were more closely aligned with the feminine experience around the year 1970. As Laura Meyer notes of a number of minimalist-oriented paintings (Appendix: Figure 26) and sculptures displayed in an exhibition of Chicago’s work at the California State University, Fullerton art gallery:

The show included the Pasadena Lifesavers, [...] a series of large acrylic-on-Plexiglas spray paintings of octagonal inner-tube forms; several groupings of [...] small, vacuum formed acrylic Domes, and photographic documentation of the pyrotechnic Atmospheres, huge, evanescent clouds of colored smoke released by the deployment of fireworks. According to Chicago, the rounded forms, melting colors, and smoldering explosions of the artwork in the Fullerton exhibition were all intended to symbolize aspects of female anatomy and fertility and to related women’s capacity for multiple orgasms.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 52.

²⁸⁹ Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. 8.

²⁹⁰ Meyer, "From Finish Fetish to Feminism: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in California Art History." 53.

In creating these works, Chicago decided to eschew the masculinist tradition of minimalism and abstraction and use these styles in order to explicitly examine issues of femininity and the female body.

The impetus for this transformation of Chicago's work came from her engagement with feminist activism and theory. She notes: "I read early feminist literature with something akin to what a drowning woman might feel when spotting a life preserver. [...] Inspired by the early women's liberation literature and my own research into women's history, I set out to forge a different type of artmaking practices, one in which my gender didn't have to be either excised or concealed."²⁹¹ Having thus had her own consciousness-raised, Chicago set out to create work that was both inspired by this experience and could facilitate such an impulse in other women. In order to best accomplish this goal, Chicago felt it necessary to leave Los Angeles and find a teaching position somewhere else.²⁹² In 1969, she accepted a teaching position at Fresno State College (now CSU Fresno), where she established the first-ever Feminist Art Program (FAP). She notes: "The Fresno course was structured so that the students were able to devote most of their class time for a year to learning how to be artists while engaging in an intensive inquiry into women's history, art, and literature."²⁹³ The Fresno course proved to be immensely successful leading "nine out of the fifteen students became professional artists."²⁹⁴ For Chicago, the course also provided a prolonged opportunity to develop feminist imagery and themes

²⁹¹ Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. 20.

²⁹² Ibid. 8.

²⁹³ Ibid. 9.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 9.

in her work and helped her to develop her own activist art practice. Following the first year in Fresno, Chicago helped to move the course from Fresno to the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, CA, where she partnered with Miriam Schapiro as co-directors.

After helping to found the FAP at both Fresno State and CalArts, Chicago went on to collaborate with designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and art historian Arlene Raven — all of whom at the time were faculty at CalArts — in founding the Los Angeles Woman's Building and the Feminist Studio Workshop. As Terry Wolverton notes:

frustrated with the limitations of working to educate women students within the confines of a male institution, Chicago, de Bretteville, and Raven left CalArts to found an independent school for women artists: The Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW). The FSW focused not only on the development of art-making skills (in visual arts, writing, performance art, video, design, and the printing arts), but also on the development of women's identities and sensibilities, and feminist practices of art-making, and the translation of these elements into their art.²⁹⁵

Chicago, de Bretteville, and Raven sought to develop not only an independent feminist art program, but also an institution wherein feminist art could be more directly engaged with the “burgeoning women's community, and the three looked for a space that could be shared with other organizations and enterprises,” eventually transforming a site that had previously housed part of the Chouinard Institute of the Arts (the precursor to CalArts) into the Los Angeles Woman's Building.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Wolverton, "Introduction." 23.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 23.

While Chicago was integral to the founding of the Los Angeles Woman's Building, she eventually stepped down from her duties there in order to focus her time and efforts full time on what would eventually become her best known work: *The Dinner Party*. She notes: "For a short while, I was happy. Yet, even though the Women's [sic] Building provided me with a context and a sense of belonging that I had rarely enjoyed, within a year I had resigned. [...] I was motivated by a burning need to devote myself entirely to artmaking. [...] Moreover, I had become obsessed with the idea of teaching women's history to a broad and diverse audience through art."²⁹⁷ Chicago's experience studying women's history on her own and as a part of her efforts with the Feminist Art Program and the Los Angeles Woman's Building had left her with a burning desire to create her own feminist historical monument, an undertaking that would expand and come to occupy her time and efforts for the rest of the decade.

From Female Imagery to *The Dinner Party*

Prior to beginning work on her monument to women's history, *The Dinner Party*, Chicago began work on a series of abstract paintings meant to represent significant women from Western history. In 1972, she created the work *The Great Ladies*, in which each woman is represented in the form of a geometric pattern in pastel colors that seems to undulate around a central circle or orifice meant to allude to women's genitals and that are characteristic of Chicago's so-called "Core Imagery," which dominated her painting practice during the early 1970s. She described the series

²⁹⁷ Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. 45.

to Lucy Lippard in 1974 stating: “In the *Great Ladies* series, begun in 1972, I tried to make my form language and color reveal something really specific about a particular woman in history, like the quality of opening, and blockage, and stopping, the whole quality of a personality. The *Great Ladies* are all queens — Christina of Sweden, Marie Antoinette, Catherine the Great, and Queen Victoria. There’s a level of literalness in them, and a level of emotional meaning.”²⁹⁸ Following her examination of the personages of various royal women, Chicago created a work with a similar format and content about the life and work of Georgia O’Keeffe, entitled *Through the Flower* (1973) (Appendix: Figure 27). In the painting, Chicago drew upon her previous “core imagery” in order to create a work that highlighted O’Keeffe’s most famous motif, the flower.

Beyond examining women’s history and developing a sense of “core imagery,” Chicago turned her attention to women’s historical roles through working in feminized craft practices during the early 1970s. In particular, she took up the study of ceramic painting, a practice that had for generations been considered a lower-level craft practice. As she stated in a narrative of her career in the mid 1970s: “[From] 1972-1974 I spent time studying china-painting as I have been increasingly interested in what has been labeled traditional women's art forms, including the whole area of china-painting and needlework, to use them and have them become visible as fine arts. My new work reflects this growing concern of mine and also draws upon the

²⁹⁸ Lucy Lippard, "Judy Chicago, Talking to Lucy Lippard," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: Dutton, 1976). 219-20.

continued research I have been doing in women's history.”²⁹⁹ In so doing, she sought to reinvigorate this traditionally feminized medium in order to cast new light upon the roles that women have played, which have been conventionally ignored or altogether written out.

Chicago eventually turned this interest toward creating a monumental work meant to commemorate the contributions of various women to history. She initially planned to expand her *Great Ladies* series to include 100 porcelain plaits, but by 1974, she decided to focus her attention on a “smaller” project, entitled “*The Dinner Party*.” As Laura Meyer notes: “Initially conceived as a table set for twenty five historical figures, *The Dinner Party*, was to combine ‘images of *traditional* women (symbolized by china painters) with *radical* women (represented by those who were politically active) at each place setting.”³⁰⁰ As Chicago continued to work on the project, particularly as she continued her research into women’s history, she began to change the conception of the work, expanding the number of “guests” at the tables of *The Dinner Party* from 25 to 39 and changing the layout of the work to comprise of three separate tables, each with 13 settings — an explicit reference to the 13 guests at the Last Supper — arranged in a triangle. Each setting evolved to include both a handcrafted ceramic plate and a personalized runner, both designed to specifically refer to some aspect of the historical personage assigned to each place at the table.

²⁹⁹ Judy Chicago, "Biographical Sketch," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502). n.p.

³⁰⁰ Meyer, "From Finish Fetish to Feminism: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in California Art History." 66.

***The Dinner Party* and The Labor Question**

Over the course of several decades, the issue of labor and authorship has been raised with regard to the fabrication of this monumental work. Chicago did initially begin the project as a solo endeavor. As Meyer notes: “[She] worked on *The Dinner Party* in isolation for more than a year, painting and firing test plates and researching women’s history to compile a lineage of courageous women stretching from prehistory through the present. She bought a sewing machine capable of embroidery stitching, with the idea of using it to sew a circle of biographical text around each plate on a table cloth running the length of the table.”³⁰¹ As Chicago continued working and researching, however, she came to recognize that fabricating the entire work alone would be untenable and began recruiting volunteers and collaborators to help her with the development and creation of the work and its various component parts. Initially, in 1975, she expanded the labor to include the work of four individuals: Leonard Skuro and Judy Keyes, who were brought on to help with ceramics; Diane Gelon, whose initial role in *The Dinner Party* was to do historical research; and Susan Hill, who worked primarily on the needlework and fabric arts portions of the project.³⁰²

Chicago did not, however, simply hire a number of studio assistants in order to help her make all of the component parts; instead, she transformed *The Dinner Party* into a feminist organization in its own right. In early 1976, Diane Gelon began expanding her role with *The Dinner Party* to include coordinating the labor of all the

³⁰¹ Ibid. 66.

³⁰² Judy Chicago, "Journals," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502, 1979). n.p.

additional volunteers who had begun to work in Chicago's studio. By the summer of 1976, the number of people working on *The Dinner Party* expanded exponentially; each of the key individuals began assembling teams of their own, and bringing in more and more collaborators. In her journal entry from May 9, 1976, Chicago notes that the participants of *The Dinner Party* for the summer of 1976 included between six and eight women working under Susan Hill on needlework, four women helping Skuro and Keyes with ceramics, and notes that they have "formed research team who meet every week and share what they've found [...] slowly compiling the research for the floor."³⁰³ From the summer of 1976 until the work was completed, the number of men and women who volunteered on *The Dinner Party* only continued to grow, and eventually took on the form of a feminist collective on the scale of the Feminist Art Program and Feminist Studio Workshop.³⁰⁴ As the organization grew, Chicago entreated her volunteers to feel that their contributions were central to women's struggle against the patriarchal oppression they felt in society, and a large number of volunteers very sincerely believed this to be the case.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ Ibid. n.p.

³⁰⁴ Lack of funds was a very serious problem facing the women working on *The Dinner Party*. Chicago solicited grants and money from a wide range of organizations ranging from the National Endowment of the Arts to Exxon Mobile. She also created multiple fundraising campaigns that solicited members of feminist organizations nationwide in order to help raise money to fund the project. The funding situation was so dire that Susan Hill stated in the Johanna Demetrakas documentary about the work's creation that "From month to month, we never knew where the money would come from; we were always in debt. One of the ways we survived were from \$5 and \$10 donations coming in the mail. In 1977 we were sure of a major grant, but it fell through." For more information, see: Johanna Demetrakas, "Right out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party," (St. Louis, MO: Phoenix Learning Group, 1980).

³⁰⁵ In the decades since the work was first shown, many art historians and critics have found fault with Chicago's methods for *The Dinner Party* and have frequently called the work exploitative, arguing that the way Chicago managed her various volunteers was anathema to the spirit of the Women's Art Movement. While unquestionably some volunteers did feel exploited and some critics felt

While the project depended on collaborative labor, and had a feminist orientation, it was by no means a non-hierarchical, collective project. Judy Chicago was unequivocally the director of the project and she employed a bureaucratic system within the project to oversee the work. This sense of the project was known and felt by the volunteers within *The Dinner Party* project.³⁰⁶ Chicago divided the labor into several different areas, each of which was run by one of the central “core,” who oversaw the labor of the various volunteers who joined the project for short stints. Susan Hill, for instance, was in charge of needlework for the project, while Anne Isolde was the head of the historical research into the various women that appeared within *The Dinner Party* (including the 39 “seated” guests and the 999 women who appeared on the heritage floor). While there was some degree of specialization among the volunteers, the labor was not strictly divided. Volunteers could work on a wide variety of tasks, ranging from needlework and ceramics to art historical research and

just in their accusations, I maintain that such condemnations are ultimately misguided, or at the very least neglect to attend to or even outright dismiss the experience of the women who participated in the project. Over the course of the project’s 5-year manufacture, hundreds of volunteers entered the studio in order to work on the project and many of them did so out of a compulsion to act and to be involved in feminist activism. Chicago ran her studio not as a workshop, but as a feminist organization and implored her volunteers to consider their labor as a form of active engagement. For Chicago, *The Dinner Party* was not simply an artwork, meant to be viewed in the context of an art museum with the cold clinical and disconnected gaze with which museum goers assess art objects; instead the work was meant to be a form of actively engaged consciousness-raising, functioning as a document depicting women’s contributions to history in much the same way as feminist literature and women’s studies courses do to reveal the patriarchal tendencies that have for so long written women out of the historical cannon. As such, she felt that the labor that contributed to the work could and should be understood as a form of feminist education for the women (and men) involved, and their participation in this project was meant to provide them with the opportunity to contribute to a watershed feminist source.

³⁰⁶ In her documentary on the making of *The Dinner Party*, film maker Johanna Demetrakas shows the volunteers discussing collectively that the project was explicitly not a collective, but rather a clear and delineated hierarchy. For more information see: Demetrakas, "Right out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party." n.p.

fund raising, and often they participated in several arenas.³⁰⁷ For instance, Sharon Kagan worked in graphics, needlework, and ceramics; Juliet Myers participated in documentation, research, office work, needlework and administrative tasks; and Ken Gilliam helped with fabrication, graphics, administration, woodworking, and ceramics, to name a few.³⁰⁸ As such, many of the volunteers were provided the opportunity to develop skills in a variety of different areas and to contribute meaningfully to a number of components of the work over the course of their time with the project.

Feminist Education in the form of Dinner Parties

In addition to the various arenas in which the volunteers could work on the project, Chicago also provided her volunteers with the resources to participate in feminist education activities. In fact, the workshop for *The Dinner Party* in many ways paralleled the artistic environments she had helped to create in the Feminist Art Program at both Fresno State and CalArts as well as the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Los Angeles Woman's Building. Chicago sought to provide volunteers with the opportunity to engage actively with the feminist community at *The Dinner Party* and within the greater Los Angeles area. One mailer sent out to prospective volunteers reads:

Come work with us on the project. Grow with us, develop your potential as an artist, work in a supportive environment, acquire new work modes. Consciousness-raising groups, open rap sessions, and sharing with other people are among [sic] the benefits in this unique experience. [...] Participants will work in a unique professional

³⁰⁷ Judy Chicago, "Portrait List," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502, 1978-9). n.p.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* n.p.

environment that employs feminist education techniques. This will produce and [sic] opportunity for people to work cooperatively and make a contribution to women's history.³⁰⁹

For Chicago, the labor of the volunteers on her project was not simply be about fabrication, but rather she considered her work and theirs to be a contribution to a significant feminist project, one that was meant to transform the lives of those who worked on it as much if not more than those who encountered the completed work.

As a result, Chicago put into place various avenues through which individual women could advance their feminist education through their work on *The Dinner Party*. When the group still numbered in the single digits, Chicago began hosting weekly dinner meetings. She writes in her journal of the project dated January 18, 1976: "I've instituted Thursday night sessions for everyone working on the Project. Last Thursday, Diane, Leonard, Susan and I did a consciousness-raising session about expectations, anxieties and most of all, money. They all said they'd work till the piece is done whether there's money or not. That took a big load off my mind."³¹⁰ From that point on, regular consciousness-raising sessions and group meetings were held at Thursday night potluck dinners, during which a wide variety of issues were brought forth on topics as ranging from lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment to the logistics of the project. As the number of volunteers grew, the Thursday night dinners could no longer function explicitly as consciousness-raising sessions, since —

³⁰⁹ "An Invitation to 'the Dinner Party'," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502, 1978-9). n.p.

³¹⁰ "Journals." n.p.

especially for Chicago — CR groups should consist of “no less than 6 and no more than 10 women,” and every member must be given time to speak.³¹¹

As such, the Thursday night dinners would often function more as almost a de facto women’s studies course, wherein volunteers would discuss readings, theory, and current events but not all were required to contribute. In the film *Right Out of History: The Making of the Dinner Party*, Johanna Demetrakas was able to document one such session when volunteers were discussing the application of Marxist theory to feminist activism. During this session, one member of *The Dinner Party* volunteers, an older woman challenged Chicago’s assignment of texts by stating: “Well I feel like we’re all going to study and study and understand it, but nothing will be done. Do you think in the times when they made political changes, like Marxist changes, that every one went around all reading books?”³¹² Chicago, in the role of leader and course instructor, fervently responded:

It's like you say “how do I make change?” and we tell you and you say “I don't want to do all that.” And we say to you “those of us who are effectively making change are not ignorant. Those people who have ever made change in the history of the human race were not ignorant. Nobody who is ignorant will ever make change,” which is one of the reasons that women have such a fucking hard time, women are fucking ignorant. And we have to take responsibility for it, and face it, and accept it, and do something about it. We are building support structures, there is a whole history of thought that helps us stop being ignorant, and we have to take responsibility to understand, to change ourselves, and prepare ourselves for a real task. Otherwise it is total, unbelievable fantasy.³¹³

³¹¹ “Consciousness-Raising,” in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502). n.p.

³¹² Demetrakas, “Right out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party.” n.p.

³¹³ *Ibid.* n.p.

Despite her somewhat aggressive tone, Chicago truly sought to use these meetings as a means to educate women on how to use their effort to make social change and to consider the structural issues that had contributed to their oppression. For her, these regular dinners provided an opportunity for the volunteers to engage with feminism as a social and activist movement, and thus provided a similar forum to that of other radical and political feminist organizations.

Moreover, the volunteers who participated in these sessions was essential to the development of their own feminist consciousness, and many felt that their participation in the various aspects of *The Dinner Party* project was a form of explicit feminist activism. Contrary to the assumptions many critics have made about the labor dynamics of the project, many volunteers felt that their work on *The Dinner Party*, despite being unwaged, was still important and even professional, and that the goals of the project extended well beyond the simple fabrication of a single art object. For example, in one of the many discussions between members of the project captured in Demetrakas' documentary, one of the women volunteers responded to a man who found the "extreme emotionalism" of the studio off-putting by stating:

I don't think any of us in the project, any of us, stopped being professional. I think that's why we come here, and come long distances to do a professional project because the world needs to hear this in a professional way. I mean in terms of expertise and intelligence and with creative sensitivity, but we also are... the excitement that we want to share with you, I want to share with you, which I want to get better at learning how to share is the possibilities that this project goes out into the world as a finished piece that is professional, but the processes that went into making this piece are holistic, that they deal with feelings, at times they get emotional. We are not only documenting feminist history, we are in the process building a feminist approach to the world, which is going to be different than what you perceive as

right now being professional and yet you're invited, you know, I want you in on that process.³¹⁴

For both Chicago and the volunteers working on *The Dinner Party*, the project was something more than just the final monument; it was born of consciousness-raising and was meant to facilitate the same process in others in order to transform the way that women's contributions to society have been and will be viewed.

The dinner parties and *The Dinner Party* were thus and are arenas for dialogue and discussion. Taking on the role of the hostess, Chicago facilitated the discussion of feminist theory and women's history much in the way that the salonnières of the French Enlightenment used their roles as hostesses in order to advance philosophical, scientific, or political discussion. Chicago not only performed this role with the scores of volunteers helping with the project, facilitating similar discussions amongst her volunteers, encouraging them to read and discuss feminist literature and political issues, employing feminist pedagogical strategies with the intention of helping this group of individuals to exchange ideas and provide feedback to one another, but she also provided a similar opportunity for her audience. Along with creating the visual work, Chicago produced a guide for viewers to read as we move around *The Dinner Party* installation, as well as a chart that discussed the history of the women whose names appeared in the work. Chicago wanted her audience to consider the work in a particular way, much as a hostess would want her guests to respond to her home in a specific manner, and as such, she provided her audience with a means to do so. As

³¹⁴ Ibid. n.p.

such, when reading *The Dinner Party* as a work, it is essential to consider Chicago's understanding of dinner parties as opportunities for the advancement of knowledge and for feminist education. As we will see, Chicago's choice of this format was quite deliberate, and she intended to use this approach to engage with the conventions not only of domestic femininity, but also of these forms of gatherings to facilitate discussion and dialogue.

Judy Chicago hosts *The Dinner Party*

Having thus established the conditions of the creation of *The Dinner Party* and having determined that it was meant to be both a feminist monument and to be experienced as a form of consciousness-raising, let us now turn to the formal and symbolic content of the work and its relationship to women's service labor. As previously noted, from the outset, Chicago was interested in using "feminized" forms of art as the formal basis of the work; she sought to draw on the tradition of craft practices — such as embroidery and china painting — that have been historically practiced by women in order to call attention to the neglect of women's contributions to art history as well. Moreover, the format of Chicago's work — the very fact that she chose to create a monument in the form of a "dinner party" — further underscores this interest in elucidating the historic role and contributions women have made to society. As such, let us turn our attention to the ways in which Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* serves to raise the public consciousness both with regard to the women's history explicitly presented in the work, but also with regard to the ways in which serving —

and by extension hostessing — is intrinsically related to the cultural conception of femininity.

Before examining the ways in which hostessing functions in Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, let us first establish a clear picture of the installation. *The Dinner Party* is divided into three separate spaces. When we, the viewer, first enter the installation, we encounter a series of six handcrafted banners (Appendix: Figure 28) presented sequentially that taken together read: "And she gathered all before her/And she made for them a sign to see/And lo they saw a vision/from this day forth like to like in all things/And then all that divided them merged/ And then everywhere was Eden once again."³¹⁵ Turning a corner, we then enter a triangular space wherein a trio of long tables are arranged in a triangle; each one is adorned with 13 place settings comprised of an individualized "runner" (a specially designed place mat), a handcrafted, painted plate designed to emulate some aspect of each "guest's" personal history as well as drawing upon Chicago's notion of "core" imagery, along with a set of standard dining accouterments — including a chalice, set of cutlery, and a napkin (Appendix: Figures 29-31). The place settings upon each table proceed in chronological order, from the "Primordial Goddess" to "Georgia O'Keeffe" and each table represents a particular point in history.³¹⁶ At the intersection of each table, the tablecloth upon which each

³¹⁵ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: From Creation to Preservation* (London, UK: Merrell Publishers Ltd, 2007). 28-29.

³¹⁶ Chicago has referred to each table as a specific "Wing." The first wing, which covers the period "From Prehistory to Rome" comprises of the following historical or mythical women: Primordial Goddess, Fertile Goddess, Ishtar, Kali, Snake Goddess, Sophia, Amazon, Hatshepsut, Judith, Sappho, Aspasia, Boadicea, and Hypatia. The next wing spans "from Christianity to the Reformation" and includes Marcella, St. Bridget, Theodora, Hrosvitha, Trotula, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Hildegard of Bingen, Petronilla de Meath, Christine de Pisan, Isabella d'Este, Elizabeth R (Queen Elizabeth I),

setting is placed is also adorned with an embroidered pattern — which Chicago referred to as the “Millennium Runners” — comprised primarily of multiple overlapping and interspersed triangles. The trio of tables also rests upon a triangular tile floor — the “Heritage Floor” — upon which the names of 999 women are painted in gold, arranged according to their historical period with regard to the three wings of the table. After moving through the triangular space and around the table, we finally encounter a series of panels that present the history and biography of the women whose names adorn the “Heritage Floor” along with a number of relevant photographs and a timeline of the historical narrative presented in *The Dinner Party*.

Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* functions as an investigation of the role of women as hostesses, and the historical role women have played with regard to domestic service. *The Dinner Party* highlights the rhetoric of female domestic servitude through the evocation of the figure of the hostess. In many ways, hostessing as an action epitomizes female domesticity, particularly within the context of post-war domestic ideology, wherein hostessing provided housewives an opportunity to show off their ability to maintain a house, to cook, and to attend to the needs and wants of her guests, which, in accordance with the rules of propriety and decorum, always superseded her own. Following the dictums of respectable homemaking, such as those codified in the twentieth century by advice writer’s such as Emily Post, Chicago not only carefully

Artemisia Gentileschi, and Anna von Schurman. The final wing ranges “From the American Revolution to the Women’s Revolution” and comprises of the place settings of Anne Hutchinson, Sacajawea, Caroline Herschel, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Blackwell, Emily Dickinson, Ethyl Smyth, Margaret Sanger, Natalie Barney, Virginia Woolf, and Georgia O’Keeffe. For more information see: *ibid.*

arranges her table, but she also takes care to choreograph the event that is *The Dinner Party*.

Chicago herself was aware of the role of women as hostess from the outset of the project's creation. In her journals from April 28, 1974, wherein Chicago first mentions the transition from the *Great Ladies* series to *The Dinner Party*, Chicago performs this function of the hostess, describing the minutia of place settings and the imagery of dinner service. She writes: "I'm going to work on smaller projects — the first will be called Dinner Party. It will consist of painted plates presented in the context of a table setting — either a long or round table — cloth, napkins, silver, water glasses, etc. I don't know about chairs yet. [...] The women represented will range from very famous and accomplished women who have been obscured by history to wives of famous men who gave up their careers to unknown women who somehow got lost in their lives."³¹⁷ Chicago was interested in creating an installation centered around women from history gathering together over a shared meal and the logistics thereof from the very start; she set out to curate a dinner party and followed the same procedures that have been encoded into the practice of hostessing for centuries.

In addition to the meticulous care she took towards carefully crafting and setting the tables of *The Dinner Party*, Chicago also took great pains to carefully curate the "guest list." Following the model of etiquette expert Emily Post, who wrote in 1922, "The proper selection of guests is the first essential in all entertaining, and the

³¹⁷ "Journals." n.p.

hostess who has a talent for assembling the right people has a great asset,”³¹⁸ Chicago chose each guest specifically for what she would bring to the table, providing her rationale in the printed matter to go along with the work. Chicago and her team assembled pages of information on each of almost 3000 potential guests and carefully narrowing the guest list down to the 39 primary figures and the 999 women on the heritage floor. The research team, headed by Diane Gelon and later Ann Isolde, meticulously compiled notecards on all potential figures, transformed their research into timelines and detailed outlines, and eventually composed the final list of women to be represented both at the table and on the heritage floor. As an aggregate, the women represented in *The Dinner Party* are laudable female figures whose contribution to history and society, up until the 1970s, had gone unrecognized. Recognizing that for centuries women’s contributions to politics, science, the arts, and many other fields were frequently dependent on their ability to parlay the domestic conception of femininity into something that extended beyond the realm of the home, Chicago called upon the history of domestic service and women’s positions therein in order to create her monument.

The issue of class is of particular import in discussing the role of hostessing and serving in women’s history. In Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, she takes on the role of the hostess, a position given to the woman of the house. Although, as evidenced from her journals about the development of the work and her writings for the

³¹⁸ Emily Post, *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home*, (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1922). 135.

accompanying book project, Chicago did initially conceive of the work in the terms of a dinner party in a servant-less middle class home, the general conceit of the work also evokes a contemplation of the history of domestic service as an industry. Because the format undoubtedly nods to women's historical roles as hostesses, and because the majority of the actual women represented as guests of Chicago's fictional dinner were of members of the aristocracy or the middle-class themselves — of the 39 portrayed, only five women (St. Bridget, Petronilla de Meath, Sacajawea, Sojourner Truth, and Georgia O'Keeffe) were born into the working class or were subject to enslavement — Chicago's work thus depicts a table that would undoubtedly be served by someone other than the hostess. In fact the labor of setting the table itself for the opening in San Francisco was dependent on the performance of service labor tasks by members of *The Dinner Party* team. As such, the work also serves to highlight the dichotomous relationship between hostess and servant, a distinction derived exclusively from class positioning.

The investigation of serving and hostessing as a form of feminized labor in *The Dinner Party* extends beyond the development of a well-considered guest list. Chicago developed the work out of her personal interest in reclaiming and revaluing women's labor within the domestic sphere. In particular, she wanted to examine the ways in which the environment of a dinner party exists as a conglomeration of many forms of women's domestic work, particularly with regard to the handicrafts that comprise the various elements of a carefully set table. In a draft preface for the book that accompanied the original work, she writes:

What is a dinner party? A dinner party is a familiar ritual in most homes. The guests arrive. The table is set with plates that the woman of the house may have decorated with softly-painted flowers sunk deeply into the glaze. The plates are thoughtfully arranged on a table which is covered with a table-cloth that the woman might have sewn, carefully embroidering the edges with small scallops whose fine detail can be easily overlooked. In addition to the tablecloth, there might be placemats made of lace, passed down from generations of grandmothers who would have cautiously manipulated the endless bobbins that are required to create the lacy spider-web patterns. The napkins that sit resolutely beside the plates could have delicate crocheted edging, made one cold night, with an angry crochet hook driven by a steel-hard determination to survive.³¹⁹

In creating *The Dinner Party*, Chicago aimed to directly engage with the history of women's handicraft labor and its relationship to women's longer tradition of domesticity. By creating a work that engages directly with the history of craft practices — practices that have both been marginalized in the canon of art history and have historically been made by women — and one that examines the function of craft objects in a domestic setting, Chicago seeks to make apparent the labor that has been traditionally been rendered invisible. Through the inclusion of carefully painted china and meticulously crafted “runners” — which ostensibly functioned as the hand crafted table-cloths referred to in Chicago's description — Chicago constructed *The Dinner Party* to illustrate the myriad ways that women's contributions both to the household and history are overlooked.

In addition to handcrafting the components of each setting, Chicago and her assistants carefully and meticulously arranged the items in order to replicate the codes

³¹⁹ Judy Chicago, "Draft of 'Introduction' to *the Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage*," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502, 1979). n.p.

of service that have historically been seen as indicative of a well kept home. Because the dictates of femininity are derived from the mores and practices of the dominant group of women — white and upper class — presenting a well-kept home was one significant way in midcentury America for lower class women to ensure their performance of their gender. The volunteers of The Dinner Party thus replicated this gesture in their meticulous construction of pristine and seamless table settings. As Susan Hill commented during the initial installation: "I think of all the times my mother ironed the tablecloth for company...It just seems like the most perfect revenge to have to iron this big one."³²⁰ In installing the work, Chicago therefore drew upon the practices of homemaking and housekeeping that are so deeply intertwined with the domesticity associated with post-war femininity. As the servant class declined in the twentieth century and especially after World War II, and with the increasing social mobility afforded to women — particularly white middle class women — these codes of behavior were further encoded into the dictums of domesticity and middle class values. Failure to adhere to such dictums bore the mark of social decline, and thus such labor was performed by middle class housewives in order to maintain and advance their social positioning. As such, Hill's off-hand remark thus illustrates the fact that Chicago intended to put on display the very invisible labor of domestic hostessing that has comprised a central component of women's roles, their class positioning, and gender identity.

³²⁰ Demetrakas, "Right out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party." n.p.

Recognizing that Chicago's work was intended to criticize the way in which the act of serving a dinner party relates to the domestic femininity of the postwar period, it is essential to recognize that even the codes of decorum in midcentury America have their roots in the longer tradition of American Domestic Service. Although considerable economic and social changes during the early decades of the 20th century severely decreased the number of women (and men) employed in domestic service,³²¹ the formalized etiquette of hostessing — as manifest in texts like Emily Post's *Etiquette* as well as carried out in maternal transmissions of domestic labor — derives from the tradition of the upper class home with its extensive staff of servants. Even in the 1945 edition of Post's famed blue book, she outlines the role of the hostess of a formal dinner with regard to the tasks assigned to her servants. She writes: "The list being settled, Mrs. Worldly's own work is done. She sends word to her cook that there will be twenty-four on the tenth; the menu, which she will probably merely glance at and send back, will be submitted to her later. She never sees or thinks about her table, which the butler will arrange properly."³²² While Post does go on to detail the proper way to set the table — a task she admits is not for the hostess, but for the butler and servants — it is clear that her conception of the role of the lady of the

³²¹ Faye E. Dudden notes: "Over the first half of the twentieth century, domestic service ceased to be an important element of women's work or private life in the United States. While in 1870 over half of all women workers were domestic servants and in 1900 servants still number about one-third of all employed women, by 1950 the ranks of domestic servants had shrunk to insignificance. The practice of employing declined accordingly, although the precise dimensions of both of these changes have been obscured by the retreat of domestic service into the 'underground,' off-the-book economy after World War II." For more information, see: Faye E. Dudden, "Experts and Servants: The National Council on Household Employment and the Decline of Domestic Service in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social History* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1986). 269.

³²² Emily Post, *Etiquette; "the Blue Book of Social Usage,"* (New York and London,: Funk & Wagnalls company, 1945). 324.

house is aristocratic in nature, and that the actual labor of serving the meal (including preparation, presentation, and clean up) should be left to members of a lower class position, namely the domestic help.

While Post's book was written from to convey the rules of etiquette from an upper class home, the target audience of her manual was a different class altogether. As Alice P. Julier notes: "the rich didn't require Emily Post. But the newer classes did, especially as a way of identifying with the wealthy and distinguishing themselves from new immigrants. [...] Emily Post's rules are important because they speak to people who are uncertain about the specifics of such interactions. If the ideology of upward mobility is central to American culture, advice books can be seen as crucial tools in people's efforts to advance or sustain themselves in that endeavor."³²³ Etiquette manuals thus served to inform the lower classes on the rules of propriety as determined and practiced by the wealthy, therefore providing a model of gentility that was gradually integrated into the practices of those classes. By the middle of the twentieth century, the dictums of propriety that had been popularized by Post and her counterparts had been integrated into the norms and practices of middle class domestic femininity.

Coupled with the aforementioned decline in the prevalence of hired domestic servants, this translation led to a schism with regard to the performance of such tasks. On the one hand, much of the invisible labor of domestic service was foisted upon

³²³ Alice P. Julier, *Eating Together Food, Friendship, and Inequality*, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=592686>. 31.

housewives to perform themselves — both in the course of daily life and for formal occasions. The decorum of a dinner party, as a simultaneously formal and domestic event, thus serves to illustrate how the dictums of service and femininity intersect. Julier writes: “As dinner parties spread to the white middle class at the turn of the century, after the Depression, and again in the post-World War II era, even women without household servants were expected to have the social skills to cook and act as a hostess. Taste still mattered. Emily Post provides categories of behavior and detailed rules that leave no room for mistakes. To function successfully, one need only carefully memorize and enact these guidelines.”³²⁴ The labor of the servants — from the cook to the butler — were thus passed along to the hostess, whose performance thereof was considered an extension of her femininity. As Julier notes “The book rests on the fundamental idea that social respectability can be purchased and learned, particularly through sociable interactions with food. Individuals learn to do class, gender, and race, by following these models.”³²⁵ The performance of the hostess function in the middle class home in the postwar period can thus be understood as yet another articulation of the neo-domesticity that characterized the predominant conception of American womanhood.

Chicago’s depiction, therefore, of a dinner party can be understood further as an attempt to analyze and challenge this gendering of labor, while simultaneously bringing attention to the myriad forms of women’s labor within the domestic context. The labor involved in the creation and arrangement of the work can be understood as

³²⁴ Ibid. 34.

³²⁵ Ibid. 34.

performing the same function as domestic servants did in previous generations, labor that was disproportionately skewed towards women. At the same time, the work also complicated how the duties of servitude have come to inform American womanhood, and thus highlight the complicated relationship between labor and class positioning with regard to the history of domesticity. As such, Chicago has created a work in which the invisible labor of the home and the heretofore un(der)acknowledged historical contributions of various women are presented directly within the space of an art installation and are thus provided with critical attention in such a context. In so doing, *The Dinner Party* functions to raise public consciousness to how gender ideology has constructed femininity and has rendered women's contributions both within the home and beyond it invisible.

From Servants to Servers: The Rise of Waitressing

Like Judy Chicago, the performance art collective The Waitresses used their work to call public attention to the often-overlooked service labor performed by women in America. While *The Dinner Party* explores the ways in which the decline of the domestic service industry has impacted the form and function of women's labor within the household, the work of The Waitresses seeks to critically examine the other side of this schism: the feminization of waiting tables. Beginning in the late 19th century, much of the labor performed by domestic servants — particularly around food service — was also being outsourced to industries beyond the home. Restaurants in particular were beginning to substitute for the domestic context for social dining and the clientele to whom they catered began expanding as well. As Andrew P. Haley

notes: “As it became increasingly rare for middle-class families to have a full-time, live-in servants [in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era], restaurants offered an alternative to eating and entertaining at home.”³²⁶ While professional food service has existed for centuries — frequently manifesting in the meals served at the temporary residences of travelers such as taverns, saloons, hotels, and boarding houses — the restaurant industry as we know it was primarily a byproduct of 19th century industrialization more generally. During Reconstruction, American restaurants were divided along class lines; primarily restaurants took the form of there meager dives and taverns where the working class could get a simple meal or fine dining establishments meant to cater to a strictly upper-class clientele.

By the turn of the 20th century, however, the restaurant industry “had been transformed, and a new class of restaurants was emerging to cater to the needs of an ever-expanding middle class.”³²⁷ The establishment of middle-class restaurants thus facilitated a sort of hybridity between the class distinctions that had polarized working class eateries from those of the upper class. As Haley notes: “Shunned by the elite restaurant, the middle class developed values and nurtured class cohesion that — simultaneously and reflexively — shaped consumer institutions. The collective purchasing power of the emerging middle class encouraged restaurant entrepreneurs to cater to their tastes, and, over the course of forty years, small preferences about how to dine begot cultural changes that eventually birthed both middle-class restaurants and

³²⁶ Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). 71.

³²⁷ *Ibid.* 68.

the modern middle class itself.”³²⁸ Haley in particular cites the kinds of cuisine — especially the supremacy of French cuisine as the only form of haute cuisine — as well as the exclusivity and pastiche of restaurant attendance and service as aristocratic tendencies abandoned in favor of a more democratic, middle-class establishments.³²⁹ With this expansion of restaurants to a broader public, so too grew the labor force needed to sustain it, and many of the individuals who had previously found themselves in the employment of wealthy — and even middle class — families entered the food service industry.

While the pedantic nature of social decorum associated with the upper class establishments was one of the things to be abandoned to some degree in middle class restaurants, some of the conventions of upper class service, and of domestic service in particular were translated directly into the restaurant industry. Borne out of domestic servitude, the practice of waiting tables continues to this day to maintain several of the conventions of this form of labor. Sociologist Greta Foff Paules avers that the codes of domestic service still exist in the restaurant industry particularly in the means of interaction, codes of dress, and the nature of conversation that comprise the dining experience. For example, restrictions on how one may behave while in the dining areas and the clear delineation of employees-only spaces are reminiscent of those conventions in large 19th century estates, wherein servants were required to enter and exit through particular doors, were not permitted to eat or drink in their master’s presence, and were given separate facilities in which to carry out the basic necessities

³²⁸ Ibid. 69.

³²⁹ Ibid. 59.

of life.³³⁰ Furthermore, the nature of address in the restaurant industry is designed to assert a differentiation in status between employee and patron. Paules writes:

Restaurants perpetuate this practice by requiring servers to wear name tags which, regardless of the worker's age, bear only her first name, and by requiring servers to introduce themselves by first name to each party they wait on. Waitresses generally have no access to the customer's first or last name [...] and are constrained to resort to the polite address forms *sir* and *ma'am* when addressing their parties.³³¹

Restaurant servers thus took up the conventions of aristocratic domestic service in the form of their industrial labor, and therefore continuing certain traditions derived from class based relations.

Moreover, the history of women's participation in the food service industry — specifically the act of waitressing — is derived explicitly from their serving labor in a domestic context. As Alison Owings notes: “At the end of the nineteenth century, the term ‘waitress,’ judging from two contemporary self-help tomes, often referred to a woman who waited tables in a private home. [...] Not only was she required to serve courses competently (‘Nothing but an unexpected extra should ever be asked for’), but she also had to clean up afterward.”³³² Waitressing as a profession thus progressed from domestic labor to industrial. Owings writes: “The occupation of waitressing must have been established by the middle of the nineteenth century, for not long thereafter entrepreneur Fred Harvey capitalized on it. While trying to build a restaurant empire at

³³⁰ Greta Foff Paules, *Dishing It Out : Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant*, Women in the Political Economy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).133.

³³¹ Ibid.137.

³³² Alison Owings, *Hey, Waitress! : The USA from the Other Side of the Tray* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 10.

stops along the Santa Fe railroad, which was rapidly expanding westward, he became fed up with drunken waiters and followed a suggestion to employ women. They became his carefully chosen ‘Harvey Girls.’”³³³ Harvey’s business model — which was arguably one of the most influential and repeated formats — thus transformed women’s domestic service labor into one that was carried out in a public business. Like the case of the domestic hostess, the vast majority of domestic service labor following the decline of the household servants in the 19th and 20th centuries was also heaped upon women working in the food service industry.

Because of the class dynamics at play in restaurants, the relationship between femininity and serving has been extremely complicated. Serving requires that waitresses perform a domestically derived and therefore private-oriented form of labor in public. They were required to take on the tasks that were by and large beginning to encompass the dictates of middle class femininity within the home in an industrial context. This transgression of the public/private boundary thus put a further onus on women servers: to perform public femininity while carrying out a private task. While domestic womanhood focuses a great deal on the performance of labor in a particular manner, the performance of femininity in public is far more precarious and dependent upon how a woman appears. Waitresses have historically been chosen for their position on the basis of their appearance and adherence to the beauty standards that have defined womanhood and women’s place in society. Women’s work within in the restaurant industry has emphasized this decorous aspect of femininity to the degree

³³³ Ibid. 9.

that “[b]y and large, employers preferred women in these new-style [middle-class] eateries” solely on the basis that “women were more suited for the role of decorative objects.”³³⁴ As Dorothy Sue Cobble notes: “One of New York’s most popular restaurants hired young, attractive waitresses to match its elaborate color scheme.”³³⁵ As such, waitressing on an industrial scale was intertwined with the prevailing gender ideology and the cultural understanding of acceptable femininity.

At the same time, the practice of waitressing also did serve to undermine the femininity of the women who performed this labor. For instance, as Dorothy Sue Cobble argues: “During the Progressive era and earlier, waitress work was judged an ‘improper trade’ for women because it was performed in surroundings deemed incompatible with Victorian respectability. Waitresses interacted daily with male strangers, conversing with them in public settings. They might work where liquor was sold or worse still, dispense it themselves.”³³⁶ While waiting tables was encoded with aspects of femininity, the actual performance of this labor required women to do things considered decidedly unladylike and that even crossed into the realm of masculinity, such as the service of alcohol.

The class politics of service also posed a significant threat to the feminine respectability of the women who did seek employment in restaurants. For starters, the practice of tipping servers, and the fact that the pay of servers most often hinged upon the tips a woman would receive for her service, often led to the sexualization of

³³⁴ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out : Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, *The Working Class in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). 22.

³³⁵ *Ibid.* 22.

³³⁶ *Ibid.* 24.

waitresses. As Cobble notes: “Moreover, because of the server’s economic dependence on the tip, she often flirted or ‘jollied among’ her male customers. Middle-class moralizers who assessed waitresses using their own refined criteria of ‘polite conversation’ and strict segregation of the sexes found much to condemn. For them, a waitress crossed the line of impropriety the moment she crossed the threshold of the restaurant.”³³⁷ Waiting tables was then often tinged with the same kind of reproach as prostitution and the women waited tables were frequently seen as “fallen” women or women of low morality, both of which ran counter to the dominant ideals of femininity.

Over time, this moralistic reproach of the waitress subsided, but the profession is still considered degrading or temporary. While serving has provided many women with a necessary income and a degree of economic independence, its performance is still maligned as an unrefined and undignified profession. On the whole, it is considered acceptable and respectable for women to take on the occupation out of economic necessity, but it has never been seen as aspirational; on the contrary, waiting tables is meant to be a stop-gap career at best. As Alison Owings notes: “Nearly three hundred years after American waitressing began, work and worker are still often scorned. What is so dismissible about a woman setting food on a table? Is it because millions do the same for free? Is it the tip? The Old connection with loose morals, alcohol, and men? [...] A chasm of class differences? The answer is anyone’s

³³⁷ Ibid. 24.

guess.”³³⁸ No matter the reason, women’s performance of industrial food service reveals a great deal about the complicated nature of womanhood and the condition of extra-domestic waged labor. The rise of the waitress after the demise of the servant class thus illustrates how the performance of certain forms of work has been encoded with femininity, but also how its transformation from private sphere to public sphere reflects the broader social strictures surrounding women’s positions in both realms.

Considering the complicated relations between industrial food service and femininity, let us then turn our attention to the ways in which feminist artists in Los Angeles raised such issues in the late 1970s. In examining the work of the collective “The Waitresses,” we will be able to see how service and servitude have comprised a certain understanding of femininity as well as the complicated issues surrounding women’s waged labor. Just as Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* brought to the forefront the gender politics of domestic service labor, so too did the Waitresses in their series of performance *Ready to Order?* seek to examine how femininity and the experience of lived womanhood is related to women’s work, albeit in an industrial setting. Moreover, through examining these performances, I will elucidate the ways in which the problems endemic to waitressing are related to the broader cultural misogyny challenged by feminist artists during the 1970s. In so doing, I will illustrate how this collective sought to use the figure of the frequently overlooked and oft-maligned waitress as a “metaphor for women’s position in the world.”³³⁹

³³⁸ Owings, *Hey, Waitress! : The USA from the Other Side of the Tray*. 25.

³³⁹ Jerri Allyn as quoted in *ibid.* 25.

The Feminist Studio Workshop: An Origin Story

The Waitresses collective was founded by Jerri Allyn and Anne Gauldin in 1977 at the Los Angeles Woman's Building. Both Allyn and Gauldin were participants in the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW), a two-year art program housed at the Woman's Building; Anne Gauldin started her studies in the FSW in 1975 and Allyn began the following year. During their time in the FSW, both women "experienced firsthand the vigorous performative power that feminism offered in terms of taking charge of one's life, re-envisioning society, transforming culture, and building anew."³⁴⁰ The curriculum of the program was designed, as Ruth Iskin wrote in 1977, to be "an independent educational institution for women in the arts and humanities. The goal of the F.S.W. from the start was to create a learning environment [sic] for women that would be free of any constrictions of male dominated institutions, that would address itself to the real needs of women and create a feminist community in which women generate feminist art — art that expresses women's experiences and points of view."³⁴¹ The Feminist Studio Workshop was designed to provide women with the opportunity to explore art making in a wide variety of media, to explore a variety of topics in art history and women's studies, and to engage with feminism both from a scholarly/theoretical and an activist framework.

³⁴⁰ Carol McDowell, "The Democratic Art of Waitress Jerri Allyn: A Chronicle of Our Conversations About Art, Consciousness, and Activism," in *The Waitresses Unpeeled : Performance Art and Life*, ed. Jerri Allyn, et al. (Los Angeles, Calif.: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 57.

³⁴¹ Ruth Iskin, "Feminist Education at the Feminist Studio Workshop, the Woman's Building in Los Angeles," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution. , 1976). n.p.

The Feminist Studio Workshop curriculum was thus divided into three different areas of focus: “Process and Presentation,” “Classes,” and the “Apprenticeship Program.”³⁴² According to the Curriculum Description from 1976-77 in the Woman’s Building archives, the program was “designed by a committee of faculty and students and [had] three major components essential to the FSW educational process.”³⁴³ The “Process and Presentation” component comprised of “small groups, process class and large group meetings designed to provide a space for mutual support and personal growth, for the development of a perspective on the feminist educational process and each individual’s development within it, and for the sharing of information on women’s culture by FSW members, staff, and invited guests.”³⁴⁴ The courses offered as a part of this component included “Consciousness Raising Groups,” “Personal and Public Process” courses in which FSW members discussed “each individual’s experience in the feminist educational process, the group process as a whole, and how we [participants] can manifest our intentions of becoming powerful individuals operating the public sphere,” and “Thursday Night Community Presentations,” wherein members of the FSW and invited guests would “[come] together for weekly presentations on women’s culture.” The process and presentation component of the program depended far more on group interaction and individual discussion than any kind of formal pedagogy or academic approach. Because having a raised consciousness was the first step to making social change, the students and staff

³⁴² "Administrative Notebook," *ibid.* (1976-1977). 4.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* 4.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

of the Feminist Studio Workshop designed the rest of the curriculum around providing women with opportunities to discuss their own experiences with a variety of issues (including their negative experiences with sexism and their positive ones with feminism) in a supportive, group format.

The other components of the curriculum comprised of more formal and structured educational opportunities. The offerings changed yearly, but from the administrative documents it is apparent that the FSW provided women with the opportunity to work in a wide variety of media and to employ several different approaches to developing their own feminist identities and art practices. In 1976-77, the FSW offered classes in mediums specific practices, like the “Video Workshop”, a design clinic in graphic work, and “Studio in Performance and Conceptual Art,” as well as more generalized working critiques for students beginning the program and those in their second year to present their in progress works to their colleagues and mentors.³⁴⁵ The course offerings also included classes that focused more on the development of women’s feminist consciousness, including Deena Metzger’s Journal Workshop — which was meant to “help [the] writer enter the interior world and woman’s experience” — and Jane Rosensweig and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville’s course “Feeling to form,” that was described as “[a] course of eight two hour sessions [...] designed to evoke formless feelings about Self, help in finding the forms appropriate to those feelings interpret [sic] those forms and maintain the integrity of

³⁴⁵ Ibid. 5-7.

this connection between self and the visual-physical world as you transform feelings into art.”³⁴⁶

The curriculum of the FSW also included opportunities for specific career development, providing opportunities for students to meet with established women artists and writers as well as facilitating apprenticeships for participants in the program. For instance, Deena Metzger coordinated a series of readings by a diverse set of women writers including herself, “Alice Walker, Judy Grahn, Audre Lorde, [and] Diane Di Prima” and Ruth Iskin organized a course called “Women Artists in their Studios” where members would visit the studios of artists including Carone Colvin, Judith Golden, Nancy Youdelman, Sherrie Scheer, Ann McCoy, and Ellen Zimmerman.³⁴⁷ In addition to the practical mentorship women could get through these courses, the FSW also offered apprenticeships to participants in six different fields: feminist administration, graphic design, gallery work, the Woman’s Building Slide Registry, the Video Center at the Woman’s Building, and teacher training.³⁴⁸ As women participated in the program, they had the opportunity to develop professional skills as well as their feminist art practices, and, as a result, many women who had participated in the program also stayed on as instructors or ran various programs and initiatives that fell under the auspices of the Los Angeles Woman’s Building. On the whole, the program provided women with an intensive and extensive education in feminism, art, and activism.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. 7.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 8.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 8-10.

It is in this context that the founding members of The Waitresses decided to develop their artistic collaboration and to use their artwork to examine the pervasive and extensive sexism and harassment facing women in general, and women working in the service industry in particular. Anne Gauldin and Jerri Allyn met while they were both participants in Suzanne Lacy's class, "Studio on Performance and Conceptual Art" in 1976. Lacy, like her colleagues in the FSW, implored her students to examine their own experiences with sexism, violence and misogyny and to use their work to incite a critical dialogue around the pervasive condition of gender-based inequity in American society in the form of regular consciousness-raising sessions. Students were then encouraged to use the results of these discussions as the basis of their work.

Upon discovering their "mutual and problematic experiences working in restaurants," Allyn and Gauldin decided to explore the issue of on-the-job sexism in the food service industry in the form of artistic collaboration.³⁴⁹ As founding member Jerri Allyn recalls:

We were ready to explode with anger at our customers. Somewhere along the line, probably in the constructive crits with our fellow students and mentoring from our professors [...] we adopted this strategy: Instead of blaming anyone, let's strive to raise their consciousness — humorously — about what it's like to serve, and have people treat us like their mothers or their sexy girlfriends or their lowly servants, all rolled into one.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹Cheri Gaulke, "1+1 = 3: Art and Collaboration at the Wb," in *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, ed. Meg Linton and Sue Maberry (Los Angeles, CA: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 24.

³⁵⁰ Jerri Allyn as quoted in *ibid.* 24.

They began developing ideas for performances that would address the systematic mistreatment and economic dependence rampant in the food service industry. The pair decided to expand their collaboration and invited a handful of other women — all of whom had waited tables at some point — to work with them in creating performances that would turn their personal perils into political statements in order to increase awareness with regard to the iniquitous treatment of women in America, both within the restaurant business and beyond it.

The Waitresses: Ready to Order?

In April 1978, The Waitresses performed their first major work as a group, a weeklong event entitled *Ready to Order?* (Appendix: Figure 32). The collective staged a variety of guerilla performances in a number of Los Angeles restaurants. As Carol McDowell points out: “The Waitresses decided to take their art to the people they wanted to address — restaurant owners, customers, and employees — in the venue that they had all worked: a crowded restaurant at mealtime.”³⁵¹ By performing at the scene of the crime, The Waitresses were able to reach a broader, more diverse audience and to address first-hand the hardships of working a mealtime rush. Throughout the week, they carried out a variety of *shtick-like* performances to satirize the unfair working conditions of the food service industry. The performances were interspersed with panel discussions, such as the Panel Discussion on “Some Histories of Women Working in Los Angeles” on April 25, 1978 and the one the following

³⁵¹ McDowell, "The Democratic Art of Waitress Jerri Allyn: A Chronicle of Our Conversations About Art, Consciousness, and Activism."57.

night on “Job Discrimination in Los Angeles”; workshops — including sessions on “Class Issues,” “Assertiveness Training for Your Job,” “The Resource Economy,” and “Money” — designed raise awareness and help women develop essential skills for the workplace; and a “Closing Ritual” that comprised of “two witches from Femina” performing a ceremony “especially for women, in honor of the ‘waitress’ in all of us.”³⁵²

Many of the performances on the menu, as Michelle Moravec notes, specifically “dramatized the reliance of waitresses on male patrons for tips, which forced waitresses to trade on their sex appeal” to increase their earning potential.³⁵³ In *Beauty is Money* (Appendix: Figure 33), for example, Jerri Allyn, playing a male customer, “dropped a trail of money throughout a restaurant, while Anne Gauldin bunny dipped, a move involving squatting straight down without bending at the waist necessitated by her short skirt, to pick up the money, [...] [as] a narrator read facts about women’s economic situation to the audience.”³⁵⁴ For this performance, The Waitresses exaggerated and over-dramatized the sexist pressures put forth to women servers in order to both get a laugh and prove a point. In this scene, Jerri Allyn, playing the male customer, is given an excess of power leading Anne Gauldin throughout the restaurant floor and forcing her time and time again to engage in demeaning behavior. Because waitresses are frequently in a condition of economic

³⁵² The Waitresses, “Ready to Order? Scheduled Menu of Events,” in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution. , 1976-1977). n.p.

³⁵³ Michelle Moravec, “In the Name of Love: Feminist Art, the Women's Movement, and History,” in *The Waitresses Unpeeled : Performance Art and Life*, ed. Jerri Allyn, et al. (Los Angeles, Calif.: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011).77.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*77.

dependence, Gauldin is required to comply, even in hyperbolic circumstances, such as those necessitated by Allyn's stringing the waitresses along by repeatedly dropping bills on the floor.

Like Anne Gauldin's Bunny dipping in *Beauty is Money*, Patti Necklaus's almost burlesque display in *The Fashion Show*, employs a similar use of sarcasm in the form of hyperbole. Being familiar and frustrated with such a problematic set of expectations, Necklaus's sought to make an overt statement in her portrayal in *The Fashion Show* (Appendix: Figure 34), declaring outright that encouraging women to exploit their bodies to increase their earning potential is degrading and deplorable. In this vignette, Necklaus plays a simply dressed waitress who is implored by a customer to "sex it up a bit." Hearing his suggestion, she goes one step further trading in her modest uniform for lingerie and high-heels only to see her tips increase exponentially.³⁵⁵ In so doing, Necklaus hyperbolically unsettles the typical expectations for female servers in going beyond the acceptable to the verge of scandalous. Instead of simply shortening her skirt, or lowering her neckline, she abandoned both entirely, choosing to serve in her undergarments and putting her sexuality on frank display for all customers to see. As such, she transformed her identity from server to sex object, and was given positive reinforcement for such a gesture in the form of monetary incentives. This exaggerated display, manifest in Necklaus's wardrobe change and the corresponding drastic response, thus highlights

³⁵⁵ Ibid.77.

the pressures to and rewards affiliated with women servers objectifying their bodies while in the workplace.

The pressure on female servers to “use their assets” in search of higher tips is a bidirectional force. On the one hand, customers — such as the one portrayed by Necklaus in *The Fashion Show* or Gauldin in *Beauty is Money* — often encourage such behavior through either overt statements, like the suggestion in this particular vignette, or through giving markedly inflated tips to waitresses who flirt and dress provocatively. On the other side of the counter, women who watch their coworkers, as Patti Necklaus did, enjoy pronounced increases in their earning when they participate in such practices are often entreated to try such strategies themselves. That said, there is, as Necklaus’ wardrobe change suggests, a degree to which a waitress can go too far, and thus lose her respectability and likely her tip. As such the system continues in perpetuity, continually putting women in a sexist double bind that has regularly been written off as a necessary evil of the tipping system.

Beyond this explicit sexism, the performances in *Ready to Order?* exposed the conditions of harassment rampant in food service. Two performances in particular, *Wonder Waitress* and *You’re All Wet — A Waitress Fantasy Come True* (Appendix: Figure 35-36) illustrate the mistreatment of waitresses by bosses, customers and fellow employees alike, while simultaneously offering a form of sympathetic vindication. During the sketch *Wonder Waitress*, Jamie Wildperson portrays an overburdened waitress being harassed by both her customers and her boss (played by fellow members of The Waitresses). In the midst of this badgering, when she appears

to have had enough, Wildperson opens her uniform to reveal her superhero alter ego, crying out “This looks like a job for Wonder Waitress!”³⁵⁶ Playing into the hyperbolic nature of comic book heroes and revealing her superhuman status with comical vigor and zeal, Wildperson proclaims her superpowers to be those of the mundane, oft-overlooked talents of waitressing. She may not be faster than a speeding bullet, but when it comes to tolerating the abuse and impatience of her proprietors and employers, Wonder Waitress is certainly a woman of steel. Marina Doktorczyk-Donohue asserts that: “When *Wonder Waitress* burst on the scene of a corner café to right the wrongs against women servers, to make things just for all, the sense of helplessness and the fantasy of empowerment, though filtered through caricature and humor, was nonetheless scathingly on point.”³⁵⁷

Similarly, *You’re All Wet — A Waitress Fantasy Come True* involves the vindication of a harangued and frustrated waitress. In this performance, a cocktail waitress - played by Anne Gauldin — is tormented by a male customer, portrayed by Jamie Wildperson, who continues to harass his waitress until she ultimately becomes fed up and throws a drink in his face. The incessant badgering faced by Gauldin in this skit is an experience common to all seasoned servers.³⁵⁸ Yet despite the reality of this

³⁵⁶ Jerri Allyn et al., *The Women’s Building with the Waitresses, WB Video Herstories* (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, Ben Maltz Gallery, Getty Research Institute, 2011), Internet Video Recording. Video part of the Oral History project associated with the Pacific Standard Time initiative and the exhibition *Doin’ It In Public: Feminism and Art at the Women’s Building*. n.p.

³⁵⁷ Marlena Doktorczyk-Donahue, “The Waitresses in Context,” in *The Waitresses Unpeeled : Performance Art and Life*, ed. Jerri Allyn, et al. (Los Angeles, Calif.: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 9.

³⁵⁸ In her interview with Studs Terkel in 1974, career waitress Delores Dante recounts the aggressive behavior of several types of male patrons. For example, she states with regard to men visiting her restaurant while attending a conference of one sort or another, ““There are conventioners, who leave

kind of unfair treatment, many servers find themselves in the predicament wherein they are helpless to end this form of aggression. Being dependent on both the wage and the tip, women servers are seldom in a position to stand up to the aggression and mistreatment they face at the hands of their customers. Considering this defenseless position inherent to the profession of waitressing, Gauldin's performance *You're All Wet — A Waitress Fantasy Come True* highlights the unequal distribution of power within such a system. Gauldin's exasperated gesture in this vignette avenges her, making her (and likely all servers') fantasy come true and resulting in the ridicule of her insulter. In both this vignette and in Jamie Wildperson's portrayal of the *Wonder Waitress*, *The Waitresses'* acts of retribution simultaneously illuminate the inequities and mistreatment of women servers, and provide an arena to assuage the frustration affiliated with this malfeasance in the form of vicarious vengeance.

While all of the sketches in *Ready to Order* serve to illustrate the ways in which women servers face a barrage of sexism and harassment simply by going to work, what is significant about this work is how they do so. As previously mentioned, Gauldin and Allyn established the collective with the intention of using humor in order to raise the consciousness of the restaurant going public. Humor, moreover, was an essential strategy for *The Waitresses* because of the precarious nature of the issue their work strived to address. On the one hand, *The Waitresses* wanted to advocate against

their lovely wives or their bad wives. They approach you and say, 'Are there any hot spots?' 'Where can I find girls?' It is, of course, first directed at you. I don't mean that as a compliment, 'cause all they're looking for is females. They're not looking for companionship or conversation." For more information, see Studs Terkel, *Working : People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: New Press, 1974). 295.

the mistreatment of women servers. On the other hand, the collective needed to do so in a way that would not potentially jeopardize the economic condition of their fellow working women. Had *The Waitresses* attempted to draw upon sorrow and rage in their works, their social criticism would not likely have been as well received, nor would it have been effective. The performers, therefore, had to develop a strategy that would be suitable and effective for the site and audience of their work. Because most people do not go to restaurants explicitly in order to harass their servers, nor are they generally aware of the pervasiveness of these issues, the average restaurant patron when called out directly would likely not be inclined to see himself as part of the problem, and thus would be resistant to having his consciousness raised. Similarly, if a patron were made to feel guilty about how waitresses are treated and were accused of complicity in this kind of diffuse and systematic mistreatment, he would likely become defensive and resentful, and thus not interested in helping to remedy the situation.

Furthermore, because of the conditions of economic dependency facing many women servers — an issue *The Waitresses* specifically dramatized in several sketches — the collective needed to develop a strategy that would not worsen the financial burden of other women in the industry. Had *The Waitresses* insisted that patrons boycott an industry that benefits greatly from the exploitation of women, they would have likely put their colleagues in economic peril, running the risk of making the situation worse. As such, the collective needed a strategy of protest that would make

the audience aware of the iniquitous and difficult conditions facing women servers in a way that would breed better treatment and not resentment or avoidance.

The solution they came up with was a tactic that has been used by many feminist humorists throughout time; instead of accusing individuals of being misogynists and oppressing women, feminist comedy criticizes the social structure that perpetuates gender inequality. Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner, argue that rather than targeting men specifically, feminist humor “of the seventies and eighties attacked the greater privilege and freedom of men, derided patriarchal institutions, and ridiculed social, sexual, and racial stereotyping.”³⁵⁹ In *Ready to Order? The Waitresses* used comedy to critique the conditions of the industry that promoted and perpetuated the exploitation and harassment of women servers. Instead of accusing the actual customers of doing something wrong, The Waitresses lampooned the structure and culture surrounding this systematic mistreatment, parodying the culture of the food service industry in their hyperbolic displays of women responding to the pressures exerted upon them in the course of an average restaurant shift. By satirizing the culture that endorses the misogyny and the harassment of women, the Waitresses were able to effectively illustrate the social ills of the restaurant system in a way that was accessible to the restaurant-going public.

³⁵⁹ Nancy A. Walker and Zita Dresner, "Women's Humor in America," in *What's So Funny? : Humor in American Culture* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998). 183.

Beyond Simply Service: The Waitresses and Everyday Womanhood

Although *Ready to Order?* was specifically designed to target a restaurant going public and to critically examine the iniquitous treatment faced by waitresses, their critiques of gender-based discrimination and the problematic nature of the ideology of American womanhood extended well beyond the space of the restaurant. As previously noted, Allyn and Gauldin intended for the figure of the waitress in their performances to function as a metaphor for all women, and they designed their performances to illustrate the inequalities that faced not only waitresses but all women. As one slide lecture from the Women's Building archives notes: "[The Waitresses] have discovered that the waitress is a metaphor for the universal position of women, in that the majority of women are in service-oriented jobs. In their performances they deal with four aspects: women and money; women and roles; women and work; and women and sexual harassment."³⁶⁰ In their work they portray all of these conditions as they relate to women in the service industry, but they do so in a way that presents these problematic issues in a way that can easily be generalized to relate to the broader population. Just as the hyperbolic portrayals of harassment in various vignettes in *Ready to Order?* served to illustrate the problematic nature of how women in food service are treated on a daily basis, so too did these performances function to illustrate how women in society are generally mistreated through this single, extreme example.

³⁶⁰ "Slide Lecture," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution.). n.p.

The issue of women's roles is perhaps the most clearly generalizable criticism of the prevailing gender ideology put forth in the performance of *The Waitresses*. As previously noted, when women performed the labor of waiting tables, they also were expected to perform a particular form of femininity and do so in a way that involved a series of contradictory expectations. The *Waitresses* felt this paradox and even included some of these contradictions in their work, such as the video from October 1978, *So You Want to Be a Waitress?*. In what appears to almost be an educational or corporate training film, an experienced waitress relays her sage wisdom to the audience, explaining the keys to success in waitressing. She recites a comically long, at times paradoxical, laundry list of skills and characteristics that the waitress is to embody. She advises:

Be attractive, but not too attractive. Be friendly, but not too friendly. Be clean. Be wholesome, but not overtly religious. Be tall. Be outgoing, but not dramatic. Be pleasant, but not distracting. Be willing, wear a bun not a beehive. Be cute. Be sturdy. Be agile. Be lithe. Be humorous, but not personal. Be humble. Be brave, be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, be a person with nice legs. Be quick. Be nimble, put your right foot in, put your right foot out, do the waitress hustle and shake it all about. Be yourself. And most certainly, smile.³⁶¹

The waitress is to perform a form of ideal femininity in the course of her daily work, even despite the intrinsic impossibility to be all of these different and often contradictory things all at once. Moreover, her instructions are not unlike the barrage of expectations put forth to women in general in a wide variety of media from popular magazines to television advertisements. Not only are waitresses expected to “be

³⁶¹ Jerri Allyn and Leslie Belt, "So You Want to Be a Waitress?," (Los Angeles: Video Center at the Los Angeles Woman's Building October 1978). n.p.

attractive, but not too attractive” or “friendly, but not too friendly,” but women in general were expected to and the consequences for transgressing on either side of that dichotomy were indeed dire, sometimes even dangerous.³⁶²

In *Ready to Order?*, The Waitresses examined the role and implications of the paradoxical gender ideology on women both within the food service industry and beyond it in several performances. The issue of sexualization as presented in *The Fashion Show*, for instance, demonstrates this paradoxical impulse for women to be simultaneously “sexy” and demure. Even when the economic dependence of tips is removed from the question, the dynamic of a man asking a sensibly dressed woman to “sex it up a bit” and the subsequent extremes to which she goes in order to adhere to this demand illustrate the problematic expectations put forth towards women. There is humor in the vignette because we understand Necklaus’s stripping gesture to be hyperbolic, and the fact that her lingerie-clad appearance is an exaggeration thus shows the complicated and precarious position in which women find themselves. American womanhood, particularly in the 1970s, dictated contradictory expectations towards women that put women in the difficult position of negotiating between two poles of femininity.

Beyond the paradoxical and problematic dynamics of femininity, The Waitresses also used their performances to call attention to how the performance of

³⁶² The policing of these kinds of contradictory gender norms has frequently been cited as rationale for violence against women. Women who do not adhere to the expectation of friendliness are frequently met with verbal abuse (such as the accusation of being a bitch) or even physical abuse. Conversely, victims of sexual violence that are women who are considered “overly friendly” can expect to have their status as victims challenged,

service labor is an extension in and of itself of the gendering of certain forms of labor as feminine. For instance, Anne Gauldin's performance in *The Great Goddess Diana* (Appendix: Figure 37) examines how the figure of the waitress embodies many of the traits associated with maternity and femininity. Wearing a dress adorned with casts of her fellow performer's breasts, Gauldin stood in the center of the restaurant as a waitress (played by Denise Yarfitz) recounted her history and her relation to the present to the diners. Yarfitz described Diana as "Great, Many-Breasted Mother, ruler and/ nourisher of the animal kingdom,/ provider of sustenance both physical and spiritual for/ All creatures great and small," ending her monologue with the proclamation that every restaurant should have a shrine to her.³⁶³ In so doing, *The Waitresses* make explicit the connection between the act of serving and that of nurturing while simultaneously calling attention to the ways in which both actions have been historically considered feminine. While in previous vignettes they highlighted the negative aspects of the social expectations put forth to women, in *The Great Goddess Diana*, *The Waitresses* embrace these aspects of femininity and declare them worthy of veneration and praise.

Moreover, in this vignette, *The Waitresses* also highlighted the complicated relationship between biology and gender, in a way consistent with other feminist artists of this era.³⁶⁴ By depicting Diana as a "Great, Many-Breasted Mother," the

³⁶³Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Awakening the Sleeping Goddess: Anne Gauldin's Visionary Journeys in Search of Women's Empowered Heritage," in *The Waitresses Unpeeled : Performance Art and Life*, ed. Jerri et al. Allyn (Los Angeles, Calif.: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 34-35.

³⁶⁴ While such a biologically determined approach to the understanding of femininity has been problematized in recent decades — most notably by Judith Butler and by the increasing prevalence of

Waitresses thus highlight the complicated relationship between the functions of the female body and the social construction of women's positions in society; they explicitly delineate how her physical body and its functions is related to the role she plays as "nourisher" and "provider of sustenance." In calling attention to the social roles that are apparently biologically determined — such as caretaking, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter — we can see how the biological is rendered into the social, and how such a delineation of gender roles has been used to justify the performance of certain types of labor by women. Thus the figure of the Many-Breasted Diana demonstrates how the act of nurturing and feeding has been translated to encompass everyday femininity more broadly. Her depiction as a waitress thus serves to illustrate how such tasks have been feminized; the fact that by her very nature Diana, symbol of (biological) womanhood, is to be considered the patron saint of waitresses highlights the fact that the performance of service labor is conceptualized as intrinsically feminine.

Conclusions

In both *Ready to Order?* and *The Dinner Party*, The Waitresses and Judy Chicago use their art practices in order to analyze the relationship between food service labor and the prevailing ideology of American womanhood. Both Chicago and The Waitresses use their art to problematize and examine the ways in which the performance of certain tasks have been feminized, and how that feminization has

criticism by members of the transgender and gender queer community — this approach to femininity was very much in vogue in the 1970s.

contributed to the understanding of this labor as either invisible or degraded. Looking to the history of industrial service — both domestically and within the restaurant business — it is apparent that much of the feminization of this labor is the result of a decline in the employment of servants and the rise of the middle class in the early part of the twentieth century. With middle-class homes relinquishing the few servants they might have maintained and with increasing numbers of working class families enjoying the social mobility afforded in the postwar period, domestic service labor transitioned from being the specialized tasks of paid workers to being the purview of American housewives. As such, this transformation rendered a considerable amount of this labor invisible, folding it into the largess of housework that because of its unwaged nature was considered inconsequential. At the same time, a drastic increase in the number and kind of restaurants not only created opportunities for working class women to perform these types of tasks in an extra-domestic context, but also contributed to the feminization of food service labor. Waitressing thus became a performance of a particular form of femininity, one that frequently exposed women workers in the restaurant to rampant harassment and sexism.

Judy Chicago took up the issue of the marginalization of women's labor in *The Dinner Party*. In creating a work comprised of primarily craft components, Chicago calls attention to both the hidden history of women's artistic labor and their service labor as well. Chicago envisioned the work to be an homage to the kinds of handcrafted items that have been used in domestic settings for generations, and have been created by women artisans for centuries without recognition. Moreover, by using

the form of a dinner party, Chicago calls attention to the ways in which hostessing and serving have become tasks reserved for (middle class) American housewives. The proper placement of each of the settings and more importantly the carefully cultivated nature of the guest list are both central to the dictums of decorum that govern such events, and the careful carrying out of these tasks is very much a performance of both gender and class. Beyond critically engaging with the strictures of domestic femininity, Chicago used the form of the dinner party — both in terms of the installation and in the potlucks held regularly as a part of the work's construction — in order to facilitate education. For the volunteers who participated in the creation, Chicago hosted regular dinner parties in order to provide opportunities for workers to engage in discussion and debate over women's issues. For viewers of the work, Chicago presents a monument complete with explanations meant to illustrate women's historical contributions and to correct for their omission from the general understanding of Western history. Thus, just as she uses craft materials to highlight the invisibility of women's labor, Chicago also uses the depiction of famous women throughout history to highlight their conspicuous placement within the dominant canon.

The Waitresses too were interested in examining women's role in society on the whole, but they did so through examining the plights facing women working in a particular sector. By developing performances that focused explicitly on the figure of the waitress, whose labor — as previously noted — involves the performance of certain ideals of femininity, The Waitresses were able to call attention to the way

women's labor is undervalued, overlooked, and considered fundamentally essential to their gender. They conveyed explicitly how waitressing can and has been understood as an extension of certain "feminine" virtues, such as caretaking and nurturing. Although these attributes are frequently linked to women's biological imperatives as mothers, in their performances, *The Waitresses* call attention to how far this ideological construction has been stretched and how all labor performed by women has been tinged by their so-called "feminine instincts," which are in fact mere social constructions. Moreover, *The Waitresses* used their performances to call attention to the inhospitable conditions that face women who work as servers because of their gender. In their performances, they portrayed the paradoxical and unrealistic social pressures on women to be simultaneously maternal and sexual, a dichotomy that if not perfectly balanced had significant repercussions for her financial and social positioning.

While both of these works are interested in examining how women's service labor is both understood as a form of feminized work and how that gendering has been used to devalue or render invisible its performance, *The Waitresses* and *Judy Chicago* approach these topics in drastically different ways. Simply on a temporal level, these works are essentially diametrically opposed; Chicago's work is a long-standing monument, while the performances of *The Waitresses* are ephemeral. Similarly, the works are materially extremely different as well, with Chicago's work being entirely object based, with *Ready to Order?* lacking almost entirely in any material referents. Beyond aesthetics, these works also diverge in their examination of the relationship

between class and femininity. Chicago's *The Dinner Party* examines the performance of service work in a middle-to-upper class home, while *Ready to Order?* focuses on the labor of working class women. As such, the issue of femininity and the implications of the performance thereof is dramatically different in each of these works.

Taking these differences into consideration, we therefore can have a clearer picture of the diversity that exists within feminist art practices in this period. Considering that these works were first exhibited within a year of each other — *Ready to Order?* took place in April 1978 and *The Dinner Party* was first exhibited in March 1979 — and recognizing that both works were created by members of the same feminist community, these differences demonstrate the degree to which feminist artists varied in their media, methods, and content. By examining how two artists — or art collectives — working within such close proximity tackle a similar issue of discursively constructed femininity, we can thus see how complicated and prevalent the pressures put forth to women to live up to certain feminine ideals are and have been. With regard to service labor, these distinct approaches to a similar subject matter illustrates how the feminization of labor is neither limited to the domestic sphere nor is it the result of any innate characteristic. Recognizing the ways in which the performance of certain tasks has been encoded into the larger discourse of femininity, artists like Chicago and The Waitresses present a clear challenge to the systems that would continue to perpetuate the devaluation and degradation of women's labor.

Chapter 4: Feeding

In the previous two chapters, I have examined the ways in which women's engagement with food culture has been defined by the performance of certain feminized forms of labor, specifically cooking and serving. As has been demonstrated, cooking and serving both are tasks that have been regularly performed by both genders, yet both forms of labor have come to constitute forms of "women's work." The encoding of such work into the dictums of femininity, as previously noted, was thus largely the result of such actions being either isolated from or rendered inconsequential with regard to the wage economy. Yet the feminization of these tasks does depend significantly upon a form of womanhood that is related to the biological functions of the female body; both cooking and serving can be understood as feminine in that they are extensions of caretaking and nurturing, attributes that are inextricably linked to the biological imperatives of maternity. The discourse surrounding cooking and serving has frequently drawn upon this element of the female biology in justifying women's performance of unwaged household labor, highlighting their innate capacities to carry and nurture human life. It is this complicated relationship between the form and function of the female body and the cultural construction of womanhood that we will now address in the remaining three chapters of this dissertation. In so doing we will examine how the biological dimension of femaleness has provided the basis for femininity and how this has been articulated in three distinct forms of food culture: the labor of feeding others, the physical and psychological implications of

eating on the female body, and the ways in which the female body is encoded in the language of consumption and treated as if it were food to be devoured.

In this chapter, I will examine the first of these more bodily derived forms of femininity — the process and practice of maternity — while simultaneously concluding my examination of the ways in which various forms of labor have been encoded into the dictums of femininity. In particular, I will examine the ways in which the act of feeding exemplifies both the biological function of the female body and the cultural construction of femininity, and how the discourse surrounding its performance highlights the complicated relationship between biology and culture or sex and gender. I will illustrate the ways in which feeding is related to the discourse of maternity, comprising both part of the biological dimension of motherhood and the cultural construction thereof. Furthermore, I will delineate the ways in which this gesture exists beyond motherhood and functions as a form of caretaking, a broader category of work that encompasses much of the labor that considered integral and intrinsic to womanhood. In so doing, I will use feeding as a case study for the ways in which feminized labor derives from but ultimately surpasses the biological functions of the female body.

Moreover, in examining feeding as it relates to maternity and caretaking, I will illuminate the myriad and diverse approaches to the issue of motherhood that emerged within feminist thought and activism during the 1960s and 1970s. As previously noted, feminists of this period were far from unanimous in their approach of women's issues and maternity was a very divisive topic for many women involved with various

forms of feminism. For feminists both within and beyond the art world, the issue of maternity brought with it a host of fraught implications. On the one hand, many women identified maternity and mothering as an action as a factor that was responsible for women's subjugation and was a hindrance to their advancement. Eschewing the ideas that a woman's ultimate achievement was related to her procreation, and recognizing that the enculturation that occurs between mother and daughter (and mother and son, as well) was largely responsible for the maintenance of a patriarchal gender order, many feminists felt that motherhood was a problematic condition in and of itself. On the other hand, many feminists embraced the prospects of motherhood as the ultimate expression of their innate capabilities as women; for many women, having children was seen as a feminist act in and of itself. As such, the issue of maternity and the practices under its auspices — including feeding — was both central and paradoxical in its expression within feminist discourse during the 1960s and 1970s.

Recognizing the complicated nature of the “question of motherhood,” I will thus analyze the ways in which feeding as a form of maternal action has been critically examined in two art works created by feminist collectives in the 1970s. I will first address how the issue of feeding is manifest in the collaborative project *Womanhouse* (Appendix: Figure 38), created by members of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1972, specifically focusing on the depiction of eggs and breasts in the *Nurturant Kitchen* created by Susan Frazier, Vicky Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch. In my analysis, I will argue that Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch's installation reflects the problematic

dimension of maternity within feminist thought in the 1970s, and that they use the uncanny nature of the space to highlight the psychological anxieties that were associated with the prospect of maternity. Having done so, I will then turn my attention to the performance *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-1981) (Appendix: Figure 39) by the collective Feminist Art Workers, which employs a more positive perspective on the relationship between femininity and feeding as a form of caretaking and maternal behavior. Through my analysis, I will illustrate how the collective uses the gesture of feeding others as a way to demonstrate the positive aspects of collaboration and the nurturing dynamics of femininity. I will argue that their embrace thereof exemplifies the approach of some feminists to embrace some of the biologically derived forms of femininity as a point of differentiation and strength. In comparing these two works, I will delineate the complexities within feminist thought with regard to maternity and delineate the ways in which feeding, as a form of caretaking, has been used by feminist artists to comment on such issues.

Feeding and Femininity: Biological Reality and Gender Identity

In order to understand the complicated discourse surrounding the practice of maternity within feminist art and literature during the 1970s, we must clearly delineate the complicated relationship between feeding, the female body, and the cultural construct of femininity. Unlike the dynamic relations of cooking and serving, as discussed in previous chapters, the boundary between culture and biology — sex and gender — is considerably more permeable when the examining the practice of maternity. While we can assert, as Judith Butler has done, that gender is solely a

performative, culturally derived concept, certain aspects of the ideological construct that constitutes a gender identity do arise from the differences between the sexes. Within the field of feminist food studies, the relationship between gender and the biological functions of the female body has been used as an explanation for why certain societies have delineated the performance of food based labor.³⁶⁵ Moreover, the fact that, until relatively recently, the terms “gender” and “sex” were considered interchangeable to a lay-audience and that there is still not a complete consensus on the degree to which these entities are entirely discrete amongst social scientists — including anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists — serve to illustrate how deeply intertwined gender ideology and biology can be.

With this in mind, in addressing the idea of “feeding” as an expression of femininity, I assert that to some degree, discursively constructed gender identities are derived at the very basest of level from certain biological differences between the sexes. That is to say, certain attributes of masculinity and femininity originate from specific biological differences between the sexes. Such differences, however, can only account for the emergence of a limited number of gendered attributes, and cannot and do not account for the variation amongst culturally defined gender identities, the gendering of certain practices — including modes of dress and the performance of labor — or even the psychological realities of living in one gender or the other; all of these aspects of gender identity are contextually dependent and can and do comprise the lived experiences of both cis-gender and transgender individuals.

³⁶⁵ Laura Shapiro makes such an analogy in the introduction to Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. XV.

The point of departure by which gender ideology arises from biological sex thus emerges from the only true difference between male and female: the reproductive system. As Joan Huber asserts, “the only sex differences that are irreducible and nonoverlapping, [are] those of procreation [...]. Only men impregnate. Only women menstruate, ovulate, gestate, and lactate. Other biological sex differences (testosterone levels, body size and strength, brains, cognition, sex hormones) lie on an overlapping continuum such that some women possess more of a male sex attribute like body strength and size than do most men.”³⁶⁶ The only difference, therein, between male and female is the difference each sex plays in the continuation of the species.

Yet this fundamental difference between the sexes does give rise to certain social functions, which we would term gender. Because pregnancy does have a physical and physiological effect on the female body and because the female body is “hardwired” to provide for the baby both in utero and as a neonate, certain cultural dictums surrounding femininity have arisen as a result of these biological functions.

That said the understanding of femininity that arises from the female reproductive capacity is extremely culturally defined. One need look no further than the long and complicated history of breastfeeding and the dictums surrounding its practice in the western world to see how gender identity, although derived from biological sex, is the result of cultural forces. Glenda Wall asserts: “Social understandings of nature and the natural play a large role in the talk that surrounds breastfeeding. As Carter [...] notes, the notion of the natural woman, in the context of

³⁶⁶ Joan Huber, *On the Origins of Gender Inequality* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007). 27.

the nature/culture dichotomy, has been at the heart of infant feeding discourse for centuries.”³⁶⁷ While all cultures acknowledge the need for infants to be nursed, the question of who does the nursing, when, where, and how is all entirely derived from cultural dictates surrounding womanhood. As Wall points out: “Bound up with this discourse of the natural is the understanding that some women, namely non-white women and working class women, are closer to nature and more in touch with their natural functions than are others.”³⁶⁸ In certain contexts, the construction of different racialized and class-based forms of womanhood has dictated whether or not a woman should nurse her own child.

The history of breast-feeding in the United States thus reveals a great deal about how the practice of motherhood — including its biological dimensions — is related to the cultural construct of femininity. Looking at the ways in which nursing and motherhood was theorized in early America, Ruth H. Bloch notes: “In practically all of the literature on women circulating in America prior to the late eighteenth century, the theme of motherhood tended either to be ignored altogether in favor of such topics as courtship or marriage, or it was subsumed among a variety of other religious and domestic obligations shared with men.”³⁶⁹ Bloch asserts that maternity, including the practice of breast-feeding, was dictated by culture. She writes: “The only other aspect of mother’s relationships with infants to receive much attention in early

³⁶⁷ Glenda Wall, "Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse," *Gender and Society* 15, no. 4 (August 2001). 593.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 593.

³⁶⁹ Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2, Towards a Feminist Theory of Motherhood (June 1978). 103.

American literature was breastfeeding. Ministers addressed this issue specifically in order to urge mothers to nurse their own children.”³⁷⁰ Seeking to unsettle the trend of employing wet nurses, Puritan ministers drew a clear connection between biological reality and religious imperative in imploring women to suckle their own children, “insisting that mothers who chose not to nurse their babies opposed the clear will of God as revealed in both Scripture and in nature. Ministers commonly cited Biblical examples of mothers suckling babies and also pointed out that God obviously designed the breasts on the female body for this use.”³⁷¹ Puritan ministers in early America thus intertwined culture and biology in the creation of a maternal ideology. They used the biological reality of the female body to integrate a particular aspect of maternity into the discourse of femininity.

While breast-feeding was emblematic of maternal virtue amongst the puritans in 18th century America, over the course of the following two centuries, the dictates surrounding breast-feeding and the role of the female body in the performance of motherhood underwent significant changes. By the postwar period, the relationship between femininity and motherhood had become inextricably linked thanks to Cold War neo-domesticity, but the biological dimensions of said practice were largely excluded from the discourse of femininity. Two integral aspects of the female reproductive process, birth and nursing, had been so thoroughly integrated into the field of medicine by the 1950s that women hardly participated in their performance. With regard to the act of giving birth, women who arrived at the hospital in labor were

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 104.

³⁷¹ Ibid. 104.

“physically restrained, heavily draped, and veiled under general anesthesia. The mother was separated from her spouse during delivery and from her infant shortly after delivery.”³⁷² In contrast to the active process of homebirth, which had been the predominant practice until the twentieth century, little regard, if any, was given to including the mother actively in the birth process in hospital scenarios during the interwar and postwar periods.

Similarly, the dictates surrounding child rearing in the postwar period emphasized bottle-feeding over breast.³⁷³ Whereas previous generations of women had nursed their children and even been implored to do so themselves over employing wet-nurses, the rise of prepared formulas in the early 20th century and the increasing specialization of physicians in fields like gynecology and pediatrics created a climate wherein the medically sound and thus “socially appropriate” practice of feeding infants was entirely divorced from the female body. Just because a woman lactated did not mean that she should breastfeed her children.³⁷⁴ The biological capacity to give life was thus often neglected in the discourse surrounding maternity and womanhood. Instead, the dictates of maternity in the postwar period emphasized domesticity, emotionalism, compassion and caretaking in accordance with the capitalist dictates of Cold War femininity. The prevailing gender discourse thus encoded certain tasks such

³⁷² Joan J. Matthews and Kathleen Zadak, "The Alternative Birth Movement in the United States: History and Current Status," in *Mothers & Motherhood : Readings in American History*, ed. Rima D. Apple and Janet Lynne Golden, Women and Health (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 280.

³⁷³ Lynn Y. Weiner, "Reconstructing Motherhood: The La Leche League in Postwar America," *ibid.*, Women and Health, 368-9.

³⁷⁴ For more information on the history of scientific motherhood and the dictates surrounding breast and bottle feeding see Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood : Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

as cooking, serving, and caretaking as feminine on the justification that they arose from the female impulse to have and rear children, but the affiliation between the practices was the result of discursive ideology.

Thus, by examining the ways in which cultural dictates about gender ideology differ in their inclusion and approach to biological sex differences, we can understand that the relationship between gender and sex is not straight forward. As Huber notes, these biological differences can be seen, cross-culturally, as the primary basis for gender distinctions. She writes: “all societies divide those who can bear and nourish children from those who cannot.”³⁷⁵ Yet the articulation of such a division, is, as we have seen, entirely the result of social constructions. Moreover, the degree to which these biological dimensions of childbirth and childrearing impact the prevailing discourse, as has been noted, can vary significantly due to intersectional factors, including class, race/ethnicity, geography and historical moment. As such, the discourse surrounding maternity must be seen as a construct that originates with biological factors, but is explicitly the result of a particular cultural moment. The attributes and specifically the labor, therefore, ascribed to femininity as a result of maternity thus reflects a larger gender discourse and the cultural construction of womanhood.

The Feminist Art Program and the Origins of *Womanhouse*

In 1970, Judy Chicago established the first “Feminist Art Program” in the United States while teaching at Fresno State College. According to Laura Meyer:

³⁷⁵ Huber, *On the Origins of Gender Inequality*. 27-8.

“With the blessing of Art Department Chair Heinz Kusel, [...] [Chicago] initialed an all-women’s class that would meet off-campus, at a spatial and ideological distance from the rest of the Department. Admission to the class was subject to permission from the instructor, who interviewed and selected interested applicants on the basis of their perceived ambition and commitment to pursuing careers as professional artists.”³⁷⁶ Chicago ultimately chose 16 women — a mixture of undergraduate and graduate students with a wide range of artistic and feminist backgrounds — to participate in the course, and set about finding a studio space and designing a curriculum for the program.

The very first task for Chicago and the members of her class was finding and establishing a studio space off-campus. Chicago maintained that this process would provide students with the essential experience of finding and establishing a studio of one’s own, which she believed essential to one’s artistic development.³⁷⁷ Moreover, it was of great importance that said studio space be separate from the rest of the campus, and that the Feminist Art Program (FAP) exist as an entity unto itself, distinct within the department. As one student, Janice M. Lester, wrote:

The structure we were creating for ourselves demanded that we have a private place to hold our rap sessions and a studio where we could work as artists, any time of the day and without fear of psychic or physical invasion. We had all experienced hesitancy, shyness, or actual intimidation when working in art classes with men, and being

³⁷⁶ Laura Meyer, Faith Wilding, and California State University Fresno. University Art Gallery., *A Studio of Their Own : The Legacy of the Fresno Feminist Experiment* (Fresno, Calif.: Press at California State University, Fresno, 2009). 6.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 7.

constantly approached sexually is inconsistent with the kind of psychic privacy necessary to function creatively.³⁷⁸

For Lester and her colleagues within the FAP, having a distinct, women-only space was a fundamental necessity for creating the kind of feminist environment they felt essential to the development of their practice as women artists. They asserted, with clear reasoning, that the structures of the art classes that were otherwise available to them as students were stifling and restrictive, and that their participation in such classes was frequently hindered by the fact that they regularly felt disempowered, overlooked, or sexualized by their male counterparts.

Beyond establishing a separate space for women arts students, the FAP was also distinct in the pedagogical and methodological approach employed in the service of helping women artists develop in both their art practices and their personal lives. As Meyer notes, the curriculum of the FAP “made a radical departure from traditional art instruction organized around medium-specific projects. Instead, projects were conceived around an issue or topic, without any specifications as to the media to be used.”³⁷⁹ Consciousness-raising or “rap” sessions were thus employed as the fundamental basis for the art that these students were creating. As Rita Yokoi noted in appeal to keep the FAP at Fresno State following Chicago’s departure, the purpose of a women-only art class is “to help develop consciousness of ourselves as women through our art. We need to find out what each of our personal pasts have been so we

³⁷⁸Janice M. Lester, "Building the Studio," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, 1970). 1

³⁷⁹Meyer, Wilding, and California State University Fresno. University Art Gallery., *A Studio of Their Own : The Legacy of the Fresno Feminist Experiment*. 7.

can express our personal selves in our work.”³⁸⁰ Women participants thus used elements of their personal background to address the issues and topics presented and to illuminate the experience of being a woman, both positive and negative, in their work, and thus transforming elements of their own consciousness-raising sessions into art.

In 1971, Judy Chicago left Fresno State for the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, CA. Prior to her departure, she petitioned the CalArts to allow her to continue her work with the Feminist Art Program and to allow her students from Fresno State to transfer to CalArts with her. In a letter to the admissions committee, she wrote: “And in the beginning, I met and trained some young women, so that they could begin. [...] To go on with what we have begun, we have to bring all of our beginnings with us. We cannot afford to let go of anything we have begun — not of our work in the studio, not of our films, or our tapes, not of our studies of women writers, nor of the starting of a Female Art History, and most of all we cannot let go of each other.”³⁸¹ Ultimately “ten of the fifteen original participants in the Fresno feminist art program, including Dori Atlantis, Vanalyne Green, Suzanne Lacy, Karen LeCocq, Jan Lester, Chris Rush, Faith Wilding, Shawnee Wollenman, Nancy Youdelman, and Cheryl Zurligen, applied and were accepted to CalArts. All except

³⁸⁰ Rita Yokoi, "Why We Need a Women's Class: Objectives and Goals," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, 1971).1.

³⁸¹ Judy Chicago, "Letter to the Admissions Committee of Calarts," in *Judy Chicago Papers* (Boston, MA: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, MC 502, 1971). n.p.

Zurlingen enrolled there in fall of 1971.”³⁸² At CalArts, Chicago combined forces with Miriam Schapiro in directing the program, and together, the two expanded the program into a more formal entity, complete with a “brand new studio space along with tools, equipment, course support money for projects and materials.”³⁸³

The first year of the CalArts Feminist Art Program, Chicago and Schapiro decided to focus the efforts of the students on a large-scale installation project that would require extensive collaboration from the students, *Womanhouse*. They wrote in the catalogue for its opening:

Womanhouse began early in the fall of 1971. Paula Harper, art historian in the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, inspired us by suggesting the idea. The program was just beginning again after an experimental year at Fresno State College. We became very excited about the possibility of starting the year with a large-scale collaborative project, rather than with the extended consciousness-raising sessions that had been held when the Program was in Fresno. There the women students had spent a lot of time talking about their problems as women before they began to do any work. We wondered if those same problems could be dealt with while working on a project.³⁸⁴

Recognizing that an essential component of feminism is women’s collaboration and mutual support, Chicago and Schapiro decided to focus the collective efforts of all of the students in the Feminist Art Program into a single work. They wanted to use the experience to help the students recognize the collective power

³⁸² Meyer, Wilding, and California State University Fresno. University Art Gallery., *A Studio of Their Own : The Legacy of the Fresno Feminist Experiment*. 18.

³⁸³ Chicago, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*. 34.

³⁸⁴ Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Womanhouse," in *Womanhouse* (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts, Printed by Wood and Jones, 1972). n.p.

of feminism and they wanted the project to embody the central tenet of consciousness-raising, wherein a woman realizes that she is not alone in her struggles.

Like with the FAP at Fresno State, Chicago and Schapiro used the *Womanhouse* project in order to give their students the opportunity to develop skills applicable beyond the academic art world. They charged the students with the task of finding a house “that would be suitable to the dreams and fantasies they envisioned for what would be an exclusively female environment.”³⁸⁵ One group found the location, “an old house on Mariposa Street in a run-down section of Hollywood,” and they sought out the owner, an elderly woman named Amanda Psalter, who was so intrigued by their proposed use of the space that her family donated the house for the project.³⁸⁶ The participants of the Feminist Art Program then took to renovating the space themselves. As Schapiro and Chicago note:

On November 8, 1972, 23 women arrived at 533 Mariposa Street armed with mops, brooms, paint, buckets, rollers, sanding equipment and wallpaper. For two months we scraped walls, replaced windows, built partitions, sanded floors, made furniture, installed lights, and renovated the 75-year old dilapidated structure. One of the goals of the Program is to teach women to use power equipment, tools and building techniques. The House provided a natural context for the women to learn these things.³⁸⁷

Like they had done in Fresno, the students and faculty of the Feminist Art Program again undertook the act of renovating a space that had fallen into disrepair for their own use.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. n.p.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. n.p.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. n.p.

The chance to develop their carpentry and construction skills was empowering for the women of the FAP on many levels. First, the labor on the project gave them a chance to transgress the boundaries that have restricted women's work; construction has been — and to a great extent remains — considered a fundamentally masculine field of work, and as such the women of the FAP had very few opportunities to engage in such work. As Schapiro and Chicago note: “In order to accomplish a project as demanding as **Womanhouse**, the women had to work in a manner that they were totally unaccustomed to. They had to do hard physical labor, use tools they knew nothing about, complete their projects by the opening date, work in a scale larger than most of them had ever tackled.”³⁸⁸ Schapiro and Chicago saw this process as a central to the women developing their own sense of self and esteem in their work. They note: “We know that society fails women by not demanding excellence from them. We hung in there. We assured them that they could do it, that the House would be a success, that they were angry because they were being forced to work harder than they ever had before ... that it was worth it. In the end, they came to agree with us, and they developed real pride in achieving what was, individually and collectively an incredible feat.”³⁸⁹ Chicago and Schapiro thus used the process of renovating the structure and building the installation as an opportunity to teach their students about the values of perseverance and about their abilities to stand up against adversity, attributes that Chicago and Schapiro felt were necessary for their students to develop as feminists and as women artists.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. n.p. Emphasis original.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. n.p.

The construction process also allowed the women of the FAP the opportunity to see first hand how their persistent efforts could change the ways in which women are perceived by society more broadly. During the construction process, the community surrounding the house in Hollywood initially reacted with trepidation and concern over their efforts. Schapiro and Chicago write: “At first the neighbors were shocked to see women in work clothes and boots sawing two-by-fours on the porch and carrying sheets of plywood up the steps. They thought that they were being invaded by hippies and they complained to the school about all of the ‘longhairs.’ The school explained that women usually wore their hair long.”³⁹⁰ The very fact that they were women doing construction work — and doing so in work clothes — was so unfathomable to that neighbor that he assumed that the laborers must be men. Despite the initial hesitation at the prospect of women doing manual labor, the neighborhood eventually did become accustomed to the presence of these 23 women workers. Through their persistent efforts and their continual engagement with masculinized manual labor, the women of the FAP were able to change the views of the neighborhood about women’s abilities in carrying out construction projects. As such, they were able to push the boundaries of gendered labor for the community, and thus raise the consciousness, even to a small degree, of the members of the neighborhood when it came to the ways in which women’s labor was defined.

Once they had renovated the space, the members of the FAP including Schapiro and Chicago took to building a large-scale installation in the rooms of the

³⁹⁰ Ibid. n.p.

house on Mariposa Street. The project was designed so that “[e]ach of the women, working singly or together, had made rooms or environments: bedrooms, closets, bathrooms, hallways, gardens. The age-old female activity of homemaking was taken to fantasy proportions. **Womanhouse** became the repository of the daydreams women have as they wash, bake, cook, sew, clean and iron their lives away.”³⁹¹ Over the course of several months, the women engaged in consciousness-raising sessions, group planning meetings, and worked collectively in delineating the various projects that would occupy the rooms of *Womanhouse* (Appendix: Figures 40-42), 21 different installation works in total. Taken together, these works covered a wide array of issues that comprise the experience of lived womanhood, ranging from menstruation to marriage. As such, the work on the whole serves as a feminist account of the myriad, distinct ways that women experience domination in their everyday lives.

Consciousness Raising and the Feminist Unconscious in the *Nurturant Kitchen*

In creating the entire installation of *Womanhouse*, members of the Feminist Art Program divided the spaces of the house amongst themselves. Three women — Susan Frazier, Vicky Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch — took it upon themselves to design and develop a project that would occupy the space of the kitchen. The women developed their pieces based on consciousness-raising session held with other members of the program. As Vicki Hodgetts notes: “We had a consciousness-raising session on kitchens. Some people saw kitchens as fulsome, warm, nurturing. Others saw kitchens as dangerous with hot stoves and sharp knives. (‘Viciousness in the kitchen — the

³⁹¹ Ibid. n.p.

potatoes hiss’).”³⁹² They considered the myriad symbolic functions of the kitchen with regard to femininity and the complicated expectations put forth to women with regard to their position within both the public and private sphere.

Of the many avenues through which womanhood is expressed within the symbolic space of the kitchen, Weltsch, Frazier, and Hodgetts ultimately decided on creating a unified installation that focused on women’s role as nurturers and the relationship between feeding and femininity. They painted all of the surfaces of the room — not simply the walls, but also the cabinets, appliances, and cookware — a uniform shade of pale pink. The women hung a series of aprons that contained exaggerated appliques depicting various parts of the female body, such as a set of smiling lips and a pair of disembodied breasts on a set of hooks and they dressed the windows with a set of frilly pink lace curtains. They filled the drawers and cabinetry with images of women taken from print media, so as to confront the viewer when he or she attempted to use the space functionally. Finally, on the walls, they affixed a number of synthetic pink breasts, which are transformed into egg-like forms as the viewer raises his or her gaze to the ceiling. The entire space was designed to overload the audience with symbolic representations of womanhood, drawing on both their cultural construction of gender and the relation thereof to the biological reality of femaleness, from the overwhelming ubiquity of pink within the space to the hybridized eggs and breast that covered the walls and ceiling.

³⁹² Vicki Hodgetts, "Eggs to Breasts," *ibid.*, ed. Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. n.p.

The *Nurturant Kitchen* was explicitly designed to highlight the way in which feeding is an explicitly feminine — and female — action. All three women wanted the space to address the relationship between feeding and maternity, and wanted to call attention to how womanhood is encoded in the dictates of both. For instance, in her contribution to the catalogue, Susan Frazier writes describes the strings of the aprons as an extension of the maternal body. She writes: “Come in, eat ... please put on the apron strings and experience the heart of the home with me./ The outside is no longer with you, you are now embraced by my nurturing pink womb, giving life — sustaining milk from my breasts. The umbilical cord has been cut though, and you must hold on to the apron strings real tight or you might (gasp) ... have to rely on yourself ... tisk, tisk!”³⁹³ Frazier explicitly calls upon the nurturing function of the female body and its relationship to the construction of motherhood in describing the symbolism of the aprons. She refers explicitly to the idiomatic relationship between domesticity and maternal protection in the form of the “apron strings,” which serve symbolically as a substitute for the bodily connection made by the umbilical cord.

Similarly, the inclusion of eggs and breasts on the walls and ceiling of the *Nurturant Kitchen* was meant to highlight the relationship between both substrates and the function of the female body during and after pregnancy. On a formal level, fried eggs and breasts are remarkably similar; both comprise of two circles, one inscribed within the other. As such, when the three women were deciding what to include in the space, they decided to accentuate the formal similarity between the two. Hodgetts

³⁹³ Susan Frazier, "Aprons in Kitchen," *ibid.* n.p.

describes the process by which they came to a consensus on the work, stating: “I had a fleeing image of fried eggs stenciled over everything — walls, ceiling, floor — and some people saw breasts. Breasts were nurturing — kitchens were the extension of mother’s milk. I felt a little railroaded. I still wanted eggs. And then Robin said, ‘Why not have a transformation from eggs to breasts,’ and we were all delighted.”³⁹⁴ The choice to include both eggs and breasts and to hybridize the two thus allowed for the women to depict two distinct components of the female body, both of which are essential to procreation.

Moreover, the women constructed the space so that it had a particularly bodily quality. The placement of the breasts on the wall and the fact that they were painted the same shades of pink as the rest of the room made it appear as if these corporeal elements were growing directly out of the wall. In her contribution to the catalogue, a short poem entitled “The Kitchen,” Robin Weltsch even goes so far as to describe the space in terms of the female body. She writes: “The soft skin of a kitchen pink/Is openers, strainers, blenders [...] Is faucets and nipples knobs.”³⁹⁵ Considering the bodily attributes Weltsch attributes to the space, and considering the ubiquitous depiction of both internal and external corporeal components, it is apparent that in creating the *Nurturant Kitchen*, Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch were determined to create a physical space that represents explicitly the biological role of women’s bodies in feeding.

³⁹⁴ Vicki Hodgetts, “Eggs to Breasts,” *ibid.* n.p.

³⁹⁵ Robin Weltsch, “The Kitchen,” *ibid.* n.p.

The depiction of maternity that came to fruition in the *Nurturant Kitchen* is far from neutral or innocuous. On the contrary, upon entry the viewer is overwhelmed with pink and inundated with breasts and eggs. The symbolism of the space is repeated time and time again so as to create a preponderance of maternity, rendering the idea of motherhood as all consuming and impossible to ignore while walking through the room. In so doing, Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch created a space that depicts not only the biological and social aspects of maternity, but that also call attention to the complicated implications of maternity with regard to women's lived experiences. In creating their installation, the three women draw upon the frightening and all-consuming elements of maternity in order to critique the ways in which motherhood is understood in the broader culture.

The work, furthermore, allowed Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch to deal with their own understanding of motherhood. For Weltsch in particular, the concept of motherhood and maternity was heavily impacted by her own relationship with her mother. In her evaluations and reflections on the project and the course, she wrote about one exercise wherein the members of the FAP chanted "Mommy" as a group. She notes:

While chanting Mommy throughout the group I did not feel compassion for my mother. I felt the pain of my other sisters. It's difficult for me to get close to deep feelings for my mother because she has stopped me from doing so in the past. I tried to keep up an image of myself and could never be my true self for fear she would reject my feelings. I've become almost apathetic to her and I hate her way of life.

I don't have too much respect for her although she's a talented woman.³⁹⁶

At the time when she was actively working on the *Nurturant Kitchen*, Weltsch was dealing with the complicated relationship between her mother and herself. She saw her mother as a negative model and clearly felt a great deal of resentment towards her mother's actions. Weltsch even notes a similar feeling of disdain towards her instructors — Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro — in an earlier evaluation, wherein she states: “for some reason — there is that parental feeling on my part that is hard to shrug off. Normally I have a good rapport with women older than I — yet there have been women that I feel daughterly to. That comes from my own relationship with my mother. All I can say about her now is that she's fucked — and I am slowly trying to escape her will that she so heavily puts upon me.”³⁹⁷ For Weltsch, the relationship between mother and daughter, and motherhood more generally is tinged with the negative dynamics of her complicated experiences with her own mother and her desire to both escape the toxic bonds between them and to avoid a similar fate.

The psychological complexity of maternity and the fearful associations that accompany to the idea of motherhood manifest as uncanny in the *Nurturant Kitchen*. In his first essay on “The Uncanny,” Freud defines the term as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been

³⁹⁶ "Evaluation," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, November 1971). n.p.

³⁹⁷ "December Evaluation," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, December 1971). n.p.

familiar.”³⁹⁸ Freud asserts that the sense of the uncanny — that feeling of fear and discomfort — derives explicitly from the combination of the novel with the familiar. Freud traces the etymology of the uncanny — the *Unheimlich* in German — to its relationship with its antonym. The *Heimlich*, to Freud “[starts] from the homely and the domestic” and is “further [developed] towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret.”³⁹⁹ This sense of secrecy and the danger that lies therein that Freud argues links the *Heimlich* to the *Unheimlich*; he writes: “*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, ‘the unhomely’) is in some ways a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, ‘the homely’).”⁴⁰⁰ Thus what makes the uncanny unhomely is precisely the fact that it deviates from the familiar, but also that it does so in a way that is imbued with the sense of the hidden and the dangerous. It is frightening because it warps something that was once mundane and innocuous into something unseemly, something distinct and in so doing it reveals something that was at one point hidden.

The monochromatic pink environment of the *Nurturant Kitchen*, with its walls inundated with eggs and breasts, transitioning from one familiar form into another, is thus, by definition, uncanny, *unheimlich*. In creating their work, Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch undermine the familiarity of the kitchen space, by covering it from floor to ceiling in unfamiliar forms. They actively remove the homeliness from a space that

³⁹⁸ Sigmund Freud, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). 125.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 133.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 134.

has frequently been referred to as “the heart of the home.” The thick coat of pink paint that adorns all of the surfaces both transforms the common form in which the objects in such a room exist while simultaneously rendering them useless. Moreover, the preponderance of disembodied breasts and discolored, inedible eggs upon the walls are paradigmatically uncanny; in creating the work, Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch transform these familiar entities into something surreal and create a dialectic between a the sexual and gustatory function of both item that unsettles the conventional interpretation of either breasts or eggs. The oscillation between these two forms thus elicits as sense of discomfort and even anxiety as one is entirely subsumed by an overwhelming sea of pink maternity. All that was homely is thus transformed into a distorted domestic scene.

This uncanny element of the *Nurturant Kitchen* is therefore in many ways emblematic of the overall goal of the *Womanhouse* project, which aimed to tap into the psychic elements of women’s experiences. As Johanna Demetrakas notes in her documentary on *Womanhouse*, “Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and their students from the California Institute of the Arts used consciousness-raising sessions to search out and reveal the female experience [...]. They explored these new feelings about themselves, and about women’s role in the home, until they created, before the eyes of the public, the longings, fears, and dreams women have as they cook, sew, wash and iron their lives away.”⁴⁰¹ *Womanhouse* is thus an amalgamation of women’s unconscious or unspoken thoughts and feelings; the psychic dimensions of women’s

⁴⁰¹ Johanna Demetrakas, "Womanhouse," (Berkeley, CA: Serious Business Co., 1974). n.p.

lives — specifically their hopes, dreams, and fears — thus comprise the basis of the work and are manifest in the final product.

Bad Mothers and Radical Daughters

Beyond being emblematic of a psychological element of second wave feminism, the uncanny nature of the *Nurturant Kitchen* is also in many ways an indictment upon the institution of motherhood. Upon entry into the space, the viewer is overcome with a sense of distortion, and along with this alteration comes a sense that something is not right. Recognizing that the *Nurturant Kitchen* is rife with images of maternity, the discomfit of the space thus aligns with the myriad and problematic issues that are associated with maternity. The image of mothers put forth by Frazier, Hodgetts, and Weltsch is built upon a sense of peculiarity, irregularity, or even fear. The space is meant to subsume the entire individual into a womb-like cave of pink, and the installation repeatedly presents the viewer with distorted forms and negative stereotypes of womanhood and maternity. The three women present motherhood, as a component of femininity, not as a laudable and natural form of female identity, but rather as something overwhelming and even anxiety producing.

This highly critical or even negative conception of motherhood is consistent with a great deal of feminist thought and literature during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many feminists found the practice of motherhood to be problematic at best. Within both the art world and the broader social and political movements, many women grappled with the question of maternity and the role their mothers played in the perpetuation of a patriarchal structure. From the outset, much of feminist discourse

treated the institution of motherhood as a form of psychological entrapment, and blamed the domestic ideology that asserted women's "rightful" and "natural" roles as wife and mother for women's subjugation. Perhaps nowhere is this critique more explicit and scathing than in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which conveys motherhood as so damaging that her critics, as Rebecca Jo Plant note, almost align with the discourse of "momism" perpetuated in the postwar period by figures such as Philip Wylie.⁴⁰²

This lambasting of motherhood was particularly true for women involved in Radical Feminism, which Christine Stansell has characterized as a "revolt of the daughters."⁴⁰³ Young feminists, growing up in the postwar period and coming of age alongside the New Left, felt conflicted about the maternal models they had been presented. As Ruth Rosen notes: "'Be like me, don't be like me,' was the confusing message a good many daughters imbibed along with their milk and cookies. The result was that many young women grew up with a pervasive sense of ambivalence about the future. They feared becoming like — or unlike — the cultural image of the fifties

⁴⁰² Plant highlights the paradoxical nature of Friedan's writing about maternity with regard to the longstanding criticism of figures like Philip Wylie, whose ideas of "momism," promoted in his book *Generation of Vipers*, blamed societal ills on the ways in which women performed the act of mothering. Plant notes: "In essence, *The Feminine Mystique* reproduced the antimaternalist critique that figured so prominently in postwar psychological literature and popular culture. Citing numerous social scientific and psychiatric studies, Friedan reiterated many of the specious charges that experts and commentators like Wylie had leveled at American moms. She blamed them for the mental problems of World War II servicemen, the traitorous behavior of Korean War POWs, the difficulties of children suffering from severe mental illnesses like autism and schizophrenia, and 'the homosexuality that is spreading like a murky fog over the American scene.'" For more information, see: Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America*, Kindle Edition ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). 146.

⁴⁰³ Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*. 221.

mother.”⁴⁰⁴ To women born in the baby boom, maternity alone was considered an insufficient or inappropriate use of their energies. They attributed the sorrows of their mothers to the pervasive neo-domestic ideology that manifest in the form of Friedan’s “feminine mystique” and they actively rejected such a model for themselves.⁴⁰⁵ This rejection of motherhood as practiced by the previous generation manifested in excoriating critiques of maternity in feminist literature during the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist writers from Adrienne Rich and Shulamith Firestone to Alix Kates Shulman and Erica Jong wrote about their complicated relationship with maternity, specifically of experiences with their own mothers. As Joyce Antler notes: “The discourse around motherhood reflected a broad concern among feminists with the choices their mothers made. Rejecting their mothers’ lifestyles, most of these rebel daughters sought alternative pathways.”⁴⁰⁶

In some cases, this rejection manifest in the form of pitiful disdain for the choices of their mothers, and many women found the experiences of the previous generations to be a cautionary tale. For instance, Antler notes that “For writer Alix Kates Shulman, it was the sense of her mother’s ‘circumscribed possibilities and thwarted ambitions, however unacknowledged,’ that sent her ‘reeling headlong into the movement’; to avoid her mother’s fate, she vowed to remain ‘forever

⁴⁰⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open : How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000). 43.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. 45ibid..

⁴⁰⁶ Joyce Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write! : A History of the Jewish Mother* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

childless.”⁴⁰⁷ Shulman found her mother’s position so unfortunate that she selected an opposite extreme for herself. Adrienne Rich, on the other hand, made no such assertion, but she did assert that her mother’s experiences inspired her for an alternative life. She writes: “In early adolescence, I still glanced slyly at my mother’s body, vaguely imagining: I too shall have breasts, full hips, hair between my thighs — whatever that meant to me then, and with all the ambivalence of such a thought. And there were other thoughts: I too shall marry, have children — but *not like her*. I shall find a way of doing it all differently.”⁴⁰⁸ Rich, like Shulman, emphatically identified her mother as a negative example, although Rich did recognize a possibility that she could be a mother and still have her own life and accomplishments.

While Rich and others, like Shulman, treat their mothers as models to be avoided at all costs, other feminists treated the entire practice of maternity and its place within the nuclear family with abject disgust and horror. Most notably, Shulamith Firestone lambasted the institution of motherhood as the central component of women’s subjugation. Unlike Shulman and Rich, who sought to develop alternative paths for their individual practice of maternity, Firestone posited an entirely different means for humans to reproduce as a species. Firestone argued for “*The freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction by every means possible, and the diffusion of*

⁴⁰⁷ Shulman, did, however eventually recant said vow and have children, but in so doing, she received similar criticism for her decision as she had launched against her mother’s position as a housewife. Ibid. 152-3.

⁴⁰⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born : Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1976). 219. Emphasis original.

the child-rearing role to the society as a whole men as well as women.”⁴⁰⁹ This goal, as Antler succinctly describes it, could be achieved if “‘childbearing could be taken over by technology’ (essentially, test tube reproduction — a radical strategy in 1970).”⁴¹⁰ Moreover, Firestone sought to excise the practice of childrearing from womanhood by restructuring the family unit so as to limit the development of kinship in accordance with biology. As Antler notes, “Firestone not only called for nonbiological reproduction, but also urged for more humane households, which included single people and large groups living together and raising children. With the ‘blood tie of the mother to the child’ severed, ‘a paradise on earth’ would be created anew.”⁴¹¹ Firestone sought to create a system wherein the biological component of reproduction was removed from the social element of raising children, and therefore, in so doing, women’s could escape the restrictions that maternity put upon them and thus attain gender equality.

Yet this desire to create a system that would ensure the continuation of the species without placing the onus of childcare upon women belies the underlying biological component of the act of having and raising children. Firestone’s model neglects the role that women’s anatomy and physiology plays in determining the social dynamics of maternity; the hormone system of the female body is designed to promote bonding between mother and infant and certain neural pathways have developed through evolution to facilitate kinship bonds. While this glaring omission

⁴⁰⁹ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex : The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970).

⁴¹⁰ Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write! : A History of the Jewish Mother*. 154.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* 154.

could be explained by Firestone's methodological approach to the subject of gender (which is based in a combination of Marxism and Freudianism), it is more likely that this dismissal of the biological element of motherhood is the result of Firestone's deep-seated disdain for the social aspects of its performance. The extremity of her proposals, and her desire to reduce the biological component of motherhood down to the barest of bones, thus can be understood as a reflection of deep anger and agitation against the institution and practice of maternity.

In addition to being critical of the practice of motherhood for themselves, many women grappled with reconciling their relationships to their own mothers with their identity as feminists. Most notably, Adrienne Rich examined the role her mother played in teaching her how to be a woman, and the complications that arose from Rich's desire to distance herself from her mother's experiences. She notes: "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other — beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival — a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other."⁴¹² Rich recognized the capability of mothers to teach femininity and maternity to their daughters, a capacity she describes with almost mournful sorrow.

Yet Rich does not exculpate mothers from the damage that this transmission of femininity can cause. Unlike Shulman and Friedan, who simply attribute the failures of mothers to a patriarchal system, Rich argues that, while such a system may have put

⁴¹² Rich, *Of Woman Born : Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. 220.

strictures upon mothers, it did not account for the emotional toll such actions leave upon daughters. She writes:

For it was too simple, early in the new twentieth-century wave of feminism, for us to analyze our mother's oppression, to understand 'rationally' — and correctly — why our mothers did not teach us to be Amazons, why they bound our feet or simply left us. It was accurate and even radical, that analysis; and yet, like all politics narrowly interpreted, it assumed that consciousness knows everything. There was, is, in most of us, a girl-child still longing for a woman's nurture, tenderness, and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defense, a woman's smell and touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain [...] It was not enough to *understand* our mothers; more than ever, in the effort to touch our own strength as women, we *needed* them. The cry of that female child in us need not be shameful or regressive; it is the germ of our desire to create a world in which strong mothers and strong daughters will be a matter of course.⁴¹³

For Rich, the abandonment of mothers, the repressive ideologies that they espoused to their daughters by virtue of the “feminine mystique” that so enveloped them rendered mothers both perpetrators of patriarchy and its victims. Rich looks upon her mother and others of her era with sorrow and pity for both the abuse that they suffered and that which they were helpless to prevent. She associates women's continued subjugation under a patriarchal system with the actions both parents, but emphasizes the complicity of mothers who perpetuated such a structure through their complacency and their actions, a course of behavior she finds unfortunate and sorrowful.

Considering the preponderance of literature criticizing motherhood, its function in women's subjugation, and the role that mothers play in teaching femininity

⁴¹³ Ibid. 224-5.

to their daughters, the sense of overwhelm and the uncanny element of the *Nurturant Kitchen* can be read as emblematic of this problematizing impulse. The surreal and all-encompassing space the kitchen, the preponderance of breasts and the literal reference to mother's function as feeders and nurturers, thus can be read as yet another critique of the capacity of motherhood to become an all-consuming endeavor, one that would prohibit women from reaching full equality. The apron strings, similarly, serve as a synecdoche for the capacity and culpability of mothers to smother their children and their participation in the promulgation of patriarchal strictures. The space of the *Nurturant Kitchen* thus takes on the enormity of the issue of maternity, literally enveloping the body of the viewer entirely; the preponderance of pink forms and their affiliation with the other forms of femininity — such as cooking and sexuality — serves to highlight the ways in which femininity and maternity have been inextricably linked, which feminists like Shulman, Rich, and Firestone sought to unsettle.

Feminist Art Workers: Identity Politics and Feminist Pedagogy

While there was a profound skepticism (or even criticism) aimed at the institution of motherhood amongst some feminists during the 1960s and 1970s, there was by no means a consensus towards the issue of maternity within feminist discourse. On the contrary, several women activists and artist saw motherhood and the practice thereof as a positive force. For many women, the experience of — or even simply the biological capacity to — bring new life into the world and to provide and nurture an infant from her own body was considered a form of female empowerment. Moreover, many of the cultural values associated with motherhood — the empathy, compassion,

strength, and patience — that constitute the practice of childrearing were seen by some feminists as essential qualities that not only differentiated men and women, but also were integral to women's empowerment.

In particular, the collective Feminist Art Workers asserted that this form of femininity and these aspects of female biology were not only powerful attributes, but also that they were necessary tools in the fight against gender-based oppression. The group examined this aspect of womanhood by highlighting the powerful capacity of women to nurture others and the ways in which caretaking and collaboration can bring about positive social change. In their work, Feminist Art Workers sought to foster community among women and to breed empowerment through conditions of mutual support. Central to this aim was an understanding and embrace of women's capacities to nurture and care for others, qualities ascribed to femininity on the basis of the female role in reproduction and childrearing. Yet unlike certain feminists who disavowed maternity because of its relationship to a patriarchal system, Feminist Art Workers — and the members of the Los Angeles Woman's Building more generally — embraced certain aspects of the maternal experience as positive and essential qualities of womanhood. Central to their work was the idea that women have an innate capacity to care for and empathize with others, and they created projects that highlighting the nurturing and caretaking aspects of femininity.

In many ways, Feminist Art Workers was simply another collaboration to come out of the Los Angeles Woman's Building. The approach to feminism and art education at the Woman's Building and the emphatic employment of consciousness-

raising as an epistemological technique led to a number of collaborations by women artists. As Cheri Gaulke notes:

C-R was [...] a tool for discovering content and fostering collaborative experiments in performance and video art at the WB. Working as a team provided continual feedback, a never-ending source of ideas and resources, and a support system. [...] Collaboration was a means of productions, but at its best, it was also the living, breathing embodiment of a culture transformed. In many ways it represented our utopian vision of the world, where people were truly equal and everyone's contribution was valued.⁴¹⁴

The collaborative environment fostered through the feminist-oriented pedagogy helped to facilitate the emergence of several different artistic collectives during the 1970s and into the 1980s at the Los Angeles Woman's Building, including but not limited to Mother Art, The Waitresses, Feminist Art Workers, the Lesbian Art Project, Sisters of Survival, and Ariadne: A Social Art Network.

Feminist Art Workers as a collective was started in the context of the feminist education of the Los Angeles Woman's Building. Unlike other collectives at the WB, Feminist Art Workers did not simply want to engage in consciousness-raising through illustrating certain aspects of women's experiences to a broader audience or to create works that constituted a form of protest. Instead, they sought to create participatory art works that combined pedagogy and activism, drawing on their experience within the educational programming of the Los Angeles Woman's Building. According to founding member, Cheri Gaulke: "Feminist Art Workers came out of the educational programs at the Woman's Building and we had all met in the Feminist Studio

⁴¹⁴ Gaulke, "1+1 = 3: Art and Collaboration at the Wb." 26-27.

workshop and we had studied together and then taught together, and so what our goal was — what we did as performance artists — was we brought together feminist education techniques with performance art, so we created interactive participatory performance structures.”⁴¹⁵ From the outset, Feminist Art Workers wanted their audiences to take on an active role and to participate in the experience in the hopes that in so doing they would feel engaged and a part of the feminist community.

Moreover, Feminist Art Workers was unique in its public engagement and approach to integrating feminism and art in the form of collaborative works. Feminist Art Worker’s consistently used performance art as their practice and as they have noted, their

performances essentially take 2 forms: 1) theatrical presentation as in ‘To Love, Honor, Cherish ...’ (wedding performance), and ‘Pieta, Afloat (float in the streets); and 2) participatory structures as in ‘Traffic in Women: A Feminist Vehicle’ (bus tour), ‘Winging Victoriously’ (plane tour), ‘This Ain’t No Heavy Breathing’ (phone conversation with strangers), ‘Heaven or Hell?’ (food event for 200 conference participants), and ‘Bill of Rights’ (interstate E.R.A. action).⁴¹⁶

Feminist Art Workers used performance as a way to get audience members to interact directly with members and with each other in order to facilitate consciousness-raising and social and political change. According to the collective, this interactive model was developed from their explicit mission as a collective. They write: “These participatory performance structures directly expresses our philosophy of feminist

⁴¹⁵ Cheri Gaulke and Zemula Barr, "Cheri Gaulke Lagl 1/Barr Transcript," in *Los Angeles Goes Live: Performance Art in Southern California 1970-1983: Oral History Interviews, 2009-2011*, ed. Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, June 25, 2010). 3.

⁴¹⁶ Feminist Art Workers, "Feminist Art Workers: A Brief History," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, 1979). n.p.

education as we function as facilitators of a transformation with our audience/participants.”⁴¹⁷ By creating performances that required the participation of audience members, Feminist Art Workers sought to use their art practice to facilitate a feminist awakening for a broader public. Through participating in these performances, each audience members were given an opportunity to understand directly the issues at hand and thus develop a stake in promoting social change.

As a collective, Feminist Art Workers sought to create performances that would foster a sense of community and caring among women. For instance, their work *This Ain't No Heavy Breathing* from 1978 (Appendix: Figure 45), the collective developed a performance meant to address the harassment many women had faced in the form of lewd phone calls, which, as Gaulke notes, “many of us had experienced as kids and young adults.”⁴¹⁸ For the performance, the collective “interviewed female acquaintances and recorded their stories of receiving obscene phone calls. After hearing their stories we decided to counteract the obscene phone calls of our own to women we didn’t know and wishing them well.”⁴¹⁹ When they called women that they had found in the Pasadena phonebook, members of the collective would read the following message: “Hi I’m (Cheri Gaulke, Nancy Angelo, Laurel Klick). This is a courtesy call from the Feminist Art Workers. We think women have received enough obscene phone calls, so we’re calling women to wish them well. I just wanted to let

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. n.p.

⁴¹⁸ Cheri Gaulke and Laurel Klick, *Feminist Art Workers: A History*, ed. Cheri and Laurel Klick Gaulke (Los Angeles: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2012). 45.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. 45.

you know that we feel you're important and hope you're enjoying your afternoon."⁴²⁰

By directly reaching out to women individually to address a pervasive problem, Feminist Art Workers helped to foster both consciousness-raising and a burgeoning feminist community. Their positive message, ripe with support and encouragement provided women who had been experiencing harassment on a daily basis with an understanding that this problem is systemic and that there is a community to support them.

Moreover, their performances also frequently focused on the diversity of women's experiences and the various roles that they play in society. As Vanalyne Green wrote in an article for *Sister* in 1979, "We have a commitment to making art that considers all of who we are as women: workers, lovers, artists, craftspeople, friends, etc."⁴²¹ In order to examine the variety and variations in women's roles, they frequently created performances around particular personas, all of which are iterations of certain roles of stereotypes women face on a daily basis. As Green notes: "A recurring theme in our imagery is the interaction of our personas as an art form: the nun, Angelica Furiosa; the whore, Cleavage Woman; the good girl, Cinderella; and the former objectified and maligned 'Pussy Cat.' Through the interaction of these characters women see for example, that you can be 'catty' and yet be in strong and supportive feminist relationships. The nun and the whore can co-exist."⁴²² In creating

⁴²⁰ Copy of *This Ain't No Heavy Breathing* postcard, as reproduced in *ibid.* 44.

⁴²¹ Article reproduced in archival records. Original publication information unavailable. Vanalyne Green, "La's Feminist Art Workers," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, April/May 1979).

⁴²² *Ibid.* n.p.

performances that highlight the diversity and co-occurrence of certain feminine identities — or even stereotypes— Feminist Art Workers sought to illustrate how the reduction of women to these simple tropes undermines the complexity and the strength that women can derive from their own personal identity. As Green notes: “Taken a step further, the role models within us when made visible can be turned from societal conditioning into a creative process of transformation and magic.”⁴²³

Feminist Art Workers also sought to broaden the scope of their public engagement by targeting specific audiences and branching out beyond Los Angeles. Instead of creating large public spectacles for a general audience, the collaborative focused brought their performances to specific groups, usually — although not exclusively — feminist conferences, women’s studies courses, and feminist-run organizations and establishments. While they were based in Los Angeles, the group regularly “[brought] workshops and performances to audiences outside of Los Angeles and local women’s art groups.”⁴²⁴ According to the groups own “Brief History”, “Our first major project was a performance and lecture tour of the Mid West and Northern California. During this tour we shared in the formation and/or strengthening of women’s art organizations throughout those areas we toured.”⁴²⁵ As a part of their touring works, Feminist Art Workers would perform several works in different locations with slightly different variations and adaptations, all aimed on facilitating audience participation on raising the consciousness of their public. They used their

⁴²³ Ibid. n.p.

⁴²⁴ Feminist Art Workers, "Feminist Art Workers: A Brief History," *ibid.* (1979). n.p.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. n.p.

experience as educators to help their participants to engage with feminism directly and to understand the possibilities for social change.

Feeding Feminist Art Workers: *Heaven or Hell?*

During their tours, Feminist Art Workers continually developed and re-worked certain performances as they went along. One such performance, *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-81) (Appendix: Figures 46-7) was first conceived of during their travels throughout the Midwest in June 1977, and was subsequently performed in a wide variety of venues across the country over the next several years. As Laurel Klick recalls, the performance originated during their long days driving from Southern California to the Midwest. She notes: “Days away from Los Angeles on our first performance/lecture/workshop tour, we drove in Cheri’s VW van, our roving un-air-conditioned doll house on wheels, and brainstormed ideas for an imminent performance in Chicago; one of us driving, one riding shotgun and the other in the back taking notes. [...] During one brainstorming session, Nancy told a story that her grandmother had once told her about the difference between heaven and hell.”⁴²⁶ The story, which became the basis of their performance, goes: “that people in hell sat at long banquet tablets [sic] that were piled high with sumptuous food. They were all trying to feed themselves with four-foot-long forks and they were jabbing themselves in the mouth and no one could get their food in. Heaven was the exact same scene with the beautiful food and all the people with four-foot-long forks but they were

⁴²⁶ Gaulke and Klick, *Feminist Art Workers: A History*. 25.

feeding each other.”⁴²⁷ From this tale, the Feminist Art Workers constructed four-foot-long forks of their own and used them to attempt to feed themselves and their counterparts, and in some performances invited the audience to do the same.

The work was performed several times throughout the Midwest tour and over subsequent trips, including at several feminist (art) conferences across the nation. As Gaulke recalls, *Heaven or Hell?* “was a piece that took on different forms in different places depending on the venue.”⁴²⁸ For instance, in the very first iteration of the work — performed at Mama Peaches, “a vegetarian restaurant for women and their friends,’ a café with purpose that fed both body and soul,” in Chicago — the collective performed the gesture of eating and feeding themselves with the long forks in conjunction with a writing component. Klick recalls: “Sporadically during the piece we wrote historical and personal anecdotes about food on a large piece of paper that hung adjacent to the table where we were feeding and being fed. This was the only time we used the writing activity in a performance of *Heaven or Hell?*.”⁴²⁹ According to the journal that Feminist Art Workers kept during this trip, “non-supportive food experiences came first and then support stories were written on the papers [sic] bottom halves [sic].”⁴³⁰ These narratives were thus meant to illustrate the complicated dynamics surrounding food culture and how these issues can and do manifest in the experiences of women.

⁴²⁷Gaulke and Barr, "Cheri Gaulke Lagl 1/Barr Transcript." 3.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. 2.

⁴²⁹ Gaulke and Klick, *Feminist Art Workers: A History*. 25.

⁴³⁰ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

The narratives from the first performance of *Heaven or Hell?* illustrate the myriad complexities that existed in the relationship between gender ideology and food culture both historically and in the context of postwar America. In some cases, these signs were clear investigations of the role that eating plays socially. For instance, in one sign by Cheri Gaulke, she discusses the practice of over-eating and vomiting during Roman banquets, highlighting the fact that eating practices are culturally specific.⁴³¹ Other anecdotes described the emotional components of eating; Laurel Klick posted a sign that read “To this day when I’m angry at my mother I can’t eat. — Not eating is her punishment.”⁴³² Klick’s text thus points to the emotional and social dynamics of eating, illustrating the way that one’s decisions to can eat or not reflect underlying states of feeling. Moreover, such a declaration also serves to illustrate the complicated politics of eating; Klick’s justification of self-starvation highlights the fact that eating or refusing to eat can have an impact on others.

Yet despite the broader interest in the politics and social dynamics of eating, a significant number of these narratives focused explicitly on the act of feeding and the personal relationships fostered or thwarted by such a gesture. For instance, in one text, Nancy Angelo describes a negative association she had with being fed following a stay in the hospital. She writes: “In the hospital I couldn’t eat my potatoes. A nurse made me — she pushed the fork’s tynes [sic] through my bottom lip — Never trust.”⁴³³ Similarly, Cheri Gaulke wrote an anecdote of a man’s lack of connection to his child

⁴³¹ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

⁴³² Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

⁴³³ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

through his ineptitude at feeding his daughter. She states: “When Mary was a baby her father — not knowing how to feed a baby — used to feed her until she threw up.”⁴³⁴ This narrative demonstrates the negative consequences of feeding, that the act in and of itself is not indicative of a genuine interest in the wellbeing of another. Moreover, this story, highlights the gendered dynamics of feeding as a gesture of caretaking and childrearing; the mistake made by the father in this tale is treated as if it is intrinsic fact, that mother’s know how to take care of babies, while fathers are, by nature, so clueless in the care of their own children as to actually cause harm.

In contrast to these negative examples of the impact of feeding as a gesture, other texts displayed during this poster highlighted the possibility that feeding could be a positive action, one with the capacity to breed empathy, compassion, and a sense of community. For instance, in one of Laurel Klick’s texts, she wrote: “When I was in the hospital my sister asked if I wanted anything — I wanted a milk shake — she brought it but I was too groggie [sic] to drink it — so she fed it to me.”⁴³⁵ In this account, being fed was not a forceful or harmful endeavor, but rather a gesture of genuine compassion and care. Similarly, Cheri Gaulke discussed the positive power of feeding and being fed in one of the texts included in the piece. She writes: “I’ve been depressed for 2 days — doing this workshop [...] confronts me with so much of women’s oppression — women not being able to support and nurture each other — we did CR in the car before coming in to perform — I *am* enjoying myself right now —

⁴³⁴ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

⁴³⁵ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26.

feeding and being fed.”⁴³⁶ For Gaulke, participating in the act of collaborative feeding was transformative and empowering, and rescued her from her state of depression. The transformative power of feeding as a gesture quickly became the central focus of *Heaven or Hell?* as a performance piece. As Klick notes: “As the piece matured, we realized that it was about feeding and not the food or the act of eating.”⁴³⁷

Moreover, they embraced the power of feeding as a force to bring together disparate individuals and create a sense of community. In an oral history, Cheri Gaulke describes how the piece actually helped bridge ideological barriers between different factions of feminists during a performance of *Heaven or Hell?* at the National Women’s Studies Association conference in Lawrence, Kansas in 1979. She recalls:

There was cultural feminism and then there was political feminism and there were some tensions in those days between those groups with the political feminists not seeing the cultural feminists as being ‘real feminist’ [sic]. [...] What we did at the National Women’s Studies Association for *Heaven or Hell?* was we had a tableau of one of us performing hell, so she was sitting at the table with a big pile of watermelon and feeding herself and making this terrible mess. She was kind of comical — Vanalyne Green performed that — and when conference attendees got their lunch and came to the tables they saw Nancy [Angelo] and I feeding each other. All the tables had been set with placemats that told the heaven or hell story and there was a four-foot-long fork next to each place. So pretty soon, as women at the conference began to sit down, they got into the action. Everybody was jumping up and running around and feeding each other and then it became this wonderful activity that was a metaphor for how in community, in supporting each other and feeding and nurturing each other that we can get so much more done.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Reproduction of Journal in *ibid.* 26-27.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.* 25.

⁴³⁸ Gaulke and Barr, "Cheri Gaulke Lagl 1/Barr Transcript." 3.

During this performance, the gesture of feeding as performed by both members of the collaborative and the audience came to bridge a substantial divide and helped to foster a greater sense of community among different-minded women.

In addition to fostering community and support, the gesture of feeding was considered an explicit extension of a woman's identity to the Feminist Art Workers. As they wrote in a description of the project from 1981, "Feminist Art Workers intends to honor the traditionally female values of nurturance while freeing women from nurturing others at the expense of themselves."⁴³⁹ For the collective, the act of feeding was intrinsically linked to the discourse of femininity, and particular to the care work associated with women's roles within the family. Recognizing the way that the labor of motherhood has been delineated so as the needs of both the husband and children are considered more important than those of the woman caring for them, Feminist Art Workers sought to create a work that would undermine the conventional understanding of feeding as a gesture. As such, their assertion that such a gesture aims to liberate women from prioritizing the care of others over themselves is a direct critique of the ways in which the traditional discourse surrounding maternity, especially during the postwar period.

Yet, while the piece serves to criticize and challenge the patriarchal delineation and valuation of work within the family, the act of feeding in *Heaven and Hell?* is also meant to demonstrate the power of such as gesture as a form of women's labor. The four-foot-long forks became a symbol of feminist empowerment, a tool to be used to

⁴³⁹ Feminist Art Workers, "Heaven or Hell?," in *Woman's Building records, 1970-1992*. (Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, 1981).

help women in their fight against patriarchal oppression. When they created a postcard version of the work in 1981, they referred to the forks as a symbolic weapon. They wrote: “Feminists, artists, political workers. Arm yourselves with four-foot-long forks. Create opportunities to feed one another in a symbolic gesture. [...] As you go out and affect the world, take with you our support, appreciation, and encouragement to keep nurturing and inspiring one another. For it is our ability to sustain each other that will enable our political movements to endure.”⁴⁴⁰ The idea of nurturing and caring for others as embodied in the act of feeding was thus considered a positive attribute, one that instead of hindering women’s progress was considered essential to it.

Motherhood is Powerful

The embrace of feeding as an empowering and fundamentally “female virtue” by the Feminist Art Workers in *Heaven or Hell?* reflects another trend within feminist literature from the 1960s and 1970s, the notion that motherhood can be powerful. While there is a wealth of criticism of maternity within feminist literature during the 1960s and 1970s, there was by no means a consensus towards its role in women’s subjugation and many feminists advocated that the capacity of women to not only provide life but to sustain it as a central virtue that is to be cultivated. In fact, some of the very same feminists who decried the way their mothers had practiced maternity, like Alix Kates Shulman and Robin Morgan, found a profound connection between their own capacities as mothers and their efforts as feminists. Shulman, for example,

⁴⁴⁰ Postcard from 1981 performance of *Heaven or Hell?* reproduced in Gaulke and Klick, *Feminist Art Workers: A History*. 162.

found “ [that] with the birth of her two children [...] [her] whole life changed.”⁴⁴¹ Although many feminists chastised her decision to become a mother in the first place, Shulman found the experience profoundly empowering noting that “in her own life, motherhood and feminism ‘were integrated from the start,’ with motherhood providing opportunities for personal and professional development.”⁴⁴² Robin Morgan, whose anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* included a scathing indictment on women’s roles as wives and mothers, also found the experience of motherhood transformative for her feminist activism. Antler writes: “Morgan came to understand the positive force of motherhood as an ideal — ‘mutual love and sensuality,’ ‘interdependence,’ ‘vigilance and sensitivity to unspoken need; true nurturance’ — which she believed was present in ancient societies.”⁴⁴³ For feminists like Shulman and Morgan, their own entrance into motherhood provided them with an opportunity to embrace a wholly female in nature, something that is intrinsic to women’s biological realities — the capacity to give and nurture life.

For other women, motherhood represented an embrace of the biological difference between women and men, which became a more salient component of feminist writing and advocacy during the early and mid-1970s. As Ruth Rosen notes: “By the middle of the seventies, an important ideological shift had occurred within the movement. ‘Rather than considering women’s difference from men as a form of inadequacy and a source of inferiority [...] this view considered difference to be a

⁴⁴¹ Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write! : A History of the Jewish Mother*. 161.

⁴⁴² Ibid. 161.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. 158.

source of pride and confidence.”⁴⁴⁴ Biological difference between the male and female bodies and specifically the female processes within reproduction were lauded as liberating. In her controversial and landmark 1973 essay “Mother Right,” Jane Alpert argues that “*female biology is the basis of women’s powers*. Biology is hence the source and not the enemy of feminist revolution.”⁴⁴⁵ She asserts that the source of said powers are “the capacity to bear and nurture children,” which she argues is not limited to actually having birthed children but rather “Motherhood must be understood here as a potential which is imprinted in the genes of every woman; as such it makes no difference to this analysis of femaleness whether a woman ever has, or ever will, bear a child.”⁴⁴⁶ Alpert’s championed women’s capacity to be mothers as a positive virtue, and argued voraciously that the qualities that are associated with maternity, specifically the caretaking and nurturing aspects of this labor, are positive attributes that should be embraced in the name of women’s liberation.

While Alpert embraced the ability to have children as a form of female empowerment, she did, however, seek to challenge the patriarchal structure that existed within the nuclear family structure in America during this period. In particular, she challenged the wageless condition of childrearing and carework. She writes: “Mothers live by their labor yet generally without standardized wages. [...] The job is without guarantees or security of any kind. Its workday is twenty-four hours,

⁴⁴⁴ Ruth Rosen quoting Hester Eisenstein in Rosen, *The World Split Open : How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. 178.

⁴⁴⁵ Jane Alpert, "Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory," *Off Our Backs* 3, no. 9 (July- August 1973). 30.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 30.

workweek seven days, no vacations, no holidays. Total dedication to the job is expected, and yet a woman who works ‘only’ in the home is regarded, with some contempt, as an unemployed housewife.”⁴⁴⁷ Alpert asserts that it is not the act of caretaking that is considered contemptible, but rather its status within the patriarchy of the wage, a sentiment echoed by Marxist feminists involved in the Wages for Housework movement during the mid-1970s. Like Alpert, Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox maintain that it is the wageless condition of household labor that makes renders it inferior and serves to subjugate women, as opposed to the intrinsic quality of the tasks themselves. Unlike Friedan and others, Federici and Cox do not argue that the performance of household labor is demeaning, but rather they recognized that it is essential labor and thus should be monetized.⁴⁴⁸ Like Alpert, Wages for Housework and similar Marxist feminist groups thus sought a cultural reevaluation of maternity, rather than a disavowal of its practices in the name of fighting patriarchy. Instead of deriding motherhood, these women instead advocated for elevating the practice from its ignoble, wageless state.

Beyond challenging the patriarchal structure surrounding the practice of maternal labor, many women in the 1960s and 1970s also agitated against the patriarchal discourse that dominated the “preferred practices” of motherhood as advocated by medical professionals. During the first half of the twentieth century, both the process of childbirth and the practice of childrearing became enveloped into the

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. 30.

⁴⁴⁸ Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, "Counterplanning from the Kitchen (1975)," in *Revolution at Point Zero Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, ed. Silvia Federici (Oakland, CA, Brooklyn, NY, London: PM Press; Common Notions : Autonomedia; Turnaround distributor., 2012). 31.

realm of medicine and science. In the 1960s and 1970s, several movements emerged that offered direct challenges to the primacy and patriarchal nature of the medicalization of childbirth and childrearing, championing instead women's own understandings of their bodies and integrating their own knowledge into the practice of raising their children. Specifically, organizations such as La Leche League and the Boston Women's Health Book Collective sought to challenge the patriarchal and authoritarian position granted to medical professionals in the care of women and children, seeking instead to educate women and to integrate their perspectives into the process of childbirth and childrearing.

Similarly, during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a significant resurgence of extra-hospital birthing methods, including a revival in the practice of home birthing and a reinvigoration in the field of midwifery. While these movements, were to varying degrees formally affiliated with feminist activism, all three championed women's agency in decisions about childbirth and childrearing, along with other avenues of women's health.⁴⁴⁹ As such, they served to reaffirm women's roles as

⁴⁴⁹ La Leche League, The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, and the Alternative Birth Movement all emerged (or expanded) concurrent with the rise of "Second Wave" Feminism, and all three entities did interact with the discourse and practice of feminist activism during this period. Both the Alternative Birth Movement and the Boston Women's Health Book Collective can trace their roots back to second wave feminist activism and ideology, with the latter emerging directly out of a women's conference in Boston in 1969. La Leche League actually predates the feminist activism and ideology of this era and the organization's official positions sometimes ran counter to the messaging of certain feminist groups, such as their assertions that women should, when financially possible, abandon the workforce in order to stay home and raise children. Moreover, La Leche League actively disavowed the feminist label for their form of activism. At the same time, the educational policies of La Leche League, their direct woman-to-woman advice network, and their agitation against the passive patriarchal medical model that dictated much of the discourse on childrearing in midcentury America on behalf of women's active participation in the birth and breast-feeding of their children has been understood as a form of feminism in and of itself. For more information see: Apple, *Perfect Motherhood : Science and*

mothers and highlighted the positive dimensions of such a practice in a way that challenged the previous patriarchal schema that was premised on relegating women to passive and ignorant patients.

Most central to this re-conception of motherhood as powerful was the idea that a woman's capacity to nurture life — through caretaking more generally, and explicitly through breastfeeding — was an attribute that could and should be valorized. From the literature of La Leche League to Jane Alpert's treatise on "Mother Right," the biological dimension of maternity that was considered most "feminine" and unique to the gender is the capacity to bond with another human being directly and to nurture and care for another individual wholly. Many feminists thus championed the biological capabilities of the female body to provide care and nourishment for another human being as an extension of a unique empathic and cooperative quality ascribed to women. Because, as Alpert argued, all (cis-gender) women have within their biology the capacity to become mothers, all women thus have a proclivity for collaboration, selflessness, and caretaking.

Moreover, many feminists argued that women's maternal power was central to a form of pre-patriarchal social structure wherein women's social status was considerably higher than in the capitalist Western system. Drawing on the work of archaeologists and anthropologists, women cited the fact that many civilization actively exalted women's position and function in society, as opposed to the subjugation of women and women's culture under patriarchy. In "Mother Right," for

example, Jane Alpert cites the scholarship of Elizabeth Gould Davis, noting: “Davis hypothesizes that patriarchal society began only after barbarian male tribes violently overthrew the ancient, peaceful, and relatively advanced gynocracies, in which women were not only worshipped but were actually temporal rulers. These ancient gynocracies may have existed throughout Asia, northern Africa, the Arabian peninsula and the Mediterranean area and persisted as late as 2,000 B.C. in some areas, such as Crete.”⁴⁵⁰ Alpert argues that the presence of such matrilineal and gynocratic societies that pre-date the establishment of a pervasive patriarchal structure represents the power associated with motherhood; that other societies clearly valorized women’s abilities because of their abilities to give and sustain life — and not in spite of these facts, which was more common for women in her contemporary Western world — was evidence that alternative understandings of motherhood were not only possible, but that they could bring about substantial social change. Highlighting the fact that matriarchies have a historical founding, Alpert provided a feasible alternative to the patriarchal structure that actively oppressed women on the basis of their culturally constructed gender *and* their biological sex.

While Alpert used the evidence of “gynocracies” as evidence for an alternative possibility, many other feminists took the notion of matriarchy further and argued that matriarchal structures were greater aligned with a “natural order” and advocated for a return to a pre-patriarchal social structure. This affiliation was particular true for women who sought an alternative, feminist spirituality, which often manifest in the

⁴⁵⁰ Alpert, "Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory." 30.

form of witchcraft, sometimes called “Dianic Witchcraft” or “Wicca.” Recognizing the history of Judeo-Christian patriarchy, a number of women sought a form of a religious practice that pre-dated these popular monotheisms. The practice of feminist witchcraft offered women a female-centered and individualized alternative faith, especially when compared to the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Tanice Foltz, “[Feminist] Witchcraft centers on ‘the Goddess,’ alternately symbolizing Mother Earth/Nature, the Divine Feminine, Female Creatrix, the cyclical connections between women and nature, and the interconnectedness of all life.”⁴⁵¹ As such, witchcraft offered women a form of spirituality that aligned with the ideology of radical feminism, empowering the individual woman by making her feel and appreciate her experiences as important, relevant, and powerful, much in the same way that consciousness-raising did. The goddess worship performed in these rituals often focused on the power of the goddess as a “mother” or “creator,” and many of the deities worshipped in the name of feminist witchcraft had previously been associated with women’s fertility. As such, the emergence of feminist spirituality functioned to re-conceptualize the motherhood and matriarchy into a positive force.

This conception of motherhood and matriarchy as a powerful, female force was definitely central to the art practice of Feminist Art Workers as a collective. As a group they recognized the positive aspects power women had to nurture and care for others, a capacity they cited as essentially female. Moreover, the collective was directly involved with forms of feminist spirituality that focused on goddess worship

⁴⁵¹ Tanice G. Foltz, "Women's Spirituality Research: Doing Feminism," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 4, Special Issue (Winter, 2000) (2000). 410.

and that emerged from “ancient, pre-patriarchal” structures. For instance, during the performance event *Winging Victoriously* —a three-day long conference and series of performances for which members of Feminist Art Workers and other feminist artists flew from Southern California to San Francisco in November 1978 — the collaborative “created rituals and performances for each other using them as a way to share [their] thoughts and feelings about pornography.”⁴⁵² Ranging from a “cleansing ritual at a local sauna” to a “performance in a Sunday School classroom Sunday morning,” these pieces used the ideas of feminist spirituality to foster community and understanding. In so doing, these performances avowedly embraced the powerful connotations of motherhood as promoted in these forms of feminist witchcraft.

Beyond the spiritual dynamics, however, Feminist Art Workers performances generally, and specifically *Heaven or Hell?*, clearly demonstrate an embrace of the positive aspects of maternity as a form of women’s empowerment. As previously noted, the use of feeding in *Heaven or Hell?* was both an explicit reference to the capacity for such a gesture to create a sense of community as well as the relationship between feeding as a form of caretaking and nurturing. Both of these dynamics of feeding as an action were meant to explicitly refer to the social construct of femininity and its relationship to maternity. Yet unlike in the *Nurturant Kitchen* where the prospect of feeding is portrayed as all consuming and overwhelming and the idea of maternity has a particularly negative connotation, *Heaven or Hell?* presents the gesture as a powerful and affirming action. To Feminist Art Workers, the ability to

⁴⁵² Gaulke and Klick, *Feminist Art Workers: A History*. 81.

care for others and to nurture them is a “virtue” and one that can and should be embraced by feminists.

Finally, in *Heaven or Hell?* the Feminist Art Workers demonstrate a clear respect and reverence for maternal transmission of ideas and for matrilineal lineage. The work itself derives from a story passed from one generation of women to the next, the story told to Nancy Angelo by her grandmother. Considering the myriad ways that feminists and women artists have problematized the relationship between mothers and daughters, such a gesture is not insignificant. On the contrary, instead of dismissing this gesture of transmission, or using the ideas of a previous generation as a negative model — such as Adrienne Rich argues for in *Of Woman Born* — the unabashed embrace of the tale by the Feminist Art Workers illustrates an explicit embrace of the positive relationship that can exist between mothers (or grandmothers) and daughters. The use of Angelo’s grandmother’s story thus functions as a form of affirmation of mother’s abilities to be positive role models for their children and highlights the strength of the bond between different generations of women as a form of feminist empowerment.

Conclusions

Having thus identified the significant differences between interpretations of the same gesture — the act of feeding — we can thus understand the ways in which this practice is emblematic of the complicated relationship between biological function and social practices with regard to gender ideology. While the act of feeding another has been feminized because it is a central component of human reproduction, the ways in

which feeding others has been expressed within the discourse of womanhood, is like all forms of gender ideology, contextually dependent. Moreover, because the act of feeding can be so easily separated from the body of a child's biological mother, either through the employment of wetnurses or the use of bottle feeding, the conception of femininity that surround the practice thereof — such as the idea of women's "natural tendencies" to nurture or care for others — stand out more starkly as a social construct. With this understanding that feeding is a form of feminized labor that derives from biological sex differences but is ultimately culturally defined, we can thus examine the way different individuals within the same moment of time have problematized the performance of this task.

The issue of maternity and its manifestation in the dynamic relationship between feeding and femininity serves to highlight the diversity and plurality of critiques and conceptualization of womanhood both within feminist circles and American society on the whole during the 1960s and 1970s. Within feminist literature during this time period, it is readily apparent that maternity and the practice thereof is highly problematic; for some women, the practice is demeaning, for others empowering. Moreover, the question of motherhood and the maternal role is complicated by the relationships women have to their own mothers and children. As such, the symbolic function of motherhood, and its role within the prevailing gender ideology reveals deep complexities about the relationship between the biological ability to gestate and lactate and the social realities of having children. Thus by looking at feminist art practices that address the same action thematically —

specifically the practice of feeding — we can see the manifestation of different conceptions of what it means not only to be a mother, but to be a woman and how those dictums relate to certain capacities of the female body.

In some cases, such as in the work of Feminist Art Workers, the depiction of women's nurturing capabilities as an offshoot of the biological realities of motherhood is affirmed as a positive force for social change. The argument that caring and nourishing others is an essential female quality within feminist discourse and art from this period was frequently used to empower women; women like Jane Alpert argued that women could be liberated because of their biology, not in spite of it. Women's capacity to give and sustain life was seen as an attribute to be championed in women's fight for equality.

In *Heaven or Hell?*, Feminist Art Workers drew upon this conception of the female essential difference in order to highlight women's abilities to care and nurture others as a positive attribute. By creating participatory works and by using those works to not only facilitate consciousness-raising, but also to foster community, Feminist Art Workers used the feminized task of feeding as a symbol of women's power. Moreover, through these performances, the collective sought to liberate the gesture from the patriarchal dictums of gendered labor wherein women are required to care for others always before themselves. Because no woman had the capacity to feed herself and thus must always be fed as a participant in the performance, Feminist Art Workers transformed the gesture into a moment of reciprocal care. In so doing, they

championed the notion that women could do more when they worked together and supported each other than any one woman could do alone.

While Feminist Art Workers drew on the labor of feeding as a symbol of nourishment and caretaking — both of which are extensions of the dictates of postwar maternity — Nancy Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch examined the restrictive and oppressive nature of motherhood and the work of childrearing. As a group, the three women designed and executed the site-specific installation of the *Nurturant Kitchen* as a part of the CalArts Feminist Art Program collective project *Womanhouse*. The piece, which was born out of a consciousness-raising session with the class, reflected the sense of dread and overwhelm that these women associated with the prospect of maternity. Over-inundating the space with symbols of female reproduction, specifically eggs and breasts, coloring the entire space with a monochromatic pink, and juxtaposing stereotypically negative depictions of women in the form of aprons and magazine cut-outs, the *Nurturant Kitchen* poses a clear criticism on the institution and cultural conception of motherhood. The space created is unquestionably uncanny, further affirming the notion that there is something problematic about maternity.

This critical approach to the subject of motherhood reflects the broader trend among feminist activists and authors to deride motherhood and to lambaste their own mothers. From Friedan to Firestone, the issue of maternity was considered a significant hindrance to women's personal liberation; mothers, particularly those whose sole occupation was raising children, were seen as pitiable figures at best.

Moreover, many feminists faulted their own mothers for either their participation in patriarchal indoctrination or their complacency with the status quo. As such, their identities as daughters of mothers frequently tempered the way they viewed the practice of maternity, an impulse that was clearly the case for Robin Weltsch as she worked on the *Nurturant Kitchen*.

By comparing and contrasting these significant differences in both approaches employed by these two collectives, we can come to recognize the diversity of perspectives that existed among feminist groups during the 1960s and 1970s. Both the *Womanhouse* project and the Feminist Art Workers emerged out of the Los Angeles feminist art scene and both were engaged in similar forms of feminist strategies — specifically the use of consciousness-raising efforts as the basis of creating collaborative works — these two collectives used the same thematic premise in significantly different ways. While some of these differences may be ascribed to temporal differences, the distinctions between these two works and their approach to motherhood show the degree to which feminism in the “Second Wave” era was not singular or monolithic in its approach. Feminist activists both within the art world and beyond it were never of a singular mindset, and in reading their work we must attend to the complexities that surround the differences in experience and understanding of womanhood that comprised the movement of movements that emerged during this period.

Chapter 5: Eating

Of all the food practices that contribute to and comprise the discursive construction of femininity, perhaps none is so problematic as the act of eating. Eating is undeniably linked to the politics of identity and the formation of the self. The gesture literally comprises turning a part of the material world into a component of the working human body. Moreover, what we eat and how we eat it reflect something about our personalities, our history, and our culture. Eating can bring about pleasure or pain, can comfort or unsettle us. Eating can foster physical health or it can contribute to illness; it is an act with many consequences.

During the middle of the 20th century, the politics of eating in America dramatically changed the social implications for what and how one consumes. While prescriptions against over eating have existed for centuries — specifically the catholic prohibition against gluttony as one of the seven deadly sins — the dictums of dieting are relatively modern in nature. The science of nutrition and the understanding of calories and other forms of nutrients was the result of early twentieth century experimentation, and as these discoveries about the nature of eating entered mainstream media, new prescriptions about the risks and benefits of eating certain types of food became common knowledge. With the relative stability of food production in the post-war period, American consumption patterns underwent a significant ideological transformation.

This new knowledge and this period of plenty — which followed nearly half a century of paucity — coupled with new fashion trends and dictates around

womanhood worked to foster a new understanding of eating aimed specifically at women. The rise of the “thin ideal” in the 1960s and 1970s rendered eating into a form of performing one’s gender. The acquisition and maintenance of a “feminine body” rendered eating from an act of nurturing and pleasure to one of self-control, denial, and bare-minimum sustenance for many American women. As such, eating became a feminist issue during the 1960s and 1970s. For women within and beyond the art world, this eating ideology was understood as a further articulation of patriarchal forces that placed a high premium on women’s value as sex objects first and foremost.

Women artists, such as Eleanor Antin and Martha Rosler, used their art practices to critique the ways in which the politics of women’s eating falls under the auspices of a patriarchal social structure. In particular, both artists used their works to examine how mass culture has presented women with an undue amount of pressure to adhere to a particular beauty ideal that is predicated upon the performance of restrictive behaviors at best and disordered eating at the most extreme. In this chapter, I will explore how mass media portrayals of the feminine ideal manifests in bodily dissatisfaction and the desire to change one’s body shape through dieting in Eleanor Antin’s conceptual work *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) and Martha Rosler’s video piece *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977) (Appendix: Figures 48-49). In particular, I will look at how both artists critique the ways in which popular culture reinforcement of a particular feminine ideal dictates how women should and do eat, and the dangerous consequences of this conception of femininity on the mental and physical health of women. I will argue that the portrayal of dieting and

the implications thereof in both of these works reflects broader feminist criticisms of patriarchal capitalism and the oppressive structures surrounding the performance of respectable, white, middle-class femininity. I will thus examine how these artists called attention to the politics of eating in the everyday as an explicitly feminist issue and used their art practices to as a form of consciousness-raising to call attention to the ways in which sexism found its way into all aspects of daily life, including what was on women's plates.

Dying to be thin: The New Feminine Ideal

The gender politics of eating in the United States became particularly more fraught during the postwar period. The paucity that had characterized American food supply during the first half of the twentieth century — specifically the rationing systems put in place during both World Wars and the general dearth of food during the Great Depression had significantly limited the amount and access that average Americans had to food stuffs — gave way to a period of plenty with the conclusion of World War II. For the first time in decades, Americans had greater access to a wide variety of food items and they were free from the pressures that scarcity had placed upon their abilities to attain adequate nutrition. Hunger ceased to be a domestic problem, and a considerable amount of emphasis was placed on helping to mitigate starving in countries around the globe.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ For more information on the shift in American policies towards mitigating hunger, see the chapter “The Politics of Hunger” in Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*.

At the same time as the pressures of attaining adequate nutrition from the available food sources were beginning to dissipate, new social pressures surrounding eating were starting to inform the cultural dictates of the practice, especially for women. While prohibitions against overeating have been included in the conception of Western, Judeo-Christian morality for centuries — most notably in the derision of gluttony as one of the seven deadly sins in Catholicism — postwar mores about the amount and types of food one should ingest were more closely affiliated with the outward appearance of the body as a reflection of an individual's character. As Harvey Levenstein notes:

Historically and anthropologically, fat people have been regarded in contradictory ways: as either predatory gluttons, voraciously grabbing more than their fair share of food, or as benign gourmards enjoying of one of life's great pleasures. As fears of food shortage and famine receded, so did the first — malign — view of fat people [...] But the second — benign — view also changed, particularly with the rise of dieting in the twentieth century. Interestingly, [...] being fat signified an inability to control one's impulses. Middle-class fat people, it was agreed, must be deeply unhappy.⁴⁵⁴

During the 1960s and 1970s, with the increased access and availability of foods of all kinds, fatness was seen as a scourge, where in previous generations corpulence had been seen as somewhat innocuous.

Beyond the moral associations with weight gain that applied to all fat people, women in midcentury America were under new pressures to adhere to a certain body type in order to perform a particular feminine ideal. This feminine ideal, as sociologist Mimi Schippers has noted, is defined by class, racial, and gender-based relations and

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. 241.

exists within a given hierarchy. The “hegemonic” or dominant form for the feminine body is very much a reflection of these intersectional factors, and certain characteristics — specifically the presence or absence of curves upon the body — are reflections most often of certain racial and class based conceptions of how women should look. The presence of multiple bodily ideals for femininity is consistent with Schippers assertions about multiple femininities. Yet, as Schippers asserts, not all femininities exist on an equal plane; there is a hierarchical structure to these multiple femininities, which reflects the racial and class hierarchies within a given society.⁴⁵⁵ As such, the hegemonic or dominant conception of femininity in midcentury America is by defined as those criteria that constitute white, middle-to-upper class femininity. The femininity promoted throughout mainstream mass cultural outlets and within dispersed throughout other apparatuses of ideology.⁴⁵⁶

This hegemonic gender system thus dictates a great deal about what constitutes womanliness, including how an ideal body should look. This articulation of gender is, like all ideological constructions, contextually dependent. With regard to postwar America, the dictates about the feminine body and the ways in which such a body was presented to the world through the use of clothing and the conventions about dress shifted drastically. In the late 1940s and 1950s, a great deal of emphasis was placed on women’s natural curves. As Levenstein notes: “Indeed, in the mid-1950s women

⁴⁵⁵ For more information regarding the theory of multiple femininities and of the idea of “hegemonic femininity” see: Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony.”

⁴⁵⁶ As such, for the sake of brevity in this chapter, references to the dominant conception of womanhood and to the ideal feminine body should be understood as referring to the bodily ideal set forth for white, middle and upper class women and should not be understood as applicable to the ideal body type for all women across class and racial differences.

cinched in their waists with tight belts to emphasize bosom and hips to a degree second only to those who aspired to ‘hourglass’ figures during the *belle époque*. Zaftig actresses such as Jane Russell, Anita Ekberg, Marilyn Monroe, and Jayne Mansfield were able to achieve stardom practically on the basis of the size of their bosom alone.”⁴⁵⁷ The presence of fat on certain areas of a woman, specifically in the buttocks and breasts, were seen as explicitly desirable. As Jack Lemon exclaimed of Marilyn Monroe’s gait in Billy Wilder’s 1959 film *Some Like it Hot*: “Look at that. Look how she moves. It’s like Jell-O on springs.”⁴⁵⁸ (Appendix: Figure 50) Some degree of curvaceousness was considered a requirement of femininity, and women’s fashions and dieting practices supported this ideal.

Whereas in the previous generation the bodily ideal for women was curvaceous and accentuated the sexual characteristics of the female body, around 1960 the bodily ideal became more thin and waif-like. The valorization of women’s curvy shapes gave way to a new ideal in this period: stick-thinness. As Levenstein argues: “for reasons that are still unclear, in the early 1960s the beauty pendulum began to swing back toward the thin ideal. A statistical analysis of the measurement of *Playboy* centerfolds and Miss America pageant contestants in the 1960s and 1970s, showing how both groups of women became considerably thinner over that period.”⁴⁵⁹ The skinny ideal was further perpetuated across a wide variety of mass cultural outlets. According to Levenstein: “That the media abetted the weight-loss mania is indisputable. Sitcom

⁴⁵⁷ Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. 239.

⁴⁵⁸ Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot, Monroe, Marilyn Movies* (S.l.: s.n. , 1959), videorecording, 1 videocassette (122 min.) : b&w ; 1/2 in. n.p.

⁴⁵⁹ Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. 239.

heroines, television commercials, ads in the print media — all provide visual evidence for the growing obsession with slenderness, particularly after about 1968.”⁴⁶⁰ Replacing the curvaceous bombshells of the 1950s were stick thin models and actresses — such as British model Twiggy or *Mod Squad* star Peggy Lipton — whose bony frames were considered the epitome of desirable and whose images were practically everywhere (Appendix: Figure 51).

Part of this praise of slenderness was a newfound obsession with youth that was written into the dominant conception for all women. Where in previous generations, different body standards had applied to women of different ages, in the 1960s and 1970s, “both young girls and their mothers aspired to the same youthful body type.”⁴⁶¹ Instead of sexual attractiveness being associated with mature female bodies, “the desirable young look was an angular one, taut and wrinkle-free, the image of an immature, prepubescent girl.”⁴⁶² Because the idea of the matronly woman — or even the maternal woman — is associated with the presence of physical curves, thinness was seen as the counter-acting agent to the aging process. By attaining a thin ideal, women could appear to be girlish, and thus younger.

Just as the fashion industry had promoted the roundness of the postwar feminine body ideal, so too did clothing trends facilitate the obsession with women’s thinness. Structural garments — specifically padded braziers, girdles, and petticoats — had largely been responsible for creating the silhouettes of postwar styles that

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. 239.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. 240.

⁴⁶² Ibid. 240.

emphasized women's curves. In the 1960s and 1970s, these garments fell out of fashion in favor of clothes worn closer to the body. As Levenstein notes: "As part of the era's turn toward the 'natural,' women rejected the layers of clothing and the stiff undergarments that had helped hide or support the fleshier parts of their bodies, exposing their real figures to unprecedented public examination."⁴⁶³ Miniskirts and bikinis, both of which grew exponentially in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, revealed the lines of women's bodies in public in ways that had seldom been seen beyond the space of the bedroom. In order to fit the clothes, women could no longer shape themselves with undergarments, and instead had to transform their bodies to fit the fashions.

In conjunction with mass culture promoting a new ideal for the feminine body, the very same media outlets promoted methods for attaining such a body. Dieting was marketed towards women as an effective method of weight-loss and new industries developed to help women in this quest. Most notably, Weight Watchers began offering its services following founder Jean Nidetch own success with a strict dieting regimen and her decision to, establish an informal support group for women seeking to lose weight in her New York City apartment. As Joyce Hendley notes: "By May 1963, Weight Watchers International, was incorporated"⁴⁶⁴ and the company changed the "dieting industry" by transforming weight-loss from an individual experience to a collective one. Hendley notes:

⁴⁶³ Ibid. 240.

⁴⁶⁴ Joyce Hendley, "Weight Watchers at Forty: A Celebration," *Gastronomica* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2003). 16.

Then, as now, a member paid a weekly fee and stepped up on a scale, with her weight recorded discretely — no judgments, only encouragement. The meeting would begin with a talk by a Lecturer (now called a Leader) always someone who had successfully lost weight on the program and who knew what it was like to be overweight. Then, the floor would open for members to share experiences and compare notes — for many, the first time they could give voice to the shame and isolation of being fat.⁴⁶⁵

Weight Watchers emphasized to its participants the rigors of sticking emphasizing the restraint necessary to adhere to “good” dieting practices. Hendley notes: “Discussions in Weight Watchers meeting rooms invariably evoked the imagery of law and order: typical dieters’ trade-offs, like skipping lunch to eat a piece of cake later, were labeled petty larceny.”⁴⁶⁶ Weight Watchers transformed dieting from a private and personal experience, predicated on an individual’s ability to chose for herself what and how to eat, to a rigorous, industrially mediated program, wherein successes and failures were a part of a collective experience.

The rigorous discourse of dieting was not unique to Weight Watchers, and women’s magazines became overrun with advertisements and articles aimed at encouraging women to lose weight. Between the years 1968 and 1979, the number of articles on dieting in six women’s magazines increased by 70 percent, when compared to the previous decade.⁴⁶⁷ Food manufacturers took note of the dieting trend, and also began developing low calorie options, and by the end of the 1970s, “large processors of well-established brand names turned to the time-honored method of product-line

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 16.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁶⁷ Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. 239.

extensions” in the creation of “diet” food.⁴⁶⁸ Advertisements for trend-diets and local foods thus saturated mass cultural outlets, further the promoting the thinness ideal to millions of women nationwide.

Because physical attractiveness is a central tenet of femininity, adherence to the new, sleeker and younger body type became a significant concern for women across America. As Nita Mary McKinley notes: “Dominant culture requires that the ideal woman be attractive. [...] More than any other standard of beauty, thinness is a major component of the current standard of attractiveness for women. [...] Ideal weight is constructed as attractive, and particularly attractive to men. Ideal weight and weight management also demonstrate that a woman cares about her appearance and *wants* to be attractive.”⁴⁶⁹ Adhering to a particular body shape thus becomes essential to the performance of a normative femininity, and maintenance of this ideal was policed through a broad number of social channels.

While being attractive to men has been one form of social regulation for women’s efforts to maintain this skinny norm, much of the social pressure placed upon women to be thin comes from women directly. As John Germov and Lauren Williams notes: “One aspect of the social construction of the thin ideal is the role women play in actively perpetuating this ideal. They do this in two main ways: women reinforce the thin ideal on themselves through constant self-surveillance; and women place other women under surveillance to ensure they comply or at least attempt to

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 243.

⁴⁶⁹ Nita Mary McKinley, “Ideal Weight/Ideal Women: Society Constructs the Female,” in *Weighty Issues : Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems*, ed. Jeffery Sobal and Donna Maurer (Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999). 103.

conform to the thin ideal as well.”⁴⁷⁰ Citing Foucault’s concept of “panopticism,” Germov and Williams emphasize the fact that through the process of monitoring the bodies of other women and themselves, women produce a significant coercive force that not only perpetuates this ideal of femininity but demands adherence to it.

The Feminist Response: Breaking Down the Beauty Myth

The mass cultural attention to an idealized younger and thinner body coincided with the rise of feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s. The pressures to adhere to an idealized feminine body were felt and subsequently challenged by women across the various factions of the white feminist movements. Most notably, the younger generations of feminists, those involved within the Radical, Politico, and Cultural Feminist sects agitated against the prevailing beauty standards in their political actions, feminist publications, and in their daily life. The notion that womanhood was dependent upon the performance of bodily maintenance and modification, including but not limited to the wearing of restrictive structural garments, the application of make-up, the removal of body hair, and the covering of natural body odors was analyzed by consciousness-raising groups nationwide, and members of the Women’s Liberation movement used their political actions, writing, and other forms of cultural media (including the visual arts) to challenge the structures of patriarchal capitalism that they identified as responsible for and profiting from women’s adherence to a particular ideal of feminine beauty.

⁴⁷⁰ John Germov and Lauren Williams, "Dieting Women: Self-Surveillance and the Body Panopticon," *ibid.* 125.

For many feminists, rejection of beauty products and the marketing of the notion that femininity depends upon a woman's attractiveness (to men) was a political act. The long-history of this denunciation by members of the Women's Liberation movement, can be traced back to the emergence of that moniker in the first place: The Miss America Protest in Atlantic City in 1968. In addition to unfurling a large banner declaring "Women's Liberation," protestors from around the country created several actions aimed at exposing the oppressive nature of the standards and techniques of attractiveness marketed toward women. As Alice Echols notes: "Some women chained themselves to a life-size Miss America puppet to emphasize women's enslavement to 'beauty standards.' They tossed 'instruments of torture to women' — high-heeled shoes, bras, girdles, [...] curlers, false eyelashes, and copies of *Playboy*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Ladies Home Journal* — into a 'Freedom Trash Can.'" ⁴⁷¹ Although this action was the origin of an apocryphal notion that feminists aimed to "burn their bras," the symbolism of the gesture was far more pointed and focused. Collectively discarding both the media sources that promote women's adherence to a particular mythologized beauty standard along with the devices aimed at helping women attain such an ideal, the women of the Miss America Protest sought to call attention to how beauty standards of this nature were simply the result of consumerism and the capitalist exploitation of women.

This critique of the beauty industry as an extension of patriarchal capitalism also was the focus of feminist writers during this period. A several chapters of Robin

⁴⁷¹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. 93.

Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* are dedicated to how mass culture has set unrealistic and oppressive standards for attractiveness as an extension of femininity. Contributors to the anthology, including Morgan herself, Zoe Moss, Alice Embree, and Florika, all examine how consumer culture coerces women to feel that their identity is dependent upon adherence to particular beauty standards. As Moss writes in her chapter, "It Hurts to be Alive and Obsolete: The Ageing Woman": "The mass media tell us all day and all evening long that we are inadequate, mindless, ugly, disgusting in ourselves. We must try to resemble perfect plastic objects, so that no one will notice what we really are. In ourselves, we smell bad, shed dandruff, our breath has an odor, our hair stands up or falls out, we sag or stick out where we shouldn't. We can only fool people into liking us by using magic products that make us products too."⁴⁷² Moss highlights the psychological damage that such marketing does to women, making them feel that the only way to be likeable and desirable — both essential characteristics of the hegemonic gender ideal for women — is to be without physical imperfection, a state that is completely unnatural. In order to attain the impossible, women are told to buy different products to help them, rendering them the very image of consumption.

Sisterhood is Powerful, as a text meant to facilitate consciousness-raising, thus highlights the ways in which this psychological conditioning by patriarchal capitalism has crept into the unconscious development of girls and women. In the chapter

⁴⁷² Zoe Moss, "It Hurts to Be Alive and Obsolete: The Ageing Woman," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful; an Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York,: Random House, 1970). 170.

“Barbarous Rituals,” Morgan outlines the various moments in a girl or woman’s life when the dictates of femininity are forced upon her. The chapter, which is a list of distinct moments, includes several instances wherein the beauty myth is enforced as a central part of this dominant gender ideology, including instances of bodily shame and dissatisfaction, and the efforts women go through in order to overcome the realities of their own bodies. For example, she writes “ — feeling basically comfortable in your own body, but gradually learning to hate it because you are: too short or tall, too fat or thin, thick-thighed or big-wristed, large-eared or stringy-haired, short-necked or long-armed, bowlegged, knock-kneed, or pigeon-toed — *something* that *might* make boys not like you.”⁴⁷³ She lists a number of strategies that young women use in order to combat the feeling of inadequacy associated with physical imperfection, writing: “tweezing your eyebrows/bleaching your hair/scraping your armpits/dieting/investigation vaginal sprays/ biting your nails and hating that and filing what’s left of them but hitting the quick instead.”⁴⁷⁴ Morgan’s list in this chapter epitomizes the idea of consciousness-raising; she lists a number of very personal moments in a woman’s life, but does so in a way to facilitate mutual understanding, compassion, and a recognition that these instances constitute a larger political issue. Morgan highlights the ways in which the dominant gender ideology puts unrelenting pressure on women to be perfect and provides them with resources through which to alter their bodies to adhere to a particular and subjective beauty standard. In

⁴⁷³ Robin Morgan, "Barbarous Rituals," *ibid.* 163.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 163.

constructing the chapter in such a way, she helps her readers to recognize their own oppression and instigates them to facilitate change.

As such, feminist actions such as the Miss America Protest and feminist literature like *Sisterhood is Powerful* sought to use consciousness-raising and political protest to challenge the patriarchal capitalist ideal of femininity promoted to women in mass media and through consumer culture. By calling attention to the oppressive nature of these beauty standards — going so far as to characterize the tools and practices associated with their adherence “barbaric” and “instruments of torture” — these feminists sought to challenge the centrality of the attractiveness ideal to women’s identities. As a result of these criticisms, many feminists — albeit far from all — made the choice to abandon the dictates of patriarchal capitalism in the form of the beauty industry, choosing instead to embrace their own bodies, flaws included, an action that was politically liberating in and of itself.

The abandonment of the oppressive patriarchal beauty standards was not simply limited to women refusing to apply make up, remove body hair, or wear certain kinds of structural garments; for many women, relinquishing dieting became an expression of this political impulse. While the pressure for women to be skinny is not simply an expression of gender ideology, as dictates against gluttony and the promotion of health apply to all genders, the thin ideal is a particularly gendered construct. As such, many women began to agitate against the practice of dieting — essentially starving one’s self — in order to adhere to a particular bodily ideal that is premised upon having an unblemished and thus unrealistic body. Feminist groups

formed around the issue of bodily acceptance and began publishing literature and carrying out collective action to call attention to the ways in which patriarchal capitalism pressured women to endure prolonged starvation as a form of their adherence to the oppressive beauty standards, comprising at “Fat Liberation Movement” within feminist circles.

In 1973, members of the Los Angeles-based feminist organization “Fat Underground” printed and circulated their own manifesto on “Fat Liberation.” Authors Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran outline their position, arguing:

1. WE believe that fat people are fully entitled to human respect and recognition.
2. We are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market, selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from that ridicule.
3. We see our struggle as allied with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, capitalism, imperialism, and the like.
4. We demand equal rights for fat people In all aspects of life, as promised in the Constitution of the United States.⁴⁷⁵

Members of Fat Underground sought to liberate themselves from the oppressive demands of society that stigmatize and ridicule non-conforming bodies. They concluded the manifesto with this assertion: “WE refuse to be subjugated to the interest of our enemies. We fully intend to reclaim power over our bodies and our lives. We commit ourselves to pursue these goals together.”⁴⁷⁶ Throughout their publications, Fat Underground sought to challenge the discourse surrounding fatness,

⁴⁷⁵ Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, "Fat Liberation," (Santa Monica, CA: Fat Underground, November 1973). n.p.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. n.p.

specifically with regard fat women. The frequently challenged the beauty myth as promoted in mass media, pushed against the medical pathologizing of fatness as antithetical to good health, and highlighted the ways in which over-weight women are stigmatized in culture. In so doing, they sought to raise mass consciousness to the oppression of fat women within American society.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, feminists used consciousness-raising, publishing, and collective action to agitate against the feminized ideal of attractiveness as perpetuated through mass cultural outlets. They highlighted the extreme and unhealthy nature of this mythology and the psychological repercussions of its teaching to young girls and women. The ideal form of the feminized body functioned to facilitate mass bodily dissatisfaction amongst women, which was then exploited by various marketing firms and advertising agencies in order to get women to buy products aimed at fixing their imperfections. Recognizing the oppressive and exploitative nature of this form of patriarchal capitalism, many feminists sought to embrace their bodies without modification, imperfections and all, abandoning the use of make up, razors, and even dieting.

Eleanor Antin: New York to California

Feminist artists, like activists in the broader social and political movement, worked to call attention to the arduous and even destructive nature of the beauty myth as an articulation of femininity through their art practices. Throughout her practice, Eleanor Antin has examined and critiqued the ways in which American womanhood is constructed of social mores and practices. . From the outset, Antin was keenly aware

that femininity is a socially constructed entity, and sought to illustrate the different ways in which gender is ascribed to and performed by individuals. Across a wide variety of works, Antin has examined how clothing, makeup, and various consumer goods are used to articulate identity, especially gender

Antin's feminist art practice was in many ways shaped by her upbringing and her arts education. Born Eleanor Fineman in New York in 1935, Antin was raised by socialist Jewish parents. Growing up in the Bronx, Antin attended public schools, benefitting from the establishment of a pilot program for gifted students at her elementary school before attending schools with strong programs in the arts in middle and high school. From early on, Antin was encouraged to follow her own creative and artistic impulses. She notes: "My mother thought that being an artist was the greatest because she had been an actor and always missed it. They were the best days of her life. And they encouraged me in school I was in the IGC class [intellectually gifted] so we were encouraged to do our own thing."⁴⁷⁷ Antin went on to attend The High School of Music and Art in Harlem where she studied painting and dance. While she was quite successful in her dance studies, a significant bout of anxiety combined with a desire to pursue other avenues of artistic expression resulted in her decision to major in writing and minor in painting at City College of New York.⁴⁷⁸ As a result of this anxiety, Antin was forced to give up dancing, which she actually found to be a relief. She recalls: "I didn't want to be a dancer. I knew but I couldn't face it because it was

⁴⁷⁷ Eleanor Antin and Judith Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009 May 8-9," (Washington, DC: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2009). n.p.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. n.p.

like a good thing to get this scholarship and Erick thought very well of me. I was talented as a modern dancer. [...] So talking myself into a heart attack was my sneaky way to get out of being a dancer.”⁴⁷⁹ Recognizing that she did not want to have the career of a dancer, Antin turned to other areas of the arts for her education, specifically looking into programs in writing and the fine arts (painting).

While at CCNY, Antin forged some significant relationships that would last her for decades; she notes: “That’s where I met David. I met people like Jerry Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg, people who became my friends for life and I also had a pretty good education and of course the best thing was I met David there and we became very good friends. We were not lovers for a long time. [...] It was great at City. I pretty much majored in cafeteria, there were three or four tables where the artists and writers hung out.”⁴⁸⁰ The friendships that she began at CCNY eventually went on to be formative for her both personally and professionally.

Antin left CCNY a few credits short of graduating in order to pursue acting for a while. She recalls, “when I quit, I had three more courses to take to graduate. I had taken all my major courses, a lot of writing when I left to be in a traveling company of *Bus Stop*. I was the second lead, not the Marilyn Monroe role. [...] That was fun and then I went to the Tamara Daykarhanova School for the Stage. That was everyday. It was like an academy.”⁴⁸¹ Antin enjoyed some success as an actor, but she eventually, following some frustrations with the production of a children’s television pilot,

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. n.p.

decided to return to CCNY. She recalls, “I went back to school and finished up. I had one requirement and one free elective left to take for my degree. I took Ancient History. I returned to my old love, the broken sculptures from the Met, the ruins.”⁴⁸² Following graduation, Antin continued acting, but also worked as a substitute teacher in the New York City School system to help make ends meet.⁴⁸³

Antin decided to spend the summer of 1960 on Fire Island; Antin returned to the city in terrible shape. She had repeated confrontations with her mother, had some terrible relationships with men, and ended up losing a significant amount of weight. She recalls “by the end of that summer on Fire Island, I thought I was pregnant and I didn’t know who the father was. No, I thought I knew but he was such an asshole I didn’t even want to tell him. So I figured, oh, oh, I need an abortion. But I didn’t know how to get one. It was illegal then.”⁴⁸⁴ She turned to her good friend, David Antin, in this moment of need; the pair discovered that Eleanor was experiencing amenorrhea as a result of extreme dieting and not pregnancy. Accordingly, David spent the rest of the summer “fattening [her] up with bacon and eggs, with ice cream sundaes, and pizzas.”⁴⁸⁵ When Eleanor Antin had fully recovered, she continued to stay with David; as she states: “So I never left and we became lovers and we’ve been together for 40-some years [...] We got married a few months after.”⁴⁸⁶ Shortly thereafter, the couple moved to an apartment on “East Third behind a quiet old cemetery,” where Eleanor

⁴⁸² Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. n.p.

began painting, working on large abstract canvases and making works in the style of Pop art.

Antin continued to make work in New York throughout the 1960s and was acquainted with many of the avant-garde movements that emerged in the city at that period of time. When asked about her friend circle in New York, Antin responds: “Some were painters and sculptors. Some were Fluxus artists, yes, a lot of writers and poets. [...] It was a great time because the genre boundaries were breaking down. I had no trouble thinking of myself as both a poet and an artist. In fact, that’s what turned me onto Conceptual Art. I read it as multi media, performative, mixed genre, experimental, inventive.”⁴⁸⁷ Antin began working in a variety of different media while in New York, creating assemblage and collage work, writing poetry, and creating conceptual pieces like her work *Blood of a Poet Box* (1965-8) (Appendix: Figure 52) wherein she obtained small samples of blood from a variety of different poets from New York.⁴⁸⁸

In 1968, Eleanor, David and their one-year old son Blaise relocated from New York to San Diego so that David could take a teaching position in the Visual Arts Department at the University of California, San Diego. Antin found the move to be a very positive experience. She recalls: “We were very bored with New York by then. It was time to go. It was boring. We were born here — I mean, born there. We were street brats, New York brats, and it was getting boring. [...] And so we drove to California. [...] The school [University of California at San Diego] had rented us a charming

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. n.p.

place with two orange trees in the garden covered with gorgeous oranges.”⁴⁸⁹ While in New York, they had lived in a compact apartment, in San Diego, the Antins had considerable space at their disposal, although Eleanor Antin did not need a big studio to continue her practice. She notes: “I wasn’t painting, I was a conceptual artist. Frankly, all I needed was a desk and a phone and a typewriter in those days.”⁴⁹⁰ Antin recalls that, upon arrival in San Diego, “the first thing I did when I came out her was make portraits out of brand new consumer goods because I discovered the Sears catalog. All these catalogs that I had never heard of — you know, in New York, you take the subway, go to Macy’s and buy something. So it was like, what, you could buy a life? so I looked through these catalogs and ordered new consumer goods and arranged configurations of them to make portraits of people.”⁴⁹¹ She titled the series of portraits *California Lives*, and showed them at a small, alternative gallery space in New York called Gain Ground in early 1970. She did a second exhibition of “‘consumer goods’ sculpture” in November 1970, this time at the Chelsea Hotel.⁴⁹²

Over time, Antin began establishing clearer ties to the San Diego and Los Angeles art world and started creating works that were much more focused on Southern California as a region. As she notes to Richards, “Enter *100 Boots*. My new hero. I bought 50 pairs of boots, big men’s boots in the Army-Navy surplus. I think they cost \$200 in those days for all of them. [...] It was six cents for a postage stamp,

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. n.p.

⁴⁹² Eleanor Antin, "Selected Biography," in *Eleanor Antin Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1973).

for a first class postcard. [...] I put together a mailing list. When I had a pretty big one, I started mailing out my *100 Boots* and I didn't have to leave town. All I had to do was shoot them and print them up as postcards. Suddenly they hit all over the place. They were written about all over the country.”⁴⁹³ Antin photographed the *100 Boots* (Appendix: Figure 53) in locations all over Southern California, creating what she called a “picaresque novel” wherein the boots carried out certain actions, including “facing the sea” or “going to church.” While Antin did eventually bring the boots to the East Coast and created postcards about their adventures there as well, the boots were developed with California specifically in mind and meant to reach an art audience well beyond the New York crowds.

Eleanor Antin's transplantation to California not only impacted the form and content of her art practice, but also fostered her emerging teaching career. During the first few of David Antin's appointment to the faculty of the UCSD Visual Art department, Eleanor Antin worked as a part-time lecturer in the department as well. She taught courses through the extension program and she was active within the department, and on the university campus. Because of obligations to her husband, and more importantly her son, Antin chose to stay in an adjunct position at UCSD instead of accepting an offer as “an artist-in-residence teacher for the Spring of 1973” from California State University, Fresno. At the conclusion of that academic year, however, Antin was not considered for a full-time teaching position within the department and decided to begin teaching elsewhere. She taught full-time as a

⁴⁹³ Antin and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009 May 8-9." n.p.

professor at UC Irvine for a few years, ultimately returning to UCSD in 1975 as a tenure-track professor, a position she held until her retirement in 2002, although she is still affiliated with the department as an emeritus today.⁴⁹⁴

Eleanor Antin's Feminist Consciousness Rises

While in San Diego, Antin became involved with feminist activism and the Women's Art Movement. In an interview with Howard Fox, she notes that she was immediately drawn to feminism as it began growing as a social, political, and ideological movement. She states: "As soon as it appeared, I was immediately attracted to the discourse. Believe it or not, I read — it's embarrassing to say because it's such a cliché [*laughing*] — I read Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan [*more laughter*]. It's an embarrassment!"⁴⁹⁵ Although the texts that she found liberating to read may be considered cliché, Antin's position as a feminist reader was far from it. Unlike the scores of housewives and their daughters for whom such texts seemed to awaken them to the patriarchal realities that defined their every day, Antin did not live in a family that believed fundamentally that a woman's place is the home. For generations, the women in her Polish Jewish family had run businesses of their own with great shrewdness; Antin's mother was a professional actor for a time and spent much of her life running resorts during the summer time, and she always pushed Eleanor to pursue her own career. When Antin's parents divorced while Eleanor was

⁴⁹⁴ Emily Liebert, "A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse: The Act of Looking in Eleanor Antin's Early Selves," in *Multiple Occupancy : Eleanor Antin's "Selves"*, ed. Emily Liebert, et al. (New York: Wallach Art Gallery, 2013). 13.

⁴⁹⁵ Howard N. Fox, "A Dialogue with Eleanor Antin," in *Eleanor Antin*, ed. Howard N. Fox (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999). 206.

in high school, she and her sister Marcia lived with their mother, who was the sole source of financial support for the family.⁴⁹⁶ Antin continued working herself following her marriage to David Antin and the birth of their son, and while she found new obligations accompanied motherhood, she never felt that they were a legitimate reason for her not to have a career. While she did not need to have her consciousness raised in order to recognize her potential beyond the home, within feminism she found an outlet and a community that supported her own beliefs about women's roles in society.

Antin discovered that community within the Southern California art world. She forged friendships and collaborations with many women artists in Los Angeles and San Diego starting in the early 1970s. Antin recalls to Fox: "I don't remember exactly when I got friendly with the women from L.A., but I became close friends with Suzanne Lacy. And Miriam Schapiro, who was teaching down here and later up at Cal Arts. [...] I was also friendly with Pauline Oliveros and Linda Montano, and they were becoming feminized politically. And Ida Horowitz (who became Ida Applebroog when she moved to New York) was perhaps my closest friend."⁴⁹⁷ Through these relationships, Antin was involved with feminist art groups like the Feminist Art Program and the Los Angeles Woman's Building.

Antin was active in the Women's Art Movement and was an advocate for helping women advance as artists. She wrote letters in protest of the exclusion of women artists from the LACMA Art and Technology show in 1970, in conjunction

⁴⁹⁶ Antin and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009 May 8-9." n.p.

⁴⁹⁷ Fox, "A Dialogue with Eleanor Antin." 207.

with the efforts of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists who boycotted the show on these same grounds.⁴⁹⁸ In 1972, she and a number of women artists from San Diego, including Ida Horowitz, Barbara Strassen and Joyce Shaw participated in the first West Coast Women's Art Conference hosted at Womanhouse in Los Angeles.⁴⁹⁹ In San Diego, she was active with local feminist groups and had a relationship with both the emerging women's studies department at San Diego State University — one of the first in the nation — and with the women's center at UC San Diego.

Antin also saw teaching as a form of feminist activism and believed that she had a duty to help young women artists develop in their careers. In a letter to the faculty of the Visual Arts department at UCSD, she wrote in 1973: "Everyone here knows I am a feminist of long-standing and it is my strong belief that I owe it to the young women majoring in art to offer them my services. Most of the art majors in the universities and colleges are women but practically all of their studio teachers are men. These young women are being deprived of the example, experience and guidance which successful women artists can offer them."⁵⁰⁰ Antin asserted the need for women faculty to foster and mentor these women students in order to counteract the socialization of women that so often hindered their success in the arts. She notes: "To be an artist requires the sort of aggressive inventiveness and tough intellectualism which women are characteristically not encouraged to display and I believe they must

⁴⁹⁸ Drafts of letters appear in Eleanor Antin, "Correspondences," in *Eleanor Antin Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1965-2009, undated). n.p.

⁴⁹⁹ Krasilovsky, "West Coast Women Artists' Conference." n.p.

⁵⁰⁰ Eleanor Antin, "To the Faculty of the Visual Arts Depart.," in *Eleanor Antin Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1973). n.p.

be nurtured, seduced, argued, and encouraged along these lines. Most of my students here are women and the relaxed, happy and inventive work they do in my classes is, in most cases very different from the passive, correct, and shall I say secretive performance they display in most of their other classes.”⁵⁰¹ Antin sought to use her classroom to help her women students overcome the cultural strictures that hindered women’s artistic production and career development. She — like many feminist artists and educators in California, including, but not limited to, Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Shelia Levrant de Bretteville, and Arlene Raven — believed that pedagogy and teaching was an articulation of feminism and was essential to help younger women to advance towards equality.

Moreover, Antin found feminist theory and political practice to be central to her identity as a working artist. She notes to Fox: “*The Feminine Mystique* was an eye-opener about popular culture. Suddenly pop [art] didn’t look as friendly anymore. I began to devour the [feminist] material.”⁵⁰² Antin began exploring issues of gender and identity in her work more regularly and explicitly. Starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the question of how gender is performed and articulated became a common theme within her work. She created works that looked at the ways in which gender is inscribed on the body, examining both the conditions of femininity in works such as *Representational Painting* (1971) (Appendix: Figure 54) and *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), and exploring the articulation of masculinity and the line between the two genders in pieces such as *King of Solana Beach* (1974) (Appendix:

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. n.p.

⁵⁰² Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999). 206.

Figure 55). Antin also created a series of performances that examined certain feminine stereotypes, looking at roles that are paragons of discursively defined femininity; most famously, her characters of the nurse and the ballerina (both of which appeared in several performances from around 1972 through the 1980s) were explorations of certain forms of idealized femininity and their articulation in the parts women play in daily life.

As previously noted, following her arrival in San Diego, Antin began focusing a great deal of attention on how womanhood is demarcated and articulated. In her first works after moving to California, the “consumer collage” portraits *California Lives* and *Portraits of Eight New York Women* (Appendix: Figure 56), for instance, include representations of specific women on the basis of certain consumer goods and a small amount of text. In *California Lives*, for instance, Antin portrays the figure of Jeanie, “through a few stray personal articles — a melamine cup and saucer, a pink hair curler, a king-size filter-tipped cigarettes, and a matchbook from Bully’s Prime Rib restaurant — strewn on a folding table with a text giving a few sketchy details about Jeanie’s day-to-day life.”⁵⁰³ From this array of objects, we get a sense that Jeanie is a woman based on the hair curler and perhaps the cup and saucer, and we also get a sense of what *kind* of woman she is; her gender identity is signified by certain items, while her personality is written upon the others.

Similarly, in *Portraits of Eight New York Women*, Antin represents eight real women, most of which were active in the New York art world, through a series of

⁵⁰³ Ibid. 26.

objects meant to signify their identities and experiences. Critic John Perreault describes some of the portraits in a *Village Voice* review of the show from 1970, stating: “Carolee Schneemann was represented by an easel draped with velvet, a jar of honey, and a mirror. Naomi Dash was represented by a black towel, a red bra, and a box of kitty litter. Yvonne Rainer was an exercycle with a basket decorated with plastic flowers.”⁵⁰⁴ In each of these portraits, Antin creates the identities of these women through the placement and inclusion of certain items. In so doing, she illustrates the ways in which a person is defined by the objects around them and how those objects can reveal certain aspects about that individual. In each of those three portraits, Antin includes some symbolic signifier meant to indicate womanhood, yet at the same time the relationship between those signifiers and the other items also serves to show how gender is inscribed upon certain objects.

While Antin’s consumer portraits were meant to show how femininity can be ascribed to inanimate items, Antin’s more performative, conceptual pieces from the early 1970s examine how gender is inscribed upon the human body. In particular, the works *Representational Painting* and *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* focus explicitly on how femininity as a form of gender identity is literally put upon the female body. In 1971, Antin created a video work meant to illustrate the laborious process by which women transform their natural faces by the application of make up. In the video, Antin sits on a folding metal chair, wearing knee-high boots, dark pants and a bra. Beside her is a TV table littered with cosmetics. Over the course of the

⁵⁰⁴ John Perreault, "Art: Pushing It," *The Village Voice* 1969. n.p.

video, Antin performs the act of applying make up to her face in order to “[transform] it from ‘plain’ to ‘beautiful’ or at least what passes for beauty in a woman’s face according to Antin.”⁵⁰⁵ The action thus serves as a documentation of a particular aspect of women’s daily life and a critique of the systematic sexism within American culture that requires the performance of such an act in order to adhere to the dictums of femininity.

Moreover, the video serves to highlight how the idea of feminine beauty, as an articulation of the dominant gender ideology, is culturally constructed and is put upon the female body as opposed to deriving from it. Antin uses the make up in this video to transform her face so that it adheres to certain standards of beauty, which are culturally specific and highly subjective. As Howard Fox points out: “The work captures the irony in making such arbitrary distinctions between plain and beautiful, and it sly begs the question of why women subject themselves to this exercise of making their appearance conform to preferred tastes.”⁵⁰⁶ Because beauty has often been considered a central tenet of womanhood, Antin thus applies a thick layer of make up to her (female) face in order to make herself appear feminine. She uses make up in *Representational Painting* in order to represent herself as a woman.

Yet the definition of beauty in this context is entirely culturally and socially defined. The title of the work, *Representational Painting*, in addition to referring to Antin’s actions, also alludes to the construction of feminine beauty within the Western canon of art history. The history of western art is deeply intertwined with the

⁵⁰⁵ Fox, *Eleanor Antin*. 38-44.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 44.

representation of beautiful women, particularly within the medium of painting. From Raphael to John Singer Sargent, trying to capture the ideal female form has captivated painters for centuries. Yet in looking through the canon of western art, we can see very easily how that definition of beauty is subjective and is in many cases contextually dependent. Comparing two representations of the female nude across from two subsequent centuries, such as Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* (1862) (Appendix: Figure 57) and Modigliani's *Reclining Nude* (1917) (Appendix: Figure 58), we can see noticeable differences in what constitutes feminine beauty. In Ingres' highly idealized, orientalist image, the women are curvaceous, fair-skinned, and light haired, with relatively no body hair. Modigliani's nude, on the other hand, is considerably slimmer, with darker hair and skin tone, and one can see pubic and body hair. In less than a century, the stylized female nude was transformed significantly, thus highlighting the subjective and contextually dependent nature of beauty norms. By titling the work *Representational Painting*, Antin sought to call to mind this history, and to make apparent the fluid and ever changing nature of the delineation of beauty. In highlighting this aspect of beauty norms, Antin thus illustrates some of the futility associated with the gesture of painting one's own face in order to adhere to the constructed and constantly changing norms that dictate the dominant ideal of womanhood.

The relationship between representations of women in the canon of western art and the envelopment of beauty into the prescriptive ideals for femininity is also a central component of Antin's conceptual piece *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*. The

work is comprised of “a sequential, gridlike arrangement of 144 photographs documenting Antin’s ten-pound weigh loss over a thirty-six-day period.”⁵⁰⁷ The title of the work is, in its self, indicative of a critical appraisal of the culture of beauty. Although the work comprises of a series of photographs — which are two dimensional in nature and hung on a wall — Antin asserts that the work is a sculpture in and of itself. Antin exhibited the work along side *Representational Painting* as a part of a show entitled “‘Painting,’ ‘Drawing,’ and ‘Sculpture’” wherein she included three different conceptual works all aimed at challenging medium specificity. As Marilyn Nix wrote in her review of the show: “the three pieces in the exhibit (from her ‘Traditional Art Series’) are concerned with ‘a re-investigation of art history and methodology by redefining the old terms so precisely as to throw new and relevant light and, in fact, make them useful again.”⁵⁰⁸ For Antin, both *Representational Painting* and *Carving* served as an investigation into the criteria that have defined art practices and been essential for establishing art historical categories. By transgressing these definitions through using two-dimensional photographs as a sculpture or a video as a painting, Antin called to question the historical conception and specificity that is associated with a given media.

Furthermore, the use of the phrase “A Traditional Sculpture” in the title connotes the conventional portrayal of female beauty within the canon of art history, performing the same function as the title “Representational Painting” did in her earlier

⁵⁰⁷ "Waiting in the Wings."44. It should be noted that other sources cite Antin’s weightloss as closer to 15 lbs.

⁵⁰⁸ Marilyn Nix, "Eleanor Antin's Traditional Art," *West Coast Art Week*, September 16, 1972 1972.

piece. As in *Representational Painting*, Antin uses her own form as a surrogate for the traditional depiction of the female form in sculpture dating back to antiquity. Antin's body is likened to the sculptor's marble and is chiseled away according to the whims of a man. Howard Fox argues that the work references "the classical conceit of sculpture: ideal form resides within the block of stone, and it is the sculptor's job to liberate it, to take away the excessive physicality."⁵⁰⁹ This is precisely the task that Antin takes on herself in the creation of the work. The allusion to sculpture and the conception of female beauty in the history of art in the title serves to highlight the ways in which such unnatural prescriptions for female beauty have been, throughout history, manufactured and perpetuated by men.

Literally *Carving*: Dieting and the Delineation of a Feminine Body

While there is a clear relationship between the act of dieting and the idea of constructing a sculpture at play in the work, the examination of aesthetics and the conceptualization of beauty as an articulation of femininity in the work extends beyond criticality of art and medium. As previously noted, in her art practice, Antin has regularly examined the ways in which femininity is the result of cultural constructions. Using her art work as an extension of her own engagement with feminist theory and the politics of Women's Liberation, Antin uses conceptually based works in order to highlight the myriad and pervasive expectations set forth towards women to appear and act a particular way. From her consumer portraits, wherein the depiction of gender arises solely from specifically commodities that have been

⁵⁰⁹ Fox, "Waiting in the Wings." 46.

gendered feminine, to her documentary and performative conceptual pieces wherein Antin demonstrates explicitly the processes by which beauty is ascribed to the (female) body and thus encoded into womanhood, Antin creates works that are meant to demonstrate the complicated and persistent demands placed upon women to perform a particular, form of femininity.

The feminist engagement within Antin's art practice was thus in many ways emblematic of the feminist ideals of consciousness-raising; her work reflected her own personal experience and in so doing rendered those struggles political. The struggle of dieting and body image is perhaps one of the best examples of a highly personal issue for most women that does have extreme political consequences, and Antin was no exception. For most of her younger life, Antin struggled with eating and nutrition, a problem related both to social pressures and to physical ailments. Antin's own problems with food began when she was a child. Antin had problems with eating and nutrition when she was in elementary school. She recalls to Judith Richards, "You see I didn't eat. I never ate until I was bout eight or nine. The nurse used to call me down to her office later on when I went to school. [...] They thought I had a disease because I was very small and very skinny. [...] I used to vomit at the sight of food."⁵¹⁰ While some of these earlier issues subsided, others emerged later on. As Antin became an adult, rigorous dieting supplanted the nausea as the major source of her eating issues. When she spent the summer of 1960 on Fire Island, Antin took up a macrobiotic diet that caused her the aforementioned significant weightloss and amenorrhea. She recalls:

⁵¹⁰ Antin and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009 May 8-9." n.p.

“I had been on macrobiotics and I was like down to 92 pounds. I was borderline anorexic. I looked horrifying. [...] well, what happened is because of my starvation diet I lost my period for a month. It’s what happens to athletes, it happens to people who don’t eat.”⁵¹¹ In the process of recovering from this incident, Antin “discovered indigestion,” a condition that she continues to struggle with to this day.⁵¹²

Antin’s own struggles with food form the basis of *Carving*, but the work seeks to illustrate the very fact that Antin’s plight is not unique to her alone. As previously noted, during the 1960s and 1970s, the idealized feminine body was transformed from a curvaceous, mature woman to a more angular, girlish figure. It is during this period that thinness became the new standard by which all women’s bodies are judged. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Americans became obsessed with being thin and terrified of becoming fat and thinness was considered the only acceptable body-type for women. To be fat was to fail at performing femininity, according to mass culture. Antin thus used this piece to call critical attention to the ways in which American culture was inundated with media images promoting this thin ideal and continuously confronted with literature about dieting.

The formal elements of *Carving* serve as a direct challenge to the ways in which the thinness ideal was perpetuated in mass cultural outlets. The progressive nature of the documentation and the multiple views presented in the work directly contradict the predominant narratives of weight-loss promoted in advertising and magazine imagery. As Emily Liebert notes: “*Carving* unfolds in a panoramic display

⁵¹¹ Ibid. n.p.

⁵¹² Ibid. n.p.

of flesh. [...] *Carving* offers an alternative to the phantasmic before-after diptych pervasive in popular magazines, which only uses two photographs to show a body before and after it has been altered in some manner. Counter to this convention, *Carving*'s 148 photographs ask the spectator to consider the labor of the subject's diet, on painstaking pound at a time."⁵¹³ In presenting the documentation of her weight-loss, Antin illustrates the reality, not the idealized narrative, of what dieting entails. She is not magically transformed from one body to another, but rather the arduous process of transforming her body is presented for the viewer to contemplate.

This documentation of her weight-loss process also serves to illustrate the disciplining of the body required in order to perform femininity in the form of thinness. Whereas popular magazines promote a fiction of instant gratification, the reality of dieting in practice is a long and arduous rendering of the body and an overriding of certain impulses. This kind of control was and is at the core of dieting literature, promoting the individual's ability to override food cravings and the sense of hunger in favor of attaining an ideal body. This rigorous discipline of the body mirrors Foucault's assertions regarding the production of the "docile body." Foucault argues "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved," arguing that the emergence of new techniques of control in the 18th century transformed "the scale of control" moving from "treating the body, *en masse*, 'wholesale,' as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself —

⁵¹³ Liebert, "A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse: The Act of Looking in Eleanor Antin's Early Selves." 16.

movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.”⁵¹⁴ Thus, as Cressida J. Heyes notes, “Dieting itself (not just weight loss as a projected outcome) is an activity that constructs the docile body.”⁵¹⁵ Antin’s documentation of her weight-loss in *Carving* is thus a documentation of the power structures put upon her body in the formation of the docile body that is the feminine ideal.

Moreover, the “panorama of flesh” that is presented in the grid of documentary images reflects the Foucauldian ideal of the “docile body” because it evokes the notion of ideological control over the body, invoking the imagery of medical examinations. To start, the very presentation of Antin’s body reflects the use of photography in the medical profession to document the manifestation of certain conditions of the body, or in more extreme cases, to illustrate physiognomic types in the service of medicalized theories of race — such as the photographs of Saartjie Baartman (“The Hottentot Venus”) or the promotion of eugenics in Nazi medical literature. As such, the perspectives employed constitute a form of examination, which Foucault argues: “combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline,

⁵¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). 136-7.

⁵¹⁵ Cressida J. Heyes, "Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers," *Hypatia* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2006). 127.

the examination is highly ritualized.”⁵¹⁶ Antin constructs a system through which the viewer is to scrutinize and analyze the various aspects of her body and thus ascertain certain notions about her self and her character.

By putting her body on display and inviting the judging and discerning gaze of the audience while circumventing the conventional narrative of weight-loss, Antin challenges the structures at play that dictate women’s conformity to this particular bodily ideal. In presenting a clinical and cold representation of her weight-loss over a course of 36 days, Antin confronts the romantic ideals that surround the dieting process. The medicalized distance with which Antin presents her naked body removes the sexual component that characterizes the quality of attractiveness that is associated with the thin feminine body. She appears as a sterile subject, a body under regulation, and not as a lively individual who has likes, dislikes, and desires. Her body is posed in particularly neutral position, with her arms out to her sides, weight evenly distributed across both feet, so as to best ascertain the positioning of fat stores across her body. In standing in such a way, she is not attempting to captivate or attract the viewer, which is an essential component of the relationship between the thinness ideal and the feminine body; women who are thin are attractive and are thus fulfilling an essential part of their femininity. Antin thus undermines the conventions wherein thinness and attraction are related by presenting herself in as asexual and desexualized a manner as possible.

⁵¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*. 184.

Moreover, by depicting herself in a sterile and regimented manner, Antin conveys the restriction and confinement associated with the act of dieting itself. In order to achieve her weight-loss, Antin had to adhere to a strict diet, controlling how and what she ate with great precision. She has documented this self-control aspect in a photographic series entitled *Eight Temptations* (1972) (Appendix: Figure 59) wherein, as Howard Fox notes: “In mock heroic gestures, Antin represents herself resisting the tempting snack foods that would violate her diet,” the very same diet that she undertook in the creation of *Carving* (Appendix: Figure 60).⁵¹⁷ In order to facilitate weight-loss, Antin imposed a stringent structure to herself with regard to her eating habits; this very same strict adherence to a regimented plan was then applied in the creation of the photographs that comprise the “sculpture.”

In imposing such a framework upon herself, and documenting the process in such a manner, Antin thus illustrates the dehumanizing and dispassionate acts that women must perform in order to adhere to the ideal feminine body. The title of the work, *Carving*, suggests that the process of weight-loss and dieting has a violent component to it, that one is actively cutting away at the substrate of the body in order to fit a normative conception of thinness. Like *Representational Painting*, *Carving* serves to illustrate the arduousness of dieting and the constant demands presented to women to adhere to a particular body shape. By using an abundance of photographs, 144 in all, Antin both replicates and complicates the preponderance of media images that continually reinforce the notion that proper performance of femininity is

⁵¹⁷ Fox, *Eleanor Antin*. 48.

dependent upon the acquisition and maintenance of a skinny body. While she unsettles the conventional narrative that exists in the before and after diptych, Antin's progressive documentary serves as a reminder for how inundated women are with this kind of ideological coercion through mass culture on a daily basis. Drawing on her own experiences with extreme weight-loss and restricted eating, Antin demonstrates the political nature of this very personal experience. By highlighting her own dieting progress, she creates an opportunity for others to consider the impact of dieting and the thin ideal on the psychological and day-to-day realities of women's lives. In so doing, she unsettles the magic ascribed to weight-loss as a transformative experience — wherein a woman discovers her new attractive and sexually appealing self — and instead highlights the arduousness and the lack of glamor inherent in the act of effective dieting.

Martha Rosler's Personal Politics

Like Eleanor Antin, her long-time friend, student, and colleague Martha Rosler was also interested in creating works to directly challenge the promotion of certain ideals of femininity promoted within mass media. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Rosler has used explicit references to various forms of mass culture — such as television cooking programs — to create art works that are meant to criticize the ways in which womanhood has been socially constructed. Rosler also grew up in New York with parents with socialist tendencies and she too had an interest in the arts from a young age, fostered by her exposure to the art world of the city. As previously noted, Rosler began her artistic training in New York before moving to San Diego at the

behest of both Eleanor and David Antin, where she pursued her MFA degree and became involved with a group of socially engaged and conceptually based art practitioners in the department.

Like Antin, Rosler's initial engagement with feminism seemed to emerge from the larger cultural ethos of the period. According to Rosler, she became interested in feminism because "it was in the air." She notes: "Even as undergrads we discussed among ourselves questions of women and our role in society, in part I suppose because of Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. Then Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* came out, which I did not read, because I was not a suburban housewife or graduate of one of the Seven Sisters. But the ideas were much discussed in various forums, especially the mass media."⁵¹⁸ Rosler was heavily influenced by certain feminist texts, including but not limited to: "*Sisterhood Is Powerful* and *Notes from the Second Year, On the Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, Redstockings materials and a host of other pamphlets and underground newspapers."⁵¹⁹ While she read these texts prior to moving to San Diego, and identified with the politics they espoused, at least initially Rosler was not actively involved with any specific feminist organizations in New York.⁵²⁰

Rosler moved to San Diego in 1968 and began her MFA at UCSD in 1971. Even before she began her MFA, Rosler became involved with the nascent feminist groups that sprouted up on UCSD's campus. When asked if her engagement with

⁵¹⁸ Martha Rosler, March 25, 2015. n.p.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. n.p.

⁵²⁰ Ibid. n.p.

feminism changed when she moved to California, Rosler responds: “Yes, in that I discovered the Women’s Liberation Front at the University (before I was a student there), and its meetings and consciousness-raising groups, and the informal network of women, radicals who were feminists, in San Diego.”⁵²¹ Rosler’s feminism was born out of her identity as a radical and as a socialist, and she found all three to be necessarily interrelated. Her participation in this kind of feminist organizing, had, as previously noted a profound impact on her art practice. As Alexander Alberro states: “Questions of oppression and resistance, long central to her thinking acquired concrete application in relation to herself for the first time, as feminism clarified the direct links between everyday life, anti-war work, and struggles for civil rights and political and social transformation.”⁵²² With the raised-consciousness that emerged from these feminist groups, Rosler approached her work with the understanding that politics and the practice of daily life are inseparable, and that the structures of power that work to subjugate certain groups — by gender or by class — are present in every avenue of life.

As noted in Chapter 2, Rosler has consistently examined the ways in which food practices are an iteration of a larger political system in her work; in works like *Semiotics of the Kitchen* and *A Gourmet Experience*, Rosler investigated the ways in which culinary discourse was central to delineating both gender roles and class distinctions. These explorations into the role of food culture in delineating these roles

⁵²¹ Ibid. n.p.

⁵²² Alexander Alberro, "The Dialectics of Everyday Life: Martha Rosler and the Strategy of the Decoy," in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998). 78.

were derived from her own personal experiences. She notes: “As a woman with a partner and child in the mid to late 1960s New York and later in California [sic] — and, furthermore as the person functioning as the family breadwinner (phrase is à propos your topic) — I was responsible for getting the family meals together, no matter what! [...] So the questions of the ‘family meal’ and women’s responsibilities were on my mind — and the minds of so many of us — even after I moved to California.”⁵²³ Rosler was keenly aware of the labor politics that comprised the act of food preparation, and thus used her art practice to elucidate the gendering of domestic labor.

Rosler’s interest in food was not limited to the act of preparation, however, and her examination of food culture in her art practice was not limited to the issues of labor. Rosler was also deeply interested in the examining patterns of consumption as they relate to the delineation of class and gender in American society. As she noted to Weinstock in 1981: “Food is an interesting issue for a number of reasons, not just as a metaphor. It’s so closely allied to what a woman is supposed to be. Food figures in the dichotomy between producer and consumer [...] There are multiple relations of production and consumption of food that women must assume: those of high art and popular art. There is also the notion of gift: giving oneself gifts of food versus the incessant pressure to deny oneself.”⁵²⁴ Rosler acknowledges the food serves a host of symbolic functions within our culture, many of which are central to the delineation of gender roles and class positioning. As she succinctly puts it: “Food represents a place

⁵²³ Rosler. n.p.

⁵²⁴ Rosler and Weinstock, "Interview with Martha Rosler." 83.

where the social and the biological coincide that is not sex.”⁵²⁵ The consumption of food, as she asserts, is a biological imperative, but very little about how we consume that food is derived from any form of innate need. Who prepares what and how it is consumed are all, as Levi Strauss has noted, derived from culture, not nature.

In developing an art practice that examined the politics of food, Rosler sought to illustrate the ways in which food practices are socially determined. This is as true of her works surrounding the consumption of food as in her works dealing with the labor of food preparation. Rosler approaches the subject of consumption from the same Marxist stance as she does labor. She notes: “the commodity form *is* the basic capitalist form: consumption is proposed as a substitute for all kinds of human satisfaction and it is never adequate.”⁵²⁶ Rosler uses this perspective as the basis of her critical investigations into the use of food as a commodity fetish and a class based signifier, such as in her works *A Gourmet Experience* (1973) and later in *Global Taste* (1985), wherein gourmet food culture and the idea of haute cuisine are examined in light of the ideological structures and labor politics that are used to support the differentiations of classes based off of their relation to food. In both works, the question of class is articulated according to who is doing the eating, and Rosler uses her art practice to illustrate the expansive distance that exists between the working class individuals who are producing these goods for middle- and upper-class eaters to acquire. The act of eating in these works is thus a reflection of sophistication and a performance of class function.

⁵²⁵ Ibid. 83.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. 83.

Rosler further problematizes the articulation of class in her works dealing with food consumption by examining how the social aspects of eating are related to contemporary gender politics. Like Eleanor Antin, Rosler examines the way that mass culture and dispersed ideology during the 1960s and 1970s came to shape how women conceptualize and practice eating in daily life. In particular, Rosler is interested in the ways in which the thin ideal as an ideological construction of white, middle-class femininity impacts the ways in which women contemplate and practice dieting and disordered eating. This interest, however, is not separate from her examination of how eating practices reflect class positioning. On the contrary, Rosler uses her works to highlight how the act of starvation is articulated differently across class lines. As she notes to Weinstock: “Food offers a giant arena in which the social overwhelms the biological, often to its detriment. Anorexia is one limiting case, and the starvation of the poor or subject peoples is another, in which the social demands are so strong that the biological must yield. In one case the social directives are internalized; in the other they are imposed in the most brutal way, by the withholding of food.”⁵²⁷ Rosler thus sought to use her works about food consumption generally — and the work *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977) specifically — to call attention to the ways in which limitations placed on food consumption reflect class positions as well as the pressures to conform to the dominant construction of womanhood as articulated in the ideal for middle class, white women.

⁵²⁷ Ibid. 83.

Critiquing the “Thin Ideal” in Martha Rosler’s *Losing*

Martha Rosler has, as already asserted, used certain forms of media in order to critically engage with how gender and class positions are articulated and enforced through mass culture. This impulse formed the foundation of much of her photographic and video works. Rosler uses familiar formats from mass culture — such as home décor photo spreads and cooking programs — which she subverts in order to illustrate how such apparatuses work to enforce a particular ideological construction of gender, race, class, or nationalism. In *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents*, Rosler takes this format almost to its logical end; while in previous works, Rosler draws upon conventional media formats only to clearly subvert them through some form of artistic intervention — such as the reduction of a cooking demonstration to the alphabet or the inclusion of wartime photojournalism in the space of middle class homes — in *Losing*, Rosler does not readily emphasize this disjuncture between original format and art work. She notes: “*Losing* was closest to a TV program, to the interview with nonfactors. It’s ambiguous in its relation to soap opera and to the interview (in this case to the interview with the victim or relative-of-victim). I wanted it to be as much like a TV interview as I could make it, and I also wanted to ring certain changes on that form. There are possibly people exactly like the characters in *Losing* but it’s easy to apprehend them as too young and improbable in their talk.”⁵²⁸ In *Losing*, Rosler constructed a fictional scenario that resembled a very real one both in format and content, and she used subtle cues — such as soap operatic overacting and the

⁵²⁸ Ibid. 80.

incongruity of the figures playing the parents with the words they spoke — in order to illustrate how mass media constructs certain narratives in the service of a broader ideological goal.

Losing: A Conversation with the Parents is an 18-minute long video wherein two actors playing the part of a young-to-middle aged couple are recounting the events leading up to their daughter's premature death as a result of her own disordered eating.⁵²⁹ The video takes on the form of a television news interview, wherein the victim's family is trying to rationalize what has happened to their loved one in a public forum. In playing into the conventions of such a format, Rosler filmed the couple setting on a couch in an upper-middle-class suburban living room. The couple sits on a beige velvet couch littered with throw pillows with four framed prints hanging on the wall behind them. In front of them sits a dark wooden coffee table, complete with a stack of high-end design magazines, a red leather photo album and a vase of flowers. The camera is angled so they appear in $\frac{3}{4}$ profile and the entire length of the couch can be seen. She wears a dark blue patterned, long sleeved, knee length dress and stockings, with her hair done up. He wears slacks and a blue button-down shirt with a tan cardigan. The setting is entirely familiar to anyone who has seen interviews of this sort on news broadcasts; the couple has cleaned themselves up to look presentable, and they are filmed in their home so as to make their experience seem familiar. The

⁵²⁹ The video implies that the daughter has died of *anorexia nervosa*, but never explicitly states the cause of death as such, primarily because according to Rosler: "only specialists had heard of it" in 1977. Source: Rosler. March 25, 2015. n.p.

whole scene is set so as to make the story seem as though because the events in question happened to this family, they could happen to anyone.

This idea is reinforced by the parents' words. For instance, the mother begins her narrative stating:

Well, she was perfectly normal. Full term, 20 inches, seven pounds. She was a good child. She liked what little children like. Was fond of cake and ice cream too, like little children are. She was a happy Child. We were happy. Well, we had the usual ups and downs, but nothing serious. We gave her plenty of our love and attention. [...] She did well enough in school, I guess. Was popular with the boys, and with the girls. She took ballet, liked riding her bicycle and swimming. She made cheerleader in high school. We never imagined... never imagined that we would ever have any problem about her weight.⁵³⁰

In her opening statements, the mother makes it apparent that their daughter's struggles were not the result of her upbringing or any issues with her disposition, further highlighting the fact that this tragedy could strike any family. Her husband similarly, affirmed their role as supportive parents in his initial lines, stating: "We always encouraged her to do exactly what she wanted to do. Like going out for sports or for cheerleading. We were pleased when she did well in school, and we let her know it, although she knew there wasn't much pressure from us there. Just so long as she kept her head above water and didn't give anyone any cause for complaint."⁵³¹ They as parents, tried to be diligent in supporting their daughter and never gave her any reason to take such drastic measures with her own eating behaviors, according to their narrative in the video.

⁵³⁰ "Losing: A Conversation with the Parents," (Electronic Arts Intermix, 1977). n.p.

⁵³¹ Ibid. n.p

Further affirming the idea that anorexia could strike any woman, the mother regularly cites the ways in which mass media remind women constantly what is required of them in order to be considered beautiful and thin. In her first monologue, she notes: “Well, we used to remind her occasionally that she couldn’t over-indulge and expect to keep her pretty little figure, but every girl knows that. TV and magazine ads are telling you that all the time. All the ads with the pretty girls, young, slim, desirable. She could have gotten that idea anywhere. I assure you, we didn’t. We did not make a big thing out of it. She was 5’7” at the time, weighed about 133 pounds. Not even close to what you’d call chubby.”⁵³² The mother in the video thus highlights the ways in which the prescriptions of femininity are made through mass media, and rendered quickly into common knowledge. The dominant ideology that promotes a thin ideal is thus perpetuated through magazine articles and television advertisements that serve to remind women of what they need to look like and how they need to act — including how they should eat — in order to adhere to the ideal of womanhood in the form of the feminine body.

Rosler, however, undermines the familiar conventions of the news broadcast interview by having her subjects discuss issues beyond the parameters of their own tragedy. Interspersed with their description of what happened to their fictional daughter are digressions regarding the racial and class politics of starvation, beyond upper-middle class disordered eating. For instance, early in the video, when the mother is telling about another case of a young girl dying as a result of an extreme

⁵³² Ibid. n.p.

diet, her husband responds: “It’s a sad thing, isn’t it, that in this land of plenty, people can’t control their food intake. Millions, I mean literally, millions of people, mostly children, die every year from hunger. And in other parts of the world, they can’t even take care of their people. They don’t have the know-how, the technology, the skill...”⁵³³ The couple raises the issue of starvations both domestically and abroad. They highlight the ways in which in the United States, the politics of starvation are related explicitly to class and race. The father notes: “The fact is there are poor right here in America who don’t get nearly enough to eat. Many of them are way down at the starvation level. I remember a Murrow on Harvest of Shame on TV about the migrants, but things haven’t changed much. He said this isn’t Johannesburg or Cape Town, but... well in Mississippi there are plenty who are way down at the starvation level. Plenty of Indians and Spanish-speaking Americans.”⁵³⁴ This discussion of starvation within the United States thus seeks to undermine the format of a news broadcast interview, which would likely be edited in order to focus explicitly on the relevant incident, a teenaged girl’s death from anorexia, while simultaneously highlighting the paradoxical nature of middle- and upper-class women willfully starving themselves when so many people starve on the basis of class and racial circumstances.

The digressions in the video serve not to liken the suffering of these two groups, but rather to highlight the myriad and multiple ways in which starvation exists within a given society. Rosler uses this contrast in the work to critique the way that

⁵³³ Ibid. n.p.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. n.p.

eating and starvation are presented in mass culture. In discussing the racial politics of starving, the father, for instance, highlights the relative invisibility of American poverty and starvation, stating: “Of course, the thing is that you don’t see them in our neighborhoods and of course they don’t get much press coverage.”⁵³⁵ This assertion thus creates a stark contrast to the kinds of media coverage on the issue of starvation, like the discussion of self-starvation that is supposed to be the focus of the news broadcast interview that forms the basis of the video work; when poor people and people of color die of starvation on a daily basis, it is not news worthy, but if a middle-class teenager dies of the same cause, it must be discussed at length.

But the media criticality in this work is not limited to whose starvation is presented, but also how starvation is portrayed in mass culture. In particular, she uses the dialogue in this video to show how media creates and promotes women’s starvation, while obscuring the hunger of the poor. The mother in this video, in fact, makes this contrast apparent when she discusses the middle-class eating habits in response to her husband’s assertions about poverty and starvation. She states:

But most of us have more than enough. Our cupboards, shelves, refrigerators are overflowing with food. Even the dog eats like a king. It’s shameful. The magazine ads are always pushing us towards the wrong choices. The women’s magazines. On one page, they’ll have a pie ad; ‘serve your family this scrumptious pie this evening. And on the next page, they’ll have a diet plan, ‘650 calories a day, guaranteed to make you lose.’ I saw one in the check stand with a banana cream pie pictured on the cover and an advertisement for a permanent weight-loss diet inside.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ Ibid. n.p.

⁵³⁶ Ibid. n.p.

The mother in the video thus highlights the ways in which the media aids and abets the dominant ideology that pushes women towards disordered eating. The message of magazines and television advertisements is paradoxical and anxiety producing; women are offered temptations on one side and told to restrict their eating on the other, all within media outlets that are specifically designed to promote adherence to a particular gender ideal. Thus, Rosler is neither chastising women for their restrictive dieting patterns nor minimizing their suffering, but rather she is highlighting how such a practice reflects how media affirms certain ideological conceptions surrounding eating, in the same way that the invisibility of poverty affirms a different conception of the place of starvation in society.

In *Losing*, Rosler not only critiques the way that media constructs certain narratives surrounding eating, but she also illustrates the dangerous implications of these mass cultural conventions. On the one hand, the consistent references to starvation as it relates to poverty and the invisibility thereof in mass media serves to highlight the way that the average American eater's ignorance further facilitates the starvation of others. For instance, the mother offers this criticism of American foreign aid food policy: "What kind of policy is it that keeps food from the starving? Some people say that food is a weapon. A political weapon. Well the rich get rich, and the poor starve. The rich countries are eating the bananas and the coffee grown in the poor countries where people are starving."⁵³⁷ In her desperate criticism, the mother highlights the fact that American eaters neglect to consider how their food is produced

⁵³⁷ Ibid. n.p.

and in so doing overlook the dangerous implications of globalization and exploitative labor. This ignorance is dangerous, as it facilitates an economic system wherein the sustenance — or more accurately, the overabundance — of one group is dependent upon the starvation of another.

Similarly, Rosler uses the work to highlight the dangerous implications of mass media portrayals of the “thin ideal.” The mother, in particular, highlights the complicated psychology of dieting and weight-loss for women, highlighting the myriad anxieties that dictate women’s attitudes towards eating and their behaviors. In one monologue, the mother oscillates between seeing her daughter’s actions as normal and seeing them as symptomatic of some underlying psychosis. She begins by stating: “We didn’t watch her very closely then. I never thought...well... she did lose weight. And we complimented her of course. She showed no loss of energy. She seemed so energetic.”⁵³⁸ Then almost immediately, she changes her tone and expresses concern with her daughter’s eager interest in exercise, even going so far as to assert that she did not want her daughter to become “mannish” through physical activity, an assertion that seems more to reinforce the thin ideal — which is distinct from a fit or muscular body — as the performance of femininity. Her next remarks seem to validate her daughter’s behavioral changes as she slipped towards anorexia, noting: “I thought then that she was right though, that she’d feel better if she were thinner. I know models and women jockeys have to skip meals. Every goal in life involves some sacrifice. Just being a wife and mother means a thousand daily sacrifices. Worth it in the long run,

⁵³⁸ Ibid. n.p.

but still, there they are. Some have one idea. Others have another idea, about how much you have to give up to play your proper part.”⁵³⁹ This vacillation, like her concern about mannishness, serves to reaffirm the equation of femininity with thinness and the prevailing ideology that women *must* perform such behaviors in order to truly be considered women in the first place.

This wavering on the part of the mother also highlights the ways in which the rhetoric surrounding food and femininity during this period was particularly anxiety producing. On the one hand, she is concerned for her daughter’s health, both physically and mentally. She makes assertions to that recognize the psychological toll of dieting as an ideology, such as: “We don’t know what such girls think about really. About the tiny little binges they allow themselves, feel driven to, and then they punish themselves. The way every little bite looms large and every excess must be paid for.”⁵⁴⁰ She recognizes the destructive nature of this disordered thinking and how it is translated into disordered eating. She notes of her daughter: “We learned later that she stopped losing after her initial losses and got panicky. So she cut down even more, almost to nothing. She told the doctor she subsisted on a hard-boiled egg and some lettuce every day, and threw away anything else that she was given. We became concerned when she began to look gaunt. So if she couldn’t avoid our watchful eyes, then she’d eat some and then she says she’d go the bathroom and make herself throw up.”⁵⁴¹ The mother’s concern for her daughter’s behaviors led her to be vigilant in

⁵³⁹ Ibid. n.p.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. n.p.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. n.p.

trying to make the girl eat; she is acutely aware that the disordered thinking about food had led her daughter to take extreme action, which had significant repercussions for her health.

While the concerns of the mother are well placed, their relationship to her attitude about her daughter's initial decision to attempt to lose weight highlights the complicated and convoluted discourse surrounding women's dieting. On the one hand, if a woman seeks to lose a few pounds through dieting, such behavior is considered acceptable, if not desirable with regard to the performance of femininity. Women who eat with reckless abandon and/or those whose physiques do not adhere to the thin ideal are considered transgressive for disrupting the normative gender order. But fat women and ravenous eaters are not alone in being considered subversive; disordered eating is also considered unfeminine. While thinness is an ideal, gauntness — especially in the period before the emergence of “heroin chic” in the 1990s — undermined the feminine body and literally removed the very characteristics that are central to the differentiation of the adult female body. Amenorrhea, as previously noted, is one significant side-effect of extreme weight-loss by women. Similarly, the fat in breast tissue is also lost when a woman starves. The body becomes sickly and skeletal, removing the characteristics that render a body feminine in the first place. Starvation, thus, like gluttony, is seen as anathema to femininity. Women who are all consumed with restricting eating are considered as problematic as those who never restrict, placing women in an impossible catch-22. The result of this rhetorical positioning and

the promotion of such a paradoxical ideal is that women are inundated with a set of complex emotions and are placed in a precarious and anxiety producing situation.

The mother's words in *Losing* thus reflect the complicated emotional response that befits both tragedy and the pressure to adhere to a certain feminine body type. On the one hand she finds her daughter's desires to lose weight to be normal, and understands them on the basis of her own experiences as a woman. She compliments her daughter for physical attributes as much as she does for her other characteristics combined and ascribes positive virtues to her interest in maintaining a certain bodily ideal. At the same time, the mother feels both anger and sorrow for the extreme measures that her daughter went to in order to achieve this goal. She creates a dialectic contrast between the suffering of those starving in poverty — and at one point the physical experience of starvation by activists on hunger strikes — whose starvation is the result of social inequality and her daughter's self-imposed starvation, and in so doing, somewhat insinuates that her daughter's behavior was selfish. At the same time, she expresses concern and compassion for her daughter, recognizing that the idea to starve herself was not hers alone, but rather a reflection of a disordered cultural ideal. She even states outright: "She just wanted to be the best woman that she could be in whatever way she could be in order to please other people [...] I say there's too much pressure on a girl to be thin!"⁵⁴² She recognizes that this disordered impulse does not exist in a vacuum and that this kind of tragedy can befall any woman or any family.

⁵⁴² Ibid. n.p.

The narrative in this video is fictional, but the experiences recounted, even in an over-acted and media critical format, do resonate with the experiences of many women. Rosler's interest in the subject of dieting and weight-loss came from her experience with feminist thought and activism. She states: "What led me to the subject was feminism and the politics of beauty. I wasn't involved in any conversations about anorexia, but surely all feminist groups were engaged in discussions about the way our bodies are controlled by society and the industries that live off that, about the ways that being fixated on 'appearance' is used to prevent women from engaging in anything meaningful not involved in attracting men's gaze."⁵⁴³ She had participated first hand in discussions about the immense pressure placed upon women in order to adhere to a physical ideal for womanhood, and she created the work in order to facilitate a similar understanding of the extreme measures women feel pressured to go to in order to adhere to the dominant conception of "beauty" and "attractiveness."

Rosler also uses the video to critique and criticize the ways in which the beauty myth was perpetuated as a part of certain hegemonic, class-based gender ideals. Rosler developed the work in order to illustrate how similar conversations were taking place within media, and how they served to reflect and reinforce the class and gender politics of starvation. She notes: "But self-starvation was in the media, as a kind of sensationalist subject, which is why the work took the form that it did. The first format was a fake 'Q and A' feature copying that in the LA Times's Sunday magazine's 'home' section, focusing on bourgeois couples and their lives. The video was an

⁵⁴³ Rosler, "March 25, 2015." n.p.

enactment of that text.”⁵⁴⁴ The video was designed to illustrate the ways in which a particular class positioning served to reinforce a particular form of femininity and how that ideal contrasted the politics of invisibility associated with poverty.

Conclusions

Examined together, both works highlight the problematic nature of the new feminine ideal that became part of the dominant ideal of femininity in American culture during the 1960s and 1970s. The plentitude and consumer culture of the postwar period combined with new medical interest into the relationship between eating and health served to facilitate the valuation of slenderness as a marker of good character, for men and women. As women’s fashions began to change and as the culture became more obsessed with youth and fitness, the onus to be thin doubled for women. As such, women were encouraged to transform their bodies, as opposed to merely enhancing them with make up or structural garments, in order to fit the feminine ideal. Antin and Rosler’s works, thus, illustrate the consequences of these transformations on women’s identities and habits.

In *Carving*, Antin uses a photographic grid of 144 images presented collectively to unsettle the common narrative about the transformative power of dieting. By documenting the arduous nature of weight-loss through her sculpture and presenting images that show the gradual nature of the transformation, Antin undermines the conventional portrayal of dieting in mass media. Instead of glorifying weight loss as instantaneous and transformative, Antin’s work illustrates how such as

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. n.p.

process is slow and monotonous, and that all losses are at a given moment so slight as to be almost imperceptible at a given moment. Moreover, Antin's reference to the idea of "Carving" highlights the painful nature of the dieting process. In order to transform her body, she must restrict her eating and even come to normalize a certain degree of hunger. Instead of being liberating, Antin's weight-loss serves to put even more strictures and pressures upon her, requiring absolute adherence to the dictates of dieting lest her efforts be meaningless and fruitless. As such, Antin's work serves to highlight the ways in which dieting can subsume a woman's entire being, underscoring how omnipresent the mythology of feminine beauty and how taxing such an ideal is upon women's psyches.

The psychological dimension of restrictive eating is also central to Martha Rosler's *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents*. In this video, Rosler highlights the anxieties and the complex psychological implications of the thin ideal on women through her fictionalized interview with the bereaved parents of a young girl who has died from excessive dieting. The fact that the mother being interviewed in the work expresses both her concern and her endorsement of her daughter's decision to diet, and also expresses trepidation over the extreme nature of the girl's weight-loss as it threatens her ability to appear feminine, highlights the complexities of such an ideal form of femininity; women who are too large or too thin are unfeminine, and the path between these two extremes is precarious and difficult to navigate. Beyond the psychological complexities of dieting, Rosler uses the video to illustrate how the media portrays issues of hunger and starvation. Drawing on the convention of

television news interviews, *Losing* illustrates how such pieces delineate a cultural ideal that is decidedly white and middle class. The warning tone of the interview format and the use of conventional narrative devices works to promote the idea that this story is a tragedy and that it could befall any family, yet as the parents are recounting their own experiences, they are also relating them to stories of starvation and food policy that are frequently neglected in favor of more middle-class interests. As such, Rosler highlights how the pressure for women to adhere to a thin ideal is the result of class delineation and reflects a disordered cultural perception surrounding issues of beauty and body image.

In both *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* and *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents*, Eleanor Antin and Martha Rosler examine the perpetuation of the “thin ideal” in mass culture and the impact of the rhetoric of dieting on women. Both artists use their works to raise public consciousness around the negative and harmful implications of the promotion of restrictive eating patterns in order to obtain and maintain this ideal feminine body. Drawing upon their own experiences with feminist activism, Rosler and Antin create works that, like the public actions and feminist literature of the Women’s Liberation movement, seek to illustrate the oppressive nature of patriarchal capitalism that exists within the “beauty industry.” Their works further politicize the highly personal experiences that face women when they consider issues of weight and body image. In creating their works, Rosler and Antin seek to challenge the ways in which mass culture promotes dieting and other forms of bodily modification by

promoting idealized bodies and encouraging women to find their own natural bodies inadequate or even shameful.

Chapter 6: Being Eaten

Throughout the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have examined the ways in which food culture has informed the dominant ideological construction of womanhood in the United States during the postwar period. All of the previous dynamic relations examined have been premised upon the various actions that women perform in order to adhere to an ideal form of femininity; I have examined at how the performance of domestic labor such as cooking, serving, and feeding has informed the dominant conception of femininity and I have explored how aspects of food culture have informed the ideology of a feminine body, both in terms of maternity and with regard to the prevailing ideals of attractiveness that dictate a woman's adherence to her culturally prescribed gender. In all of these previous chapters, I have looked at the things that women *do* to ensure the proper performance of womanhood, and how feminist artists have used food thematically in their work to challenge the exploitation of women's labor and bodies as a part of this gender ideology.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which femininity is also informed by notions of passivity. Within the prevailing discourse surrounding sexuality in midcentury America, the feminine body exists as an object of sexual desire; women's sexuality is considered to be a passive, with women's sexual expression being discursively constructed solely through men's activity. As such, I will examine the ways in which women's bodies as sexualized objects function as consumable items and how the language of sexual desire renders women into food items. Drawing on the notion of the devouring gaze in relation to the ideas of voyeurism, scopophilia, and the

general media construction of femininity, I will highlight the ways in which midcentury American mass culture transformed women's bodies into something to be eaten.

While mass culture and sexual mores promoted a gender ideology that hinged upon women's sexual passivity, many women directly refuted this notion. Women artists in particular during the 1960s and 1970s sought to use sexual expression to challenge the conventional dictates of femininity, making works that embraced sexuality in a confrontational manner. Consistently throughout both of their art practices, Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke have created work that directly challenges women's position as the passive subjects of men's sexual desire. Both artists actively sought to challenge the prevailing gender ideology that promotes the women's sexual passivity by promulgating the notion that women lack a sexual appetite of their own, rendering women instead the docile subjects of men's attention. Schneemann and Wilke have criticized this tendency by drawing upon the alignment with the women's bodies with food items in order to create works that explicitly challenge this conception of feminine sexuality. In *Meat Joy* and *Super-t-Art*, respectively, Schneemann and Wilke have created works that confront such expectations by placing women's own sexual expression and experience front and center. Presenting the female body in an active, and even passion-filled, manner, both artists undermine the conventional understanding that women are the receptors and not the agents of sexual expression.

Schneemann and Wilke used this embrace of sexuality as a form of feminist agitation. In both cases, the artists drew upon their own personal experiences and their own desires for something beyond what the prevailing ideological construction of womanhood would allow for them as the basis of their own art practices. Both artists sought to make work that would challenge the conventional understanding of both womanhood and of women's artistic production. Yet Schneemann and Wilke's form of sexually liberated feminism was one variant within a broader movement, and their endorsement of heterosexual sexual expression was at times considered problematic. As such, by examining how these works employed oppositional politics in presenting women's sexual experience, we can thus understand the variation in feminist discourse surrounding female sexuality, heterosexuality, and gender expression.

The Devouring Gaze: Women's Objectification as Food

In order to best understand the oppositional nature of Schneemann and Wilke's embrace of sexual expression in their work, we must first examine the ways in which women's sexuality has been predicated upon passivity and objectification, and how such a construction of femininity works to render women's bodies into consumable entities. This passivity is the result of church and state doctrine on the subject of sexuality as a part of what Foucault has termed "the repressive hypothesis." For centuries, the discourse on sexuality in the West was defined by prevailing ideology and the dictates of morality. As Foucault notes: "Up to the end of the eighteenth century, three major explicit codes — apart from the customary regularities and constraints of opinion — governed sexual practices: canonical law, the Christian

pastoral, and civil law. They determined, each in its own way, the division between licit and illicit. They were all centered on matrimonial relations: the marital obligation, the ability fulfill it, the manner in which one complied with it.”⁵⁴⁵ Christian morality not only dictated with whom and under what condition one may have sex, but it also dictated what forms of sexual expression were considered acceptable within the laws of God and man. Foucault continues: “It was this domain that was especially saturated with prescriptions. The sex of husband and wife was beset by rules and recommendations. The marriage relation was the most intense focus of constraints.”⁵⁴⁶ Sexual expression thus became a fulfillment of duty, not of desire, and its performance codified and regulated strictly. Moreover, this discursive construction of sexuality sought to remove pleasure from the equation. Procreation, and not sexual gratification, was the only accepted rationale for having sex in the first place, and this utilitarian view of the practice led to prescriptions designed towards minimizing the experience of pleasure within the sexual act.

Emergent capitalism and the ascension of the patriarchy of the wage during the 16th and 17th centuries functioned to further codify sexual mores, adding specifically gendered provisions. As Silvia Federici notes, the onslaught of the Great Witch hunt in Europe “destroyed a whole world of female practices, collective relations, and systems of knowledge that had been the foundation of women’s power in pre-Capitalist Europe [...] Out of this defeat a new model of femininity emerged: the ideal woman and wife

⁵⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols., vol. 1 *The History of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990). 37.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 37.

— passive, obedient, thrifty, of few words, always busy at work, and chaste.”⁵⁴⁷ With the establishment of a patriarchal system that was dependent upon men’s dominance — which was further affirmed through the reward of the wage — sexuality became yet another avenue for women’s subordination. The prevailing gender order in early modern Europe thus served to affirm the notion that women’s sexuality was, like her labor, secondary to men’s. Women were to be passive and submissive to men in all walks of life, including — or even especially — within the bedroom.

Women’s sexual practices were further reinforced through social practices that provided strict consequences for women found in violation of this patriarchal order. Federici notes that sexual crimes and women’s sexual expression were often affiliated with the demonic. Women who used or provided contraception were common among the persecuted. Midwives in particular were singled out as witches because they were “traditionally the depository of women’s reproductive knowledge and control.”⁵⁴⁸ Similarly, a woman could be tried for witchcraft on the basis that she “was also the loose, promiscuous woman — the prostitute or adulteress, and generally, the woman who exercised her sexuality outside the bonds of marriage and procreation. Thus, in the witchcraft trials ‘ill repute’ was evidence of guilt.”⁵⁴⁹ As such, the Great Witch Hunt in Europe served to cement the notion that women should be chaste and passive when it comes to their sexuality. While witch-hunting fell out of favor as a method of social regulation, the prohibitions against women’s active sexuality remained intact for

⁵⁴⁷ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York, London: Autonomedia; Pluto, distributor, 2004). 103.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 182-3.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 184.

centuries. Women who transgressed the dictates of feminine chastity were the victims of ostracism, economic ruin, and other methods of social control.

Women's sexual passivity, thus determined, was promulgated not only through threats of violence or destitution, but also through the promotion of a patriarchal sexual ideal. As religious and legal prohibitions against premarital and extramarital sex loosened during the Victorian era and after the turn of the 20th century, new cultural outlets produced a discourse that emphasized a sexual appetite as masculine and that reaffirmed women's sexuality as subordinate and receptive. In her landmark book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett highlights three instances from literature that illustrate the way that midcentury American sexual politics are developed around male sexual agency and dominance. With respect to the depiction of sexual relations within Henry Miller's *Sexus*, Millet writes: "The power nexus is clearly outlined. It remains only for the hero to assert his victory by the arrogance of his final gesture: 'After a while I made her stand up, bend over; then I let her have it from the rear.'"⁵⁵⁰ Millet emphasizes how the action of the sexual encounter here reflects the notion that the man is the active participant, and the woman is simply the recipient. Moreover, she highlights how works like Miller's serve to affirm this conception of men's sexuality as active, stating "What the reader is vicariously experiencing at this juncture is a supernatural sense of power — should the reader be a male. For the passage is not only a vivacious and imaginative use of circumstance, detail, and context to evoke the excitations of sexual intercourse, it is also a male assertion of dominance over a weak,

⁵⁵⁰ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.,: Doubleday, 1970). 6.

compliant, and rather unintelligent female. It is a case of sexual politics at the fundamental level of copulation.”⁵⁵¹ Depictions of sexual encounters in Miller’s work, and in that of Norman Mailer and Jean Genet, Millet argues are designed to enforce the ideal that men’s sexuality is the enactment of dominance and power upon another person. According to these depictions of sexual politics, women do not engage in sex; they receive it.

Laura Mulvey furthers Millet’s assertions about the ideological construction of women’s sexual passivity being the result of sexual politics in culture in her analysis of the way in which Hollywood film conceptualizes of women. In her 1975 *Screen* essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey argues that film is entirely constructed around the male gaze and that “mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order.”⁵⁵² She writes: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.”⁵⁵³ As such, she asserts: “Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story a, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. 6.

⁵⁵² Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989). 16.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 19.

side of the screen.”⁵⁵⁴ The depiction of women in film — like their depiction in the literary sexual encounters discussed by Millet — is thus both the product of men’s desire and the recipient thereof; women are the passive subjects of men’s sexual fantasy, without any agency within this moment of sexual exchange.

The encoding of sexual passivity upon women’s forms within film thus serves to render them objects of desire, rather than subjects thereof. As such, women’s bodies have been frequently rendered the subject of the male appetites. The language of desire as manifest in mass cultural portrayals of women’s sexual passivity has often functioned to conflate the sexualized consumption of women’s bodies through this objectification with the act of physically eating. The sexual and gustatory appetites are rhetorically treated as interchangeable. For instance, Millet highlights such language in Henry Miller’s texts, noting “The hero then caters to the reader’s appetite in telling how he fed upon his object, biting ‘... the nape of her neck, the lobes of her ears, the sensitive spot on her shoulder, and as I pulled away, I left the mark of my teeth on her beautiful white ass.’”⁵⁵⁵ Miller’s protagonist relates the sexual exchange as if he were engaged in an act of cannibalism. Even Millet uses food related metaphors to describe the depiction in this scene, referring to the “appetite” of the reader and noting how he “fed upon his object.” The sexual politics at play thus reflect the notion that women’s primary function in the sexual exchange is to be a consumable and consumed object.

More broadly, food metaphors have been utilized quite regularly with regard to the sexualization and objectification of the female form. Parts of the feminine body

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. 19.

⁵⁵⁵ Millett, *Sexual Politics*. 6.

have been idiomatically likened to a whole host of foodstuffs, ranging from fruits — such as referring to breasts as melons — to cuts of meat. This practice is pervasive and has a long history. Linda Nochlin illustrated this fact at the 1972 College Art Association conference in San Francisco, during her opening remarks as the chair of a “panel titled ‘Eroticism and the Image of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Art,’” when she projected a French photograph of a woman “holding a tray of apples at breast level, [...] naked save for her leather boots, velvet leggings, and pearl choker.”⁵⁵⁶ Nochlin wrote of the image: “While certainly low on the scale of artistic merit, a nineteenth-century photograph like *Achetez des Pommes* [...] nevertheless embodies one of the prime topoi of erotic imagery: comparison of the desirable body with ripe fruit, or more specifically, the likening of a woman’s breasts to apples.”⁵⁵⁷ (Appendix: Figure 61) Nochlin went on to trace the history of this metaphorical encoding of women’s bodies as fruit and other consumable entities in other works of 19th century art including the paintings of Gauguin and Cezanne.

Furthermore, Nochlin’s argument illustrates how this practice is unique to women. Nochlin created her own counter-example to the photograph, which she titled: “*Achetez des Bananes (Buy Some Bananas)*.” (Appendix: Figure 62) In this photograph, a long-haired man appears naked except for white socks and leather moccasins holding a tray of bananas directly in front of his penis. The reversal in this image functions to affirm the normalization of the association of women’s body with

⁵⁵⁶ Richard Meyer, “Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art, and the Force of Censorship in the 1970s,” in *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia et al Butler (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007). 370.

⁵⁵⁷ Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power, and Other Essays*. 139.

food in general and fruit in particular. She writes: “No similar sanctions exist for the association of fruit with male sexuality, exemplified in a modern counterpart of *Achetez des Pommes* title *Achetez des Bananes*. While there may indeed be a rich underground feminine lore linking food — specifically bananas — with the male organ, such imagery remains firmly in the realm of private discourse, embodied in smirks and titters rather than works of art.”⁵⁵⁸ Nochlin asserts that the prevalence and naturalness with which women’s bodies are encoded as food does not apply to men. To do so, would eliminate the virility and power associated with men’s bodies. She writes: “Even today, the food-penis metaphor has no upward mobility, so to speak. [...] the linking of the male organ to food is always a figure of meiosis — an image of scorn, belittlement, or derision: it lowers and denigrates rather than elevates and universalizes the subject of the metaphor.”⁵⁵⁹ Likening the body to food thus serves to pacify that form and render it attainable and consumable to another.

If likening men’s bodies to food serves to emasculate, then the practice of affiliating women’s bodies with food can serve to reaffirm masculinity. In particular, the metaphorical rendering of women’s bodies as meat highlights the ways in which both the gustatory and sexual appetite can work to affirm a man’s virility. This practice was the center of feminist activists criticism during the Miss America Protest in Atlantic City. In an effort to illustrate the ways in which women’s bodies are rendered objects of consumption, protestors created a poster in which a naked woman’s body was overlain with a chart mapping the location of various cuts of meat,

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. 141.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. 141.

just as one would see within a butcher's shop. The text on the poster reads "break the dull steak habit," further emphasizing the ways in which women are regularly treated as cuts of meat, meant to be consumed by men for their pleasure. This likening of women's bodies to meat also plays into the notions of dominant masculinity as manifest in food practices. Meat as a food is typically affiliated with virility and masculinity; it is understood to be the primal food source provided and consumed by men. As such, codifying the female form within the rhetoric of masculine eating habits functions to confirm manliness and to reaffirm masculine hegemony and a dominant form of masculinity.

The practice of this objectification combined with the sexual mores that encouraged women's sexual passivity thus render women's sexual experience akin to being eaten. In both instances, women play no active part and their pleasure is entirely discounted from the experience. It is this conception of women as solely sexualized objects as opposed to sexual beings that was of considerable concern for feminists both within and beyond the art world. Although, as we will see, there was considerable variation amongst feminist with regard to the role and function of sexuality in daily life, most feminists found this consistent degradation and dehumanization through objectification to be a central and systemic part of the patriarchal structure that maintained their oppression. As such, many artists sought to reclaim women's agency in sexual encounters as in order to agitate against this conventional understanding. Using their art practices, they critiqued the ways in which women's bodies are put on

display for male consumption and called attention to the iniquitous nature of sexual politics in American culture.

Carolee Schneemann: Education to Experimentation

The position of women in sexual exchange has been a focal point of much of Carolee Schneemann's work throughout her career. From the early 1960s, she has consistently created works that have served to challenge the conventional understanding of womanhood, particularly with regard to sexual expression. Born in rural Pennsylvania in 1939, Schneemann resisted the traditional social mores that dictated women's lives and careers from her youth.⁵⁶⁰ Unlike many of the other women artists studied in this dissertation whose parents were avowed socialists — or Stalinists, as was the case for Eleanor Antin — or who believed firmly in the value of a good education, such as Alison Knowles' parents, Carolee Schneemann's parents were considerably more traditional. In an oral history with Judith Olch Richards, she notes: "part of my identity is separating what I had to do from what was hoped for, anticipated, and expected of me. [...] I would have to say that she [her mother] was the [sic] conventionalizing, fearful, confused by the boundaries that would have to develop between a parent and children. But it was also my father who at some point decided that he would not let me go to college, that that was inappropriate. I was already too strange."⁵⁶¹ Despite the relatively conservative tendencies of her parents, Schneemann was determined to set another path for herself, beyond being a wife and

⁵⁶⁰ Carolee Schneemann and Judith Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1," (Washington, DC: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2009). n.p.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. n.p.

mother. While in high school at a small, Quaker private school, Schneemann was encouraged by her English teacher to apply to Bard College. Schneemann received a full scholarship to Bard, and thus even despite her father's objections, she was able to pursue an undergraduate education.

Her studies at Bard were as tumultuous as they were formative. Schneemann's time at Bard was also highly productive for her. It was through her professors and classmates at Bard that Schneemann was introduced to the avant-garde art world of New York City in the late 1950s. Schneemann and her classmates from Bard would "go down on weekends, and [...] stay in people's apartments" and visit the Tenth Street Galleries and Cedar Bar, the famed haunts of the hard drinking Abstract Expressionist painters like Pollock and de Kooning.⁵⁶² Schneemann recalls one visit in which "Franz Klein buys me drinks [...] I get to the Artists' Club. And I see that the one woman wears a mask and never speaks. I think this is very important. It's Marisol [Escobar]. I'd like to know what she's thinking. And she's gorgeous behind the mask. And I understand that the position of a woman joining these important men will probably be a speechless position."⁵⁶³ During these weekend sojourns into the city, Schneemann became acquainted with how the art world functioned at the time, but she also became acutely aware of what her position as a woman artist would be.

The sexism she witnessed at these functions in the city also paralleled the sexism she experienced at school. She notes: "Throughout college I was receiving the message: 'of course you can/don't you dare.' My family were [sic] interested to know

⁵⁶² Ibid. n.p.

⁵⁶³ Ibid. n.p.

if I had ‘dates,’ not that I was working in a lost encaustic process. My teacher said: ‘You’re a terrific kid, you could go far, but don’t set your heart on art, you’re only a girl.’⁵⁶⁴ Her fellow students also reaffirmed that she would never be taken seriously as an artist. She recalls: “Also at Bard, my best friend buddies, the boys, are stealing my art books. They take my brushes. They say, ‘We need this brush more than you.’ [...] So the exclusionary conventions are very strict in the late fifties.”⁵⁶⁵

Beyond being discounted on the basis of her gender, Schneemann’s sexual development and expression ended up having significant detrimental impacts on her success in college. Schneemann was the subject of significant unwanted sexual attention from one of her professors, who used sexual aggression as a means to discourage her as an artist.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, Schneemann was involved in a serious romantic/sexual relationship with another student that ended up causing her significant problems. Certain faculty felt that she was “overtly involved with” him, to an inappropriate degree. This sentiment festered until Schneemann was eventually asked to leave the school for a year as a result of her sexual misconduct with another student. She notes: “It came as a great shock when during my second year review, my painting and drawing were given highest honors but a committee told me to leave school for a year, that I had committed ‘morally offensive acts’: someone accused me of making love with my boyfriend under a tree! (He was not asked to leave, nor did we ever remember such an incident ...) I was on full scholarship, this banishment created an

⁵⁶⁴ Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings* (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979). 193.

⁵⁶⁵ Schneemann and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1." n.p.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.* n.p.

uproar.”⁵⁶⁷ Because her scholarship was not through the University, Schneemann was able to keep her funding and transfer credits the Columbia School of Painting and the New School during the year away from Bard, and thus spent the year in New York City studying life drawing at Columbia and studying with Hannah Arendt’s husband Heinrich Blücher at the New School, before returning to Bard to complete her degree.⁵⁶⁸

During her year away from Bard, Schneemann met composer James Tenney, and they began a their significant, long-term partnership, which would last throughout much of the next decade. She and Tenney moved around the country for a few years, while each continued their course of career development. Eventually, she and Tenney both received fellowships at the University of Illinois- Champaign-Urbana in painting and music, respectively. Having figured out her own way of existing within the academic art system, Schneemann found the time at Illinois challenging but also extremely productive. While at Illinois, she began developing ideas for performances and movement based works, and it was at the suggestion of the wife of one of her professors, Elizabeth Hiller, that Schneemann began to read Antonin Artaud’s *The Theater and Its Double*, a book she claims “is going to change my life.”⁵⁶⁹ At Champaign-Urbana, Schneemann also began examining the work of women artists. She notes: “now I’m searching for what I call the ‘missing precedents.’ I’m trying to find books that will show art made by women. You know it’s 1959-60. This is a

⁵⁶⁷ Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 193-4.

⁵⁶⁸ Schneemann and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1." n.p.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. n.p.

desperate search.”⁵⁷⁰ This research on both the uses of theater and on women’s art history proved significant for Schneemann’s career development, and had a profound impact on the nature of the work she created during the 1960s and 1970s.

Schneemann and Tenney returned to New York City when he received a grant from Bell Labs, and during this time both became more involved with the various avenues of experimental performance that characterized New York’s avant-garde art in the early 1960s, namely fluxus, the Judson Dance Theater, and the Happenings. Tenney was more directly involved with the composers associated with fluxus, and through them, Schneemann made acquaintances that brought her to the Judson Dance Theater. As she noted in a 1981 interview with NYU Student Daniel Cameron as a part of “The Judson Project:”

Jim Tenney, the composer, who was my original companion, when we came from the University of Illinois, first to New York, he met Philip Corner and Malcolm Goldstein and they began this idea of sort of a musician’s collaborative for new music and for experimental music that Jim had been conducting and composing and directing as a student. [...] And it was through Malcolm that I got close to Irene Rothlein, his wife, and I began to take classes with her. Because as a painter I was always working with the body, like before I started to paint I would do my own kinds of exercises and stretches, so that I felt like my body was really highly attuned and all a piece of whatever energy was going to move from the eye to the hand and whatever was going to come out onto the surface. So that was fine for me to work with Arlene and simultaneously Philip said ‘you know, there’s a group of people that I’ve just met that you might want to work with them. They have a workshop and they’re trying different movement things. And the particular people, initially, I worked with were: Yvonne Rainer, Ruth Emerson, Elaine Summers, Lucinda, an actor named James Waring

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. n.p.

[...] Then slightly later Judith Dunn came into those workshops and I think there was a lot of overlap with Center Field and Barbara Lloyd.⁵⁷¹

These workshops eventually developed into the Judson Dance Theater, and Schneemann began developing and participating in the series of performances that this collective held regularly in Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village.

While Schneemann was most closely involved with Judson, and carried out much of her work there, she was also heavily influenced by the work of other avant-garde artists around her at this time. She states to Cameron:

The Happening people were very important to us and everybody was running around looking at everything, every week. So if Tuesday you went and you saw an Oldenburg piece and he dropped a pile of dust over everybody, that meant that the dream that I had had or that someone else had had of where everything was covered in dust would have to be shifted and instead of dropping dust you dropped a great big blue cloth over everything. So in Chromalodeon, everybody gets wrapped up in a great big enormous pink blanket, and then Cunningham sees that and then in Summer Space, no in Winter Branch, suddenly there's a whole section where the people get wrapped up in a great big blanket and are taken away very much as if we had had the same class assignment. Take this many people and a blanket and evolve your action.⁵⁷²

Though Schneemann recognized that there was a great deal of mutual influence across the groups, she also felt the palpable distinctions between them. She notes to Cameron that this environment in addition to fostering artistic development

⁵⁷¹ Daniel Cameron and Carolee Schneemann, "The Judson Project: Carolee Schneemann. Interviewed by Daniel Cameron.," in *The Judson Memorial Church Archive* (New York, NY: Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries, 1981). n.p.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* n.p.

also led to a great deal of competition and a desire to establish distinctions amongst each of these groups.⁵⁷³

Working with the members of the Judson Dance Theater, Schneemann began developing performances of her own, establishing what she called “Kinetic Theater” works. In creating these pieces, Schneemann sought to create immersive works that drew upon a variety of sensations. She writes in *More than Meat Joy*:

I assume the senses crave sources of maximum information; that the eye benefits by exercise, stretch, and expansion towards materials of complexity and substance; that conditions which alert the total sensibility — cast almost in stress — extend insight and response, the basic responsive range of empathetic-kinesthetic vitality. If a performance work is an extension of the formal-metaphorical activity possible within a painting or construction, the viewers sorting of responses and interpretation of the forms of performance will still be equilibrated with all their past visual experiences.⁵⁷⁴

Schneemann used the kinetic nature of performance in order to create works that engaged the viewer totally and that called upon one’s ability to relate bodily experience to visual. As Carol Bergé notes: “Carolee Schneemann’s kinetic performance pieces use blood-into-paint, bodies as sculptural media, war-sounds and news-reports as music; she is visio-painterly without the confinement of canvas, substantively sculptural without needing earthly staticity.”⁵⁷⁵ Schneemann thus translated both the visual and tactile impulses of her painting into her performance work, creating holistic productions meant to subsume the viewer totally.

⁵⁷³ Ibid. n.p.

⁵⁷⁴ Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 9.

⁵⁷⁵ Carol Bergé, “Engergy Visions,” in *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*, ed. Carolee Schneemann (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979). 272.

Schneemann, like other members of the Judson Dance Theater, sought to use movement to explore pervasive issues and the politics of daily life, but she did so in a way that was more about creating an entire environment than exploring the conditions of a single movement. While people like Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and James Waring examined the conditions of certain gestures or ruminated on particular objects, Schneemann created works at Judson that resembled fluxus performances and Happenings; She engaged with everyday materials in absurdist and contemplative ways, much as fluxus artists like Dick Higgins, Daniel Spoerri, George Brecht, and George Maciunas did in their performances, and she constructed whole environments, much like the Happenings of Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, and Robert Whitman. As such, Schneemann's scores from some of her Judson works more as full-length absurdist plays, than simple choreography, and her events were often more visually and sensorially complex than many of the dance-based works performed at Judson.

It was during her time participating in the workshops that would become the Judson Dance Theater that Carolee Schneemann began creating these dynamic, all encompassing performance works. In 1962, she created the piece *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion* for the Living Theater, and the following year she premiered three pieces — *Newspaper Event*, *Chromolodeon*, and *Lateral Splay* — at the Judson Dance Theater in the Judson Memorial Church. In each of these works, Schneemann constructed an environment in which the performers would appear and carefully established a visual dimension so that they dancers creating the piece would carry out

a series of actions in particular arrangements and orders. While there was some improvisation with the explicit nature of each gesture, very little of these works were left to chance. Instead, Schneemann used objects from daily life in manners distinct from their intended use in order to create captivating movements and visual sensations.

The Joy of Meat

Of the works that Schneemann created in conjunction with the Judson Dance Theater, no work was more substantial or memorable than her piece *Meat Joy* (Appendix: Figures 63-66). Initially conceived of for Festival de Libre Expression in Paris in May of 1964, and then reperformed in London on June 8, 1954, and at Judson Memorial Church in November of the same year. According to Schneemann's notebooks: "Meat Joy developed from dream sensation images gathered in journals stretching back to 1960. [...] I'd been concentrating on the possibility of capturing interactions between physical/metabolic changes, dream content, and my sensory orientation upon and after waking: an attempt to view paths between conscious and unconscious organization of image, pun, double-entendre, masking, and the release of random memory fragments."⁵⁷⁶ Schneemann's ruminations on the intersection between conscious and unconscious, physical and metabolic manifest in an orgiastic display of bodily movements that blends together elements of pleasure and abject, highlighting the close relation between the two.

⁵⁷⁶ Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 63.

The work involves nine performers, four men and five women, each playing a particular role. The cast is comprised of three couples; Central Man and Central Woman form an autonomous pair that “hold the focus, [and] are the main energy source,” while the two Lateral Men and Lateral Women “perform as complements/doubles.”⁵⁷⁷ In addition to this grouping are Independent Woman, who “sets up a private world on her mattress at [the] perimeter of [the] action” before joining in with the others at a later point in the performance, and Independent Man, who “joins Independent Woman from [the] audience.”⁵⁷⁸ These eight performers enact much of the gestural activity in the work. The final woman in the piece plays the role of the Serving Maid, who “functions throughout as a stage-manager-in-the-open, wandering in and out of the performance area to take care for practical details (gathering discarded clothing, spreading plastic sheeting, distributing props, allocating fish and chickens, etc).”⁵⁷⁹

The performance, which ranges between 60 and 80 minutes in length depending on the evening it was performed, involves a mixture of tableaux, choreography, and improvisation. According to Schneemann: “Certain parameters of the piece function consistently. Sequence, lights, sound, materials — these were planned and coordinated in rehearsal. Other components vary with each performance. Attitude, gesture, phrasing, duration, relationship between performers (and between performers and objects), became loosely structured in rehearsal and were expected to

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. 67.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 67.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. 67.

evolve.”⁵⁸⁰ These actions comprised a series of successive vignettes, marked by the cessation of movement or by lighting cues, wherein the performers carried out a set of different gestures accompanied by a score made of contemporary pop songs overlain by sounds of the Paris streets, including “the cries and clamourings of Rue de Seine vendors selling fish, chickens and vegetables beneath [the] hotel window where [Schneemann] first composed the actual performance score.”⁵⁸¹ The entire piece was created to be an immersive environment, one that combined the visual, the auditory, and, even, the olfactory in order to examine the nature of certain aspects of human behavior.

The performance focuses significantly on the gestures associated with human sexuality. Schneemann herself describes the work as “[having] the character of a erotic rite: excessive, indulgent, a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope, brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is toward the ecstatic — shifting and turning between tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon: qualities which could at any moment be sensual, comic, joyous, repellent.”⁵⁸² The climax of the action within the performance — the penultimate sequence of gestures — begins with the eight key performers (all except the Serving Maid), wearing nothing but underwear, fall to the floor, laying still with bodies strewn across one another and limbs interspersed. The Serving Maid appears, “carrying a huge tray of raw chickens, mackerel, strings of hot dogs. [...] Slowly, extravagantly

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 64.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. 64.

⁵⁸² Ibid. 64.

she strews fish, chickens and hot dogs all over the bodies.”⁵⁸³ The performers move their bodies in response to the meats, “twitching, pulling back, hands reaching, touching,” moaning and laughing as they engage with this visceral substrate.⁵⁸⁴

The pleasure and sensuality derived from the meats is overtly sexual. In the film made from the Paris performance, various performers use their genitals to engage with the meats. For instance, at one point one of the women receives two fishes and proceeds to rub them across her body in a way that seems to indicate she is enjoying some pleasure of her own, gyrating and thrusting her pelvis into the air as a fish lays directly over her loins. One of the men shoves a whole chicken down his underwear so that the head hangs down becoming a surrogate for his own penis.⁵⁸⁵ In both gestures, the performers use the meats as surrogates for their own sexual organs. The chicken hanging from the man’s pelvis looks and functions much as an erect penis would. Similarly, the rubbing of a fish over a woman’s pelvic area does function to call attention to the euphemistic understanding of the vagina wherein secretions are associated with the smell of raw fish.

Not only do the performers used the raw meats as metaphorical surrogates for their own sexual organs, but they also use the raw meats to facilitate the pantomime of sexual activity. For instance, one couple in the performance engage in a passionate embrace which from various angles looks exactly as if they were copulating on stage. This impression is the result of their interaction with a chicken carcass, which is

⁵⁸³ Ibid. 80.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. 80.

⁵⁸⁵ *Meat Joy* (New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, 2005), videorecording, 1 videodisc (6 min.) : sound, color ; 4 3/4 in. n.p.

pressed between their bodies. He attempts to devour the chicken, pressing into her flesh as he does so. The limits of her body and the chicken are permeable and at times incomprehensible. She then wrestles with him and attempts to eat the chicken herself, performing a similar gesture with his body as he did to hers. They sit up and he pushes the chicken into her breasts and continues to attempt to eat it and she tilts her head back and smiles with great pleasure. Their bodies remain intertwined the entire time.⁵⁸⁶ The result is a sexual pantomime, revealing the dynamics and gestures of such passionate exchanges.

The conflation of human and animal flesh in this performance highlights the interrelated nature of these two forms of appetite: the gustatory and the sexual. In *Meat Joy*, Schneemann presents her audience with the literal enactment of lustful hunger. The performers attempt to eat the raw flesh off one another and in so doing create a spectacle that presents the passionate dynamics present and prevalent within the sexual exchange. Moreover, the performers use the meat as a form of sexual surrogacy, using fish and chickens to stand in for the various parts of their body that due to morality laws remain hidden. Thus as these individuals carry out the gestures of trying to manipulate, manoeuvre and even ingest the raw meats, they perform a sort of euphemistic sexual interaction.

The erotic component of *Meat Joy* is an extension of Schneemann's interest in the subject of sexuality and her belief of the role and function of sexual expression within daily life. Schneemann herself was sexually liberated well before the Sexual

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. n.p.

Revolution. Not only did she engage unabashedly in sexual relationships with her partners, but she also believed sexuality was a central part of the human experience and of self-expression. In her notebooks, she wrote in 1963: “Capacity for expressive life and for love are insolubly linked; that was my understanding when I taught; saw immediately facing the individuals in a class what their chance for expressive work was and its direct relationship to their social/sexual and emotional life.”⁵⁸⁷ This link between the sexual and the expressive informed the nature of her work throughout much of her career, and in 1963, she was in the midst of a formative exploration of the relationship between sex and art in the form of a trio of works meant to examine various aspects of the sexual exchange comprised of the photographic series *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1962), the performance *Meat Joy* (1964), and the film *Fuses* (1965) (Appendix: Figures 67-68). In each of these three works, Schneemann examined the nature of sexual activity using the specificity of each medium, in order to create a holistic analysis of what comprises the sexual exchange between two intimate partners.⁵⁸⁸

Schneemann did not simply seek to depict the carnal or visceral aspects of sexual activity; rather, she was significantly preoccupied with the role and function of pleasure as a form of sexual expression. She considered pleasure and sexual gratification to be central to her essence. She wrote in 1963: “I can remember orgasm, the tree rustling at my window, a particular woven blanket and the crib I was in where

⁵⁸⁷ *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 57.

⁵⁸⁸ This argument comprised a portion of my Master’s thesis: Emily Elizabeth Goodman, “I Know It When I See It : Intimacy, Obscenity and Female Sexuality in the Early Work of Carolee Schneemann” (University of California, San Diego).

my own experience of my body sensations gathered. I decided my genital was my soul...that is what my parents' explanation of soul led me to believe. Soul was 'true and most perfect, when the body died the soul lived in the stars'... the soul was some essence of being! Conscious!'”⁵⁸⁹ Schneemann maintained that pleasure was an essential part of her being, akin to her soul. She traced this conceptualization back to moments of childhood bodily exploration and the orgasmic feeling arising from masturbation, thus affiliating it with an innocent and natural dimension. Childhood sexual exploration of this sort is distinct and separate from adult sexual behavior and as such is not stigmatized in the same manner. By asserting that the pleasure she took from this behavior on her own as a child informed how she understands the central essence of the human soul, Schneemann affirms that the gratifying sensations arising from genital stimulation as paramount to our being as people.

It is this pleasurable aspect of sexuality that Schneemann exposes in *Meat Joy*. With unabashed enthusiasm, Schneemann imbued the performance with a sensual and erotic quality wherein the performers take pleasure from the flesh. She conflates the gustatory and sexual appetites using human and animal flesh in order to highlight the primal and natural nature of this pleasure. The sexual charge in the work derives from the performer's engagement with substrates typically eaten. As such, Schneemann creates a spectacle of eroticism wherein the need for sustenance and sexual gratification are positioned as equal. In so doing, Schneemann seeks to embrace sexual expression, removing it from the moralizing stigma imposed upon the experience of

⁵⁸⁹ Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 55.

genital stimulation by culture. Her beliefs that creative and sexual expression are linked and that sexual pleasure is a central essence of the human experience thus inform the display that she has created.

Pleasures of Flesh and The Status of Women in the Arts

Schneemann's ready embrace of pleasure and sexuality was very much meant to pointedly critique the ways in which American culture viewed sexual expression, particularly for women. Between her conservative parents, her dismissal from Bard, and some significant issues that arose with regard to potential academic funding for her and Tenney based on the nature of their relationship, Schneemann was acutely aware of how distinct her beliefs about the place of sex in life were.⁵⁹⁰ She received significant criticism, censorship, and was even the subject of violence because of how she embraced sexuality in her work. For instance, at the performance of *Meat Joy*, according to Schneemann, "In both the Paris and New York audiences, informants from the local police stations and from various 'moral decency' groups were present. [...] During the Paris performance a man from the audience came on stage, pushed me against the wall, and tried to strangle me. I was saved by three older women who had never seen any performance, but were convinced that this assault was not part of it."⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰ When Tenney went to complete his undergraduate studies following his loss of funding from Julliard, he received a scholarship at Bennington College in Vermont, but the funding was dependent upon their being married or living separately, so the couple legally married. When they each received funding from the University of Illinois, the University's anti-nepotism policy required that they could not be married to one another. As such their lives were significantly complicated because they wished to have a sexual relationship and cohabit, but the legal status of such a relationship carried significant weight. For more information, see: Schneemann and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1."

⁵⁹¹ Carolee Schneemann, "The Obscene Body/Politic," *Art Journal* 50, No. 4, no. Censorship II (Winter 1991). 29-31.

Schneemann recognized that her views were transgressive and that her views and her works pushed directly against the boundaries of how sexuality was understood at the time.

Schneemann took particular issue with the repressive nature of American views on sex. She found the puritanical strain of Cold War-era conservatism to be a hindrance to self-expression, particularly to women. She wrote in 1963, “Sexual damning is expressive damning. [...] How they fear sensation, pleasure; starvation drives them to an embrace which is a shadow to expression they repress.”⁵⁹² This repression, she argues, instills within women a sense of shame and ignorance. She writes:

These women are fastidious: the living beast of their flesh embarrasses them; they are trained to shame ... blood, mucus, juices, odors of their flesh fill them with fear. They have some abstracted wish for pristine, immaculate sex... cardboard soaked in perfume. Many of them imagine that in giving birth they abandon themselves to flesh life — drugged and desensitized as they may be. But they’ve been taught that here is their physical worth, moon fed, streaming process ... let the gift of the child ennoble and redeem the intricacies of their bodies.⁵⁹³

Schneemann asserts that the ways in which American discourse describes women’s sexuality removes the natural elements of the act. Women become ashamed of the actual functions of their bodies because they are socialized to both obscure and disavow the natural processes of their bodies and because the sex that they encounter — in the limited avenues in which sexuality is discussed — is mythologized and sterilized. Schneemann found this understanding of sexuality to be not only a

⁵⁹² *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 57.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.* 58.

disservice to women, whose naiveté and shame about the function of their own bodies rendered them ignorant, but she also asserts that this misconception functioned to affirm women's inferiority.

Schneemann found this repression oppressive to all women. In particular, she felt that the requirement that women deny their impulses for the sake of some ideal of purity and of sexual passivity was psychology damaging. She wrote of the subject in 1963, "I've never seen a woman not repressed or waiting. Putting her desire away into trivia ('too much, unfitting') or waiting, holloring [sic], dropping pots and laying traps she imagines are scarfs and shoes. Double fools. If a man had to wait for his dinner the way a woman waits for love (I MEAN SEX IS LOVE)! The constancy of this destroys me. I say no to my body and am poisoned I say wait and go mad. I always write about it."⁵⁹⁴ Schneemann asserts that the discourse around women's sexual expression renders them hysterical. Being required to deny a natural and gratifying impulse serves solely to render women repressed and frustrated, facilitating the promulgation of their status as inferior. If men's desires are warranted and good, but women's must be denied, then women will continue to be subjugated within a patriarchal system, according to Schneemann's logic.

Schneemann sought to call attention to the damaging implications of this conceptualization of women's sexuality. For Schneemann, the embrace of sexuality — and particularly of women's pleasure in sexual expression — was an overtly political gesture. She sought to illustrate the oppressive and repressive nature of contemporary

⁵⁹⁴ "Very Bad, Very Bad," in *Carolee Schneemann Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1963). n.p.

sexual discourse through her works, and sought to create a discourse of liberation surrounding (women's) sexual pleasure. With *Meat Joy*, Schneemann uses the embrace of sexual satisfaction in the performance to confront the systematic obscuring and disavowal of women's sexuality — including the physicality of their bodies and the desires they hold of their own. As Thomas McEvilley notes: "In a simplistic sense [*Meat Joy*] can be — and often is — regarded as a one-woman assault (as emissary of Aphrodite) on the citadel of the Puritans."⁵⁹⁵ Schneemann used the performance to challenge explicitly the sexual mores and dictates of femininity that sought to obscure women's needs, desires, and experiences.

Schneemann's art practice and actions were shaped by her own experience as a woman and as a woman in the arts, and she developed her own feminist consciousness at a moment when feminism was beginning to re-emerge in the public discourse. Schneemann was working on her sexually liberated performances at the same moment that Betty Friedan was writing *The Feminine Mystique*. Schneemann, like Friedan, found the institution of marriage and the domestic obligations that accompanied the normative conception of womanhood to be a significant factor in women's subjugation and repression. Schneemann wrote of her views of other women's tacit acceptance of the prescriptions of womanhood in 1963, stating: "You in blind acceptance are condemned to 'roles'; you imagine you fill in some sentimental construct while you feel love is like blackmail; you 'take,' are 'taken'; you marry, are given another name.

⁵⁹⁵ Thomas McEvilley, "(What You Did Do)," in *Split Decision : Carolee Schneemann : Breaking Borders 24, March - 22 April 2007, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Remains to Be Seen, 31 March - 26 May 2007, Cepa Gallery, Buffalo, New York, United States*, ed. Carolee Schneemann, et al. (Buffalo: CEPA Gallery, 2007). 39.

‘Man and wife’ — Wife — that’s YOU. Your own language calling you to change and assert your deepest personal image addresses you by inclusion; (Ever say: ‘Woman and husband’?)”⁵⁹⁶ Schneemann saw marriage as a significant impediment to her own aspirations, and felt that the same was true for other women. She like many other feminists of this period, believed that the extreme degree to which women’s lives were defined by their marital relationships served to erase their own identity. In her relationship with Tenney, she asserted that she “told him I don’t want to get married. I’m a painter. I won’t take your name even though it’s very nice. If we get any money, we won’t share a bank account, and we won’t have children.”⁵⁹⁷ Schneemann saw marriage and children the significant factor that relegated women to be secondary to men, and she wanted no part of it. Moreover, she wanted other women to recognize the possibility for an alternative.

Recognizing that sexual activity was something beneficial and even necessary for her own personal creativity, Schneemann did not seek to avoid heterosexual romantic relationships altogether. On the contrary, Schneemann sought to create an alternative system within those relationships. In 1963, she wrote her “Notes for Liberation of Loves” in which she outlined a system of shared partnership and mutual support that circumvented the traditional gender roles and division of domestic labor. She writes: “Certain things he is not adept at, that are easy for me I do for him: packing or sewing, buying his clothes.../ If one of us is fulfilling a chore for the other

⁵⁹⁶ Carolee Schneemann, "Untitled Letter - "Sexual Damning"," in *Carolee Schneemann Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1963). n.p.

⁵⁹⁷ Schneemann and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1." n.p.

we find a way to make it mutually worth while. Ironing — he reads [...] for us both. Driving — I'll read for us or copy down his thoughts or notes for music. Doing things neither of us particularly likes to do together makes it all fine — shopping for groceries ... cat to the vet.”⁵⁹⁸ In her own home, Schneemann actively sought to create a system that would not force her into the traditional wifely roles with her partner. Instead, she worked to create a “liberated” home, wherein mutual support and cooperation — as opposed to the arbitrary gendering of labor — was essential to the maintenance of the home. Moreover, in creating such a system, Schneemann separated her identity as a woman from the kind of work she was expected to perform.

Schneemann's disdain for the prescriptive gender roles and her appreciation of them as a hindrance for women's career success was very much the result of her engagement within the arts. As previously noted, her ambition was regularly dismissed while she was in school on the basis of her gender. Moreover, as she circulated amongst artists, she observed the roles allotted for women, which were frequently secondary or tertiary to those of men. She notes of the few women artists working among the abstract expressionists in New York in the late 1950s in her interview with Judith Olch Richards: “I thought they were wonderful. But I also saw that they were never central. They were sort of ‘feminized’ which meant on the side. And they always seemed to be supporting the male endeavors. And if you know, you know, reading back the history of Elaine de Kooning and [Lee] Krasner, it's appalling how much energy they devoted to their partners — and at what expense for their own

⁵⁹⁸ Carolee Schneemann, "Notes on the Liberation of Loves," in *Carolee Schneemann Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1963). n.p.

psychic energy. But I'm watching that and I feel like a spy in the art world."⁵⁹⁹ Schneemann recognized how these relationships and how the art market worked to dismiss the work of women artists. Early on in her career, while she was still a student, she was made acutely aware of how marriage and family could detrimentally impact a woman's career, and how the prescriptive gender schema of the time rendered women's work secondary to men, even beyond personal relationships.

She wrote critically of these tendencies — specifically with regard to the detrimental impacts of this climate on women pursuing the arts in academia — in 1963, in an entry in her notebooks entitled "I Ching." She states:

It is a fact that most art departments are run like stag clubs; the conservative mentality reacts with [a]pprehension to new techniques in teaching, ideas of liberating creative responses as well as to women instructors who upset their need for a fixed notions [sic] of social sexual structure. A woman is not an individual to them pri[m]arily but a sexual object who is disruptive to order of their own thoughts and by extension their departments, in which they secure their [...] rigid private attitudes in public function.⁶⁰⁰

She goes on to chastise the hiring practices of departments, highlighting how the lack of women on faculty at major universities is the result of this deep held belief that a woman's only worth is that of a sexual object. She notes her own experience, stating "After the first year at teaching in Urbana I was not rehired because they told me they had 'no motivation for hiring a woman'. This amused the staff at Navy Pier — when I was hired by them — and one man exclaimed about the Urbana comment

⁵⁹⁹ Schneemann and Richards, "Oral History Interview with Carolee Schneemann, 2009 March 1." n.p.

⁶⁰⁰ Carolee Schneemann, "I Ching," in *Carolee Schneemann Papers* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 1963). n.p.

‘no motivation for hiring a woman! Not even sexual motivation!’⁶⁰¹ This climate frustrated Schneemann. She writes: “they will not even consider what I DO. And that is fantastically difficult to present.”⁶⁰²

Recognizing this systematic bias against women in the arts, Schneemann used her art practice to criticize the way that women are portrayed in art and as artists. She began using her own body and her own experience as the content of her work in order to challenge the prevailing conception of women as passive, sexual subjects. She writes:

The use of my own body as integral to my work was confusing to many people. I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE/BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN SELF IMAGE. If I had only been dancing, acting, I would have maintained forms of feminine expression acceptable to the culture: ‘be the image we want.’ But I was directing troupes of performers, technicians, creating lights, sound, electronic systems, environments, costumes — every aspect of production, and then physically moving in what I had created. Some people wanted to constrain our actions as seductive, provocative, obscene, but the tenderness, boldness, spontaneity and pleasure which the performers communicated forced them to question their own attitudes.⁶⁰³

In creating works with her own body and her own sexual expression, Schneemann posed a significant challenge to the masculine dominance that existed within American art practices during this time. She was not presenting a passive object for men’s consumption in her work, but rather women actively engaged in sexual pleasure.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. n.p.

⁶⁰² Ibid. n.p.

⁶⁰³ *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works & Selected Writings*. 194.

Schneemann's emphatic use of women's active sexuality and her own sexualized body not only served to challenge the masculinist and chauvinistic tendencies within the artistic climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s; rather, Schneemann recognized that such a gesture could be powerful in emboldening other women artists. She writes: "In some sense, I made a gift of my body to other women: *giving our bodies back to ourselves.*"⁶⁰⁴ Schneemann used the visceral and carnal aspects of works like *Meat Joy* to provide women with an opportunity to see what was so often repressed. The conservative climate of midcentury sought to obfuscate the realities of sexual exchange, replacing description with euphemism or scientific language. As such, many — but especially women — were kept ignorant of the realities of their bodies. As previously noted, Schneemann found this practice to be detrimental to women for it limited their avenues of creative expression and rendered them ignorant. Schneemann's employment of pleasure and engagement with all aspects of her body in her works, and especially in *Meat Joy*, thus sought to illustrate to women the positive capabilities and capacities of their bodies. Schneemann recognized that sexual expression is a natural component of the human condition and should be understood as such. Moreover, she sought to challenge the dominant conception that women's sexual expression was intrinsically passive. In *Meat Joy*, Schneemann combines these two aims, creating a work that serves to highlight the innate need for sexual gratification by affiliating it with other such appetites and by portraying women as active participants in sexual exchange.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. 194. Emphasis original.

By affiliating the body with meat, Schneemann accomplishes this dual critique of the sexual mores of mid-century America. On the one hand, this association functions to highlight how human sexuality is one of the fundamental and basic functions of the body, much like eating. Moreover, the act of eating in the performance is raw and carnal. Whereas Lévi-Strauss asserts that the act of cooking is emblematic of culture, that which is raw, according to his theory, is derived from the basic animal urges. For Schneemann, who finds the disavowal of the realities — both pleasurable and abject — of the human body to be detrimental to society and women in particular, this assertion of sexuality as a natural and innate process functions to reclaim sexual expression from the cultural dictates that seek to obscure and undermine such impulses.

On the other hand, Schneemann similarly sought to challenge the discourse surrounding sexuality that positioned men as active consumers and rendered women passive objects to be consumed in *Meat Joy*. While affiliating the two forms of flesh does serve to highlight the intrinsic nature of this exchange, it also elucidates the ways in which the discourse surrounding sexuality renders sexualized bodies into cuts of meat. Drawing on her own extensive experience with the negative repercussions of being objectified as a woman — and having her looks supersede all other aspects of her identity — and the sexual passivity implied for women, Schneemann highlights the ways in which bodies, particularly those of women, are treated as consumable entities. By creating a scenario wherein the bodies being treated as meat are both men and women and wherein women play an active role in the sexual exchange,

Schneemann offers a direct criticism of the passivity imposed upon women's sexual expression. She creates a confrontational depiction of sex and in so doing challenges the prevailing conceptions of sexuality, which she feels have done significant disservice to women.

Hannah Wilke's Bodily Confrontations

Like Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke created depictions of women's bodies — most often her own — aimed at challenging the ways in which the objectification of women simultaneously rendered women passive and ashamed of the form and function of their own bodies. Similar to Schneemann, Wilke embraced sexuality and sought to challenge the prevailing notion that women should be passive objects of sexual desire as opposed to active sexual beings. She created confrontational depictions of women and women's sexuality, making sculptures and performances that laid bare that which the repressive dictums about sex sought to repress. From very early on, and continuing until her death in 1993, Wilke's art practice focused on how women's bodies are depicted in mass culture and in the art world. Wilke's engagement with the feminized body was not limited to depicting the various forms; rather, Wilke created works that examined what it means to have a real body — to be in that body and of that body — highlighting the disparities between the dictates of the ideal femininity and the lived experience of women, chief among these contradictions being the experience of sexuality.

It has regularly been noted that Wilke was always a sexually liberated woman. Her nephew Andrew Scharlatt has described her as “a very sexual person and

explicitly sexual,” noting that “for her, it was very feminist.”⁶⁰⁵ Wilke’s examination of sexuality has been traced back to a Polaroid photograph Wilke took of herself wearing nothing but a pair of white high heels and her mother’s stole, in 1954 when she was 14 years old.⁶⁰⁶ This embrace of sexuality was central to her identity from early on and permeated her work over the course of her 30-odd year career.

Born Arlene Hannah Butter on the Lower East Side of Manhattan on March 7, 1940, Wilke grew up in an assimilated Jewish household during and after World War II, an experience that shaped her identity fundamentally.⁶⁰⁷ Her father was an attorney, and Wilke and her sister, Marsie Scharlatt, grew up in a fairly typical, middle-class postwar household. Nancy Princenthal notes: “following a postwar norm, the Butters soon moved away from the old immigrant urban neighborhood in Manhattan, initially to Queens. [...] In 1952, the family moved again, to Great Neck, a suburb where Wilke attended high school.”⁶⁰⁸ Wilke developed an interest in the arts early on, declaring “her intention to be an artist” in an autograph book in the sixth grade.⁶⁰⁹ She was interested in theater and dance in high school, but “by the time she graduated from high school, [...] she had already demonstrated both talent in and commitment to

⁶⁰⁵ Emily Elizabeth Goodman, Andrew Scharlatt, and Marsie Scharlatt, "Interview with Marsie Scharlatt and Andrew Scharlatt," (Los Angeles, CA: Hannah Wilke Collections and Archive, Los Angeles, November 10, 2014). n.p.

⁶⁰⁶ Wilke’s sister Marsie Scharlatt actually shot the photograph, but Wilke constructed it. For more on the image, see: Nancy Princenthal and Hannah Wilke, *Hannah Wilke* (Munich; London: Prestel, 2010). 10.

⁶⁰⁷ Wilke famously has described her childhood stating: “My consciousness came from being a Jew in World War II. I was born in 1940, and I was a Jew. I realized what it would be to be annihilated just for a word.” For more information, see: *ibid.* 8.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

the visual arts.”⁶¹⁰ As such, following the advice of her high school art teacher, Wilke “enrolled at the Stella Elkins Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia (now Tyler College of Art), from which she earned a B.F.A. and a B.S. in education in 1962.

At Tyler, Wilke studied sculpture, “[experimenting] with radical form and content” during her undergraduate studies.⁶¹¹ She was particularly interested in examining various components of human anatomy and physiology in her sculptural practice while in college. She created serial works examining the form of the penis, vagina, anus, and human excrement, such as in her works *Early Box* and *Six Phallic and Excremental Sculptures* (1960-3) (Appendix: Figure 69). Wilke examined the morphology of these parts of the human body in a wide array of media, analyzing both the material quality of each substrate —terra cotta versus plaster of Paris, etc. — and the distinctions in form that comprise each bodily component.

She married Barry Wilke in 1960; following her graduation from Tyler in, Hannah Wilke taught art at the local high school from 1962—5 in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, where she lived with her husband. The couple then moved to Riverdale, New York “a middle-class neighborhood in the Bronx,” and Wilke took a teaching position at White Plains High School. The two divorced shortly after the move in 1965, but Wilke continued to teach at the high school for the next five years.⁶¹² At the same time, Wilke continued her artistic exploration into the realm of sexuality and genital difference. As Princenthal notes: “By 1963 or ’64, she was making ceramic

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. 10.

⁶¹¹ Tracy Fitzpatrick et al., *Hannah Wilke: Gestures*, 1st ed. (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, 2009). 10.

⁶¹² Princenthal and Wilke, *Hannah Wilke*. 11.

sculptures ‘for which [she] almost got fired’ from her high-school teaching job.”⁶¹³ She exhibited these works in two group shows in 1966: an exhibition on erotic art called “Hetero Is” at a temporary gallery in Manhattan as well as in the “3-D Group Show” at Castagno Gallery.⁶¹⁴ Throughout the late-1960s and early 1970s, she continued to make and exhibit work in New York with considerable success, having her first solo show at Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1972, and contributing works to the Whitney Biennial that same year.⁶¹⁵ Wilke continued to teach art as well, joining the faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1972, where she continued to teach until her death in the 1990s.

Wilke continued to examine the vaginal form in her art works through out the rest of her career, employing a wide variety of different media — from clay to latex, chewing gum to bacon — in her examination of the morphology of female genitals (Appendix: Figure 70). She became well known for making vaginal works, establishing an oeuvre of her own and seeking to establish an alternative to the phallocentrism that characterizes a considerable amount of modern art and architecture. A review of Hannah Wilke’s work in *Penthouse* magazine, noted, “Wilke’s goal is to create a ‘vaginal iconography.’ She wants to ‘reverse from phallic symbolism to feminine symbolism, to make vaginas into something worshipful, to give a sense of religious respect, a sense of awe, a sense of strength and power attributed to the feelings of being a woman. Just because we’re internal doesn’t mean

⁶¹³ Ibid. 24.

⁶¹⁴ Marsie Scharlatt et al., "Hannah Wilke Biography," Hannah Wilke Collection and Archive, Los Angeles, <http://www.hannahwilke.com/id10.html>.n.p.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. n.p.

we're inferior.”⁶¹⁶ Wilke used the vaginal imagery of her work to challenge the ways in which the female anatomy is linked to gender inequality. Recognizing the omnipresence of phallic imagery and the relative dearth of vaginal iconography, Wilke used her work to agitate against the social dictates that valorized the male organ and obfuscated the female.

Wilke's embrace of vaginal imagery went beyond simply trying to create an alternative to representations of the penis; Wilke used her works to elucidate the complexities and contradictions that existed within the contemporary discourse of ideal womanhood. As Mark Savitts notes in his review her exhibition at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York in 1975: “By now everyone is quite well aware that Hannah Wilke does cunts. What her show at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts will reinforce is the wide range of her interlocking concerns and the multi-level evocative quality of her work.”⁶¹⁷ The material qualities of her vaginal sculptures functioned to elucidate various aspects of the prevailing conception of femininity, illustrating the tenuous link between the essential quality of femaleness with that of womanhood. For instance, from 1971 — 3, she constructed a series of 12 vaginal forms arranged in a grid on a plinth on the floor entirely out of dryer lint. Wilke obtained the lint after doing the laundry for her and her then-partner, artist Claes Oldenburg (Appendix: Figure 71). As Barbara Schwartz notes of the piece, “Talk about woman's art! After washing brightly colored towels, Wilke discovered particles of lint had become a clump of stuff and thus her innovation: laundry lint sculpture, soft to sight and tough, a material extension

⁶¹⁶ Meridine Merzer, "Scenes: Genital Art," *Penthouse* September 1975. 45.

⁶¹⁷ Mark Savitt, "Hannah Wilke: The Pleasure Principal," *Arts Magazine* September 1975. 56.

for her specialized imagery.”⁶¹⁸ In exploring the significance of vaginas made out of lint, Wilke illuminates the processes by which these two material forms are related: the ideological construction of womanhood. Wilke used the material from typically gendered labor — laundry lint — in order to represent the female biology, and in so doing, elucidating the discursive connection between housework as a form of femininity and the innate qualities of the female biological sex.

During the 1970s, Wilke expanded her art practice from examining the forms of the female body in the abstract to examining the realities of her own body and her identity as a woman. As Tracy Fitzpatrick notes: “Among the materials that Wilke kneaded were not only cookie dough, Play-Doh, bacon, and erasers, but also her own flesh, an approach first captured in her thirty-five-minute videotaped performance entitled *Gestures* from 1974.”⁶¹⁹ Referring to the methods through which Wilke constructed her vaginal sculptures out of a significant number of different materials, Fitzpatrick notes that this transition was an extension of the impulse that guided Wilke’s repeated exploration of the vaginal form. Fitzpatrick asserts: “*Gestures* is distinctly sculptural, if not sculpture itself. Wilke manipulated her flesh the way she manipulated all other forms as varies as her folds. These forms, more than just facial expressions, evoke emotion — ‘sad, joyous, playful,’ etc. — much the way she imparted ‘personality’ to her clay boxes.”⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸ Barbara Schwartz, "Young New York Artists," *Craft Horizons* October 1973. 63.

⁶¹⁹ Fitzpatrick et al., *Hannah Wilke: Gestures*. 40.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.* 40.

Wilke further continued this association between her sculptural practice and her own “body art” in the form of her *Starification Object Series (S.O.S.)* (Appendix: Figure 72), which took on several different iterations between 1974 and 1982. Throughout the entire series, Wilke used masticated chewing gum to fashion many small, folded, vaginal sculptures, but in several articulations of the project, she goes beyond the sculptural and affixes these forms to her own body. In the best known version of the work, a series of black and white photographs taken by Les Wollam in 1974, Wilke “struck a variety of fashion-model poses,” in most of which she appears topless “ornamented from chest to forehead and fingernails with shaped pieces of gum, sporting accessories ranging from an Arab headdress to a cowboy hat and two toy guns to hair curlers.”⁶²¹ Wilke used these photographs in subsequent versions of the work. For instance, in late 1974, she turned the work into a “game” for the exhibition “Artists Make Toys” at The Clocktower gallery in New York. Fitzpatrick notes that the game, entitled *Starification or (S.O.S. Starification Object Series): An Adult Game of Mastication*, appeared in the work alongside “a swing by Mark di Suvero, a four-foot horse that opened to reveal a theatre inside by Claes Oldenburg, Trisha Brown, and Jared Bark, and a giant wooden picture puzzle by Red Grooms.”⁶²² The game “contains unopened packages of chewing gum, playing cards printed with chewing gum wrapper logos, and *S.O.S* cards — six-by-four-inch photographs” from the original set taken by Wollam.⁶²³ Wilke also adapted the work into the performance

⁶²¹ Princenthal and Wilke, *Hannah Wilke*. 51.

⁶²² Fitzpatrick et al., *Hannah Wilke: Gestures*. 47-49.

⁶²³ *Ibid.* 49.

that she did at the “Galerie Gerald Piltzer in Paris in associations with the exhibition 5 *Women Artists in Paris*,” wherein she appeared semi-naked in the gallery space and invited viewers to chew pieces of gum, which she then fashioned into the typical vaginal forms and affixed them to her body.⁶²⁴

From the 1970s throughout the rest of her life, Wilke developed an inter-media practice that focused extensively on the nature and the form of the female and feminine body. She created several works aimed at analyzing how women’s bodies are understood as objects of art, and how this conception works as a hindrance to their achievements as artists. For instance, in 1976, she created a video performance entitled “*Through the Large Glass*” in dialogue with Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* — commonly also referred to as “The Large Glass” — wherein Wilke literally stripped bare in front of the work. Nancy Princenthal describes the video stating “she walks on camera and stands behind the glass, wearing a three-piece white suit, fringed white scarf, and white fedora [...] Striking poses associated with fashion photography, Wilke struts, thrusts her hips sideways, touches her hat and, again, her face, her mouth [...] Slowly, with great panache, she takes off her jacket, unzips her pants, adjusts her hat.”⁶²⁵ Wilke concludes her striptease by striking a pose that “descends directly from Botticelli’s most famous Venus, her crumpled pants substituting for the clamshell.”⁶²⁶ In stripping bare for Duchamp’s *Bachelors* and evoking canonical poses for the female nude, Wilke uses her own body in the

⁶²⁴ Ibid. 50.

⁶²⁵ Princenthal and Wilke, *Hannah Wilke*. 73-6.

⁶²⁶ Ibid. 76.

performance to highlight the conventional position of women in art: as naked or nude subjects.

Yet her position in this work is oppositional. In performing this sort of burlesque in front of the work, Wilke is essentially calling Duchamp's bluff; whereas his fictional bride is the subject of some kind of aggressive disrobing, Wilke's is calculated and purposeful, and imbued with artistic agency. Moreover, where Duchamp's "Bride" is reduced to the plane of the glass, Wilke, as seen through the work, is three-dimensional. As such, she confronts the work's fictional construction of womanhood by presenting an actual lived-in body. She extends this confrontation to the ways in which women's bodies are represented in visual culture more broadly. Simultaneously invoking poses associated with advertising and with the canon of Western Art, Wilke illustrates how these gestures are used to construct an image of women that is as flat as Duchamp's bride. Wilke thus uses her position as artist and as subject to examine how women are seen and understood.

Sweet and Sour: Being Eaten in *Hannah Wilke's Super-T-Art*

Hannah Wilke used the form of the female body not only to confront the viewer and the phallogentrism that characterized art and visual culture, but she also sought to examine the conditions and experiences of having such a body. As such, she developed a performance-based practice that not only examined issues of gender but her own experience as a woman, particularly as a sexually active and "conventionally attractive" woman. As previously noted, Wilke, like Schneemann, believed that sexuality was a central aspect of her identity, and she never shied from bringing her

own relationships into her work. Moreover, Wilke frequently drew on the aesthetic conventions —from both the art historical canon and mass culture — in order to examine the ways in which her form and figure as a woman was understood, mimicking the gestures of stripteases, advertisements, and reclining female nudes in her works with her own body. As such, Wilke created works that examined women's position as consumable entities, highlighting the ways in which the female body is treated like a cut of meat or a sweet treat to please some man.

Wilke frequently made the analogy between the female body and the consumable good in her art practice. She often used foodstuffs in order to create her vaginal sculptures, including strips of bacon, fortune cookies, and, most famously, masticated chewing gum, such as those that adorn her face and body in *S.O.S. Starification Object Series*. She even went so far as to present these forms within the conventions of a meal; in 1974, Wilke created two works, *Saucer and Spoon* (1974-5) and *Fork and Spoon* (1974) (Appendix: Figure 74), wherein she placed dozens of vaginas formed from kneaded erasers upon various forms of serving wear, presenting these disembodied organs as something one could ingest in a single gulp.

Wilke regularly presented the vaginal form with reference to sweetness and sugar. One of her floor pieces of a series of pink acrylic painted ceramic vaginas is titled *Sweet Sixteen* (1977) (Appendix: Figure 75). That same year she constructed a work in dialogue with another piece by Marcel Duchamp — his (in)famous *Étant Donnés* (1946-66) — entitled *I Object, Memoirs of a Sugargiver* (1977-8) (Appendix: Figure 76). In this piece — a diptych photograph — Wilke takes the pose of the

woman in Duchamp's voyeuristic installation, with her clothes strewn around her as she lays atop some haggard rocks. The photographs are taken from two distinct vantage points, one employing a similar perspective to that seen through Duchamp's peephole, and another taken from above, rendering Wilke more a victim of sexualized violence than a boyish peeping sexual fantasy. Wilke imbues the title with a double meaning, referring both to the artist's dissent and her own experience being objectified, while at the same time referring to her position as such as being that of "a sugargiver."

Wilke sought to imbue women's sexualization with an active positionality. She rendered herself a "sugargiver" — as opposed to a "sugar cellar" — invoking the she was providing this sexual gratification of her own accord. Moreover, this notion of the "sugargiver" derived from Wilke's own inclinations to give to others as a form of her own pleasure. According to Marsie Scharlatt: "[Wilke] loved feeding people and that was part of the sugargiver."⁶²⁷ Wilke asserted that a woman's body could function as something to feed others, specifically to nourish and satiate an individual's hungers, both sexual and gustatory. As such, her examination of the female body as a food source differs significantly from the ideas of feeding manifest in *Womanhouse* or in the work of the Feminist Art Workers. Whereas in the previously discussed works the idea of feeding is linked solely to women's caretaking impulses, Wilke's portrayal of her body as a source of sustenance examines the sensuous nature of the sexualized female and portrays the feminine body as a source of sweetness, further highlighting

⁶²⁷ Goodman, Scharlatt, and Scharlatt, "Interview with Marsie Scharlatt and Andrew Scharlatt." n.p.

how women's bodies are encoded with the rhetoric of consumption; she is not simply the provider of food, she is something to be eaten.

Wilke combined this analogy of the body as food with her critique of the mass cultural construction of womanhood in the form of her performance piece *Super-T-Art* (1974) (Appendix: Figure 77). In November of 1974, Wilke was invited to participate at an evening of performances at the Kitchen — a non-profit art space in New York City — organized by Jean Dupuy.⁶²⁸ According to a New York Times review of the event characterized it as an “avant-garde dinner party” with the following premise: “serve people an inexpensive dinner consisting of soup, bread, wine, and apple tarts, and entertain them with a sequence of three-to-four-minute performances by a dizzying range of performers and performance artists.”⁶²⁹ Over the course of the evening, there were performances from more than “three dozen artists, including Philip Glass (as an unaccompanied vocalist); Gordon Matta-Clark (sawing open a cardboard box to reveal a house-shaped cake, which he sawed into slices, to much affectionate laughter and wild applause); and Alan Saret (playing an acoustic guitar[...]).”⁶³⁰ The venue was packed with nearly 400 people and the performances proceeded in alphabetical order based on each artist's last name. Hannah Wilke's was, therefore, the final performance of the night.⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ Princenthal and Wilke, *Hannah Wilke*. 56.

⁶²⁹ John Rockwell, "'Soup and Tart' at the Kitchen Is Supper with Avant-Garde," *The New York Times* December 2, 1974.

⁶³⁰ Princenthal and Wilke, *Hannah Wilke*. 56.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.* 56.

In her performance, Wilke emerged on stage wearing only a large white drape — reminiscent of both a bed sheet and, more appropriately for the occasion, a tablecloth — tied around her like a toga and a pair of 3 or 4 inch, white high-heels. Wilke then “stepped onto a spotlight pedestal” and performed a series of gestures wherein she altered the configuration of her garment from a toga to loincloth, enacting a set of poses reminiscent of both fashion photography and canonical works of art as she undertook this sartorial transition. Wilke concluded the performance in this loincloth, standing frontal, with arms fully extended and raised out from the shoulders, head gazing off to one side in a gesture meant to evoke the iconography of the crucifixion. Wilke subsequently repeated the performance in a series of 24 photographs shot by Christopher Giercke, wherein she transformed the fluid gestures of her transition into a “series of calculated poses that progress from chaste Greek goddess to ecstatic innocent to crucified Christ.”⁶³² In these images as in the original performance, Wilke enacts various aspects of the visual discourse that surround the ideological construction of womanhood.

Wilke designed the work to be a sort of indictment on the contradictory and complicated roles ascribed to women, particularly with regard to the form and function of their physical appearances. Of particular interest to Wilke in this performance is the paradoxical discourse about women’s sexuality. Through her gestures in the performance and in the photographs, Wilke ruminates on the contradictions ripe within the Madonna/whore dialectic that shapes the ways in which women’s sexuality

⁶³² Ibid. 58.

is understood; she enacts gestures associated with virginal purity and female chastity, such as when she appears fully draped, with her arms pressed across her chest, looking down over her left shoulder, in a manner evocative of sculptures of the Virgin Mary or the chaste goddess Diana. She also performs poses that evoke the iconography of female prurience as manifest in indulgent sexual pleasure, such as when she stands contrapposto in her loincloth, with her hand splayed over her pelvis in a gesture similar to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* or Manet's *Olympia*, eyes closed and head turned upwards, as if she was enjoying a moment of self-stimulation. By exploring the range or articulations between these two polarized conceptions of women, Wilke illustrates that affiliation between women's bodies and sex form a dialectic that generates a significant number of paradoxes.

Beyond examining the complicated and contradictory implications of women's bodies with regard to the relationship between sexuality and identity, Wilke uses the work to criticize how the depiction of the feminine and female body has served to reduce women to the status of consumable objects. Performed in a context of food — a dinner event in an art space called “the Kitchen” — Wilke's piece is a rumination on one of the myriad ways in which women's sexuality is encoded within the discourse of food. For Wilke, the work was born out of a meditation upon the sonorous quality and multiple connotations of the food items that comprised the event's title: Soup and Tart. As she noted in an interview in 1978, “I did ‘Super-T-Art’, as a pun for ‘Soup and Tart,’ [...] So, I said ‘Soup-T-Art’, or ‘Super Tart’, tart, being like a whore, or something, ... so my three minute performance was a crucifixion where there were

about 50 different gestures.”⁶³³ By referring to the connotation of a “tart” as a whore — and in the process of enacting such a conception of womanhood through the gestures in her performance — Wilke illustrates the ways in which women’s entire identities are boiled down to their sexual proclivities. Moreover, the specific euphemism employed in Wilke’s performance serves to highlight the element of consumption that is manifest in the discourse on women’s sexuality. A woman who is sexually active is akin to a sweet and sour pastry, she is readily available for consumption and will provide a variety of sensations to the man who devours her body.

The religious imagery evoked in her performance also functions to highlight and critique the ways in which women’s bodies are constructed as symbols of consumption. In *Super-t-Art*, Wilke refers explicitly to the most prominent translation of the human body into a physically consumable entity in adopting the pose and dress of the crucified Christ: the Eucharist. According to Catholic doctrine, through the act of transubstantiation, bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Jesus, both of which are then consumed by the faithful in the act of taking the Eucharist. Even in Protestant sects where the dogma of transubstantiation has largely been abandoned, the symbolic eating of the flesh of Christ is still performed through the communion wafer. In performing this ritual of eating, practitioners affirm their adherence to the dictates of scripture and belief in Jesus as lord and savior. By eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, one is rendered whole and pure and free of sin. The

⁶³³ "Artist Hannah Wilke Talks with Ernst," *Oasis de Neon* 1978. n.p.

Eucharist, however, is a masculine and overtly patriarchal symbol; Jesus Christ is at once “The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit,” and to take of his body is to affirm his position as supreme and to subscribe to a dogma that is explicitly built upon a patriarchal relationship between God and his followers.

In *Super-t-Art*, Wilke complicates this symbolic relationship, highlighting how the symbolic act of consuming the body of another exists in contradictory and paradoxical forms given the gender and identity of that body. In the form of the Eucharist, the body that is being consumed is masculine and named: it is specifically the body of Christ, the Lord and Father. The “Tart” however, referred to by Wilke in the title, and through her performative gestures is feminine and anonymous. In many cases, “tart” is used to replace the name of a woman or to fold her into a categorical distinction. As such, when she is called a tart, an individual woman’s whole identity is subsumed by a particular characteristic, and she is rendered solely a sexual object.

Similarly, the Eucharist is a symbol of piety and chastity. Christian morality has strict dictates about sexuality and many forms of Christianity prohibit the taking of the Eucharist if one has violated — or failed to do penance for a violation of — the prescribed doctrine. The concept of a tart is a woman who explicitly skirts — or is perceived to shirk — the prevailing mores of sexual propriety. This woman’s body and identity are rhetorically transformed into food because they violate the ideas of chastity and purity, especially those promoted in Christian doctrine. By combining the symbol of the Eucharist and the tart, Wilke highlights the paradoxical distinctions

between how masculine and feminine bodies are understood when they are rendered into items for human consumption.

Wilke thus uses the work to call attention to the ways in which women's bodies are reduced and euphemized as food items and to highlight the ways in which women's sexual expression is repressed and often condemned. The use of her body was strategic and political in the creation of such a gesture. Wilke had been criticized many times for her emphatic embrace of her own sexuality — specifically referring to sexual relationships, including those with other artists (namely Claes Oldenburg), in her art practice — along with her willingness to display her own body. In discussing the impulse to create the work in her interview in *Oasis de Neon*, Wilke refers to being characterized as “a Primal Prostitute of Art, as Mona Da Vinci said of me once” and notes that she “found it really interesting that people, even like Peter Frank, would say, ‘Oh, she takes her clothes off at the drop of a hat,’ but I do it only politically.”⁶³⁴ Wilke was frequently criticized as a narcissist — most famously by Lucy Lippard — on the basis that she was both a sexual and attractive woman. She noted in an interview in 1989 of the art world, “I didn't fit in. I looked very glamorous and pretty, and the social irritant of it made me create my first piece *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art*, which was a female crucifixion. ‘Cause I was being [...] crucified for my looks.”⁶³⁵ Wilke's use of her own naked form in *Super-t-Art* thus functions to illustrate how she as an individual woman has experienced this euphemistic reduction of her identity. Presenting herself as the tart of the event “Soup and Tart,” Wilke criticizes and

⁶³⁴ Ibid. n.p.

⁶³⁵ As quoted in *Hannah Wilke*. 64s

challenges the ways in which her body has been sexualized and rendered into food. In so doing, she illustrates the damaging nature of such a characterization, illustrating how it functions to dismiss and vilify women on the basis of their appearance and sexual expression. Wilke thus saw in the idea of the tart an opportunity to liberate women's sexual experience from both the connotations of objectification and condemnation.

The Schism over Sexuality in "Second Wave Feminism"

Wilke's approach to sexuality, however, was not universally well received by feminists within and beyond the art world. Unlike Schneemann, whose *Meat Joy* premiered prior to the emergence of Radical feminism and the Women's Liberation movement on a broad and national scale, Wilke was creating works within a climate of multiple and often contradictory approaches to feminism. Within this climate, Wilke's use of her own sexualized body was seen as liberationist by some and exhibitionist by others. Because Wilke was a conventionally attractive woman and this characteristic manifests as desirability in her works about women's sexuality using her own body. As such, the use of their bodies differs significantly from that of other women artists, like Eleanor Antin, whose naked form in *Carving* is presented in a cold and clinical manner. Where Antin presents her body in a desexualized manner, Wilke played into the sexual connotations encoded upon women's naked bodies.

Because Wilke, like Schneemann, presented herself as a sexual image, she received significant criticism for such a gesture. Lucy Lippard, among others, characterized her as a narcissist for her willingness to appear naked and sexualized in

her work. Of Wilke, Lippard writes: “Hannah Wilke, a glamor girl in her own right who sees her art as ‘seduction’ is considered a little too good to be true when she flaunts her body in parody of the role she actually plays in real life [...] her own confusion of her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist, has resulted at times in politically ambiguous manifestations that have exposed her to criticism on a personal as well as on an artistic level.”⁶³⁶ In Lippard’s characterization of Wilke’s work, she over-emphasizes the degree to which her physical attractiveness and willingness to appear naked serves to undermine her status as an artist.

What is problematic about Lippard’s critiques of Wilke — and perhaps what has rendered such a criticism central to the conventional narrative of Wilke’s practice — is that it appears hypocritical in the context of the article in which it appears. Prior to emphasizing how Wilke and Schneemann’s own physical attractiveness has hindered their career success, Lippard notes:

Men can use beautiful sexy women as neutral objects or surfaces, but when women use their own faces and bodies, they are immediately accused of narcissism. There is an element of exhibitionism in all body art, perhaps a legitimate result between exploiting oneself or someone else. Yet the degree to which narcissism informs and affects the work varies immensely. Because women are considered sex objects, it is taken for granted that any woman who presents her nude body in public is doing so because she thinks she is beautiful. She is a narcissist, and [Vito] Acconci, with his less romantic image and pimply back, is an artist.⁶³⁷

Following so shortly after such a strong assertion about the undeniable double-standard — one of many facing women artists — regarding women artists’ use of their

⁶³⁶ Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art." 126.

⁶³⁷ Ibid. 125.

bodies in their work, Lippard's tone when discussing Wilke appears contradictory at best. Lippard appears to be excoriating Wilke in the same way that she lambastes other critics for doing with the work of less-attractive feminist artists.

These assertions — and the hypocrisy of them — arise primarily from the sexualized ways in which Wilke presents herself. Because they are performing sexuality in their work and criticizing the discourse around sexuality through the use of their own bodies in sexualized displays, Wilke appear to be enacting the tropes of femininity perpetuated within the male dominated discourse of sexuality. She performs suggestive gestures that do render her objectified and because she is attractive and enjoying these moments as liberated forms of sexual expression, Wilke does appear to adhere to the chauvinistic dictates that dominate the rhetoric of sexuality. At the same time, however, her performance also involve subverting those conventions and re-asserting women's agency in the sexual encounter. She inserts herself in these works in order to express elements of their own experience in the work, and to reclaim her position not as object, but as active participant, a "sugargiver," of her own accord.

Lippard was not remotely the first nor was she the only critic to make such assertions about Wilke's art, but this criticism is a reflection of the complicated and paradoxical discourse about women's sexuality within feminist circles during this period. Like with issues of labor and maternity, there was hardly a consensus among feminists with regard to what part sexuality should play in determining a woman's identity. As Jane Gerhard notes: "The loosely affiliated groups that made up the

movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s generated new accounts of female sexuality by challenging and reworking the terms of American sexual thought. They did so not through an orchestrated and coherent critique but through a range of writings from different, and, at times antithetical points of view.”⁶³⁸ While many feminists — from mainstream writers, like Gloria Steinem, to more marginal and militant figures, such as Valerie Solanas — asserted that sexual relations between men and women often manifested in power differentials that were related to the patriarchal structure of society, the degree to which they found sexuality solely responsible for the establishment and perpetuation of gender inequality varied widely. Whereas some women asserted that being sexually liberated and engaging in sex with men was an essentially empowering phenomenon, other feminists argued that all heterosexual encounters should be abandoned in favor of alternative relationship structures, and others still argued for a valuation of heterosexual sex somewhere in between these two poles.

As such, Wilke’s work can be read as emblematic of some of the ideas espoused within this discourse on women’s sexuality. For instance, her use food in order to illustrate how women’s bodies are rendered into consumable entities within the masculinist sexual discourse is expressed in a variety of sources on women’s sexuality, including in works like Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*, Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful*, and Anne Koedt’s essay “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm.” Koedt in particular puts this issue into clear relief, stating: “One of the elements of

⁶³⁸ Jane Gerhard, "Revisitng 'the Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm': The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2000). 450.

male chauvinism is the refusal or inability to see women as total, separate human beings. Rather, men have chosen to define women only in terms of how they benefitted men's lives. Sexually, a woman was not seen as an individual wanting to share equally in the sexual act, any more than she was seen as a person with independent desires when she did anything else in society."⁶³⁹ This impulse, which was of issue to many feminists, is starkly criticized through Wilke's assertions of agency and sexual autonomy in her works including but not limited to *Super-t-Art*.

At the same time, however, Wilke unabashedly endorsed heterosexual sex as being liberating. Wilke brings the subject of her own heterosexual experiences into her work which explicitly reference the sexual encounter between women and men and seek to reaffirm women's position within such exchanges. In works like *Super-t-Art* and *I Object*, Wilke examines her position in relation to the heterosexual exchange. She creates a work that mimics the kinds of displays that seem to those of the male fantasy, but she also makes effort to endorse the role of her own pleasure in these displays. Moreover, Wilke unabashedly refers to her own relationships with men, including other artists, in her work. She does not find her relationships to be prohibitive to her career, but rather draws on these experiences in order to create art that questions the role and status of women in the arts and in society on the whole.

Yet Wilke's embrace of sexual liberation in her life and work also somewhat contradicted the prevailing thought about the role and function of sexuality within feminist circles. Sexual liberation had been a problematic issue since the mid-1960s,

⁶³⁹ Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Radical Feminism : A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000). 375-6.

particularly within radical political circles. The promotion of sexual liberation bordering on libertinism by men within the New Left was highly problematic within the movement and significantly contributed to the splitting of Radical feminists from the New Left. This issue reached a fever-pitch during “Freedom Summer” — the summer of 1964 — wherein various community projects were overrun by sexual relationships between volunteers, specifically interracial couples, and where sexual liberation was rendered a marker of one’s true liberalism. Women within the New Left often found themselves in a double bind; as Alice Echols describes it:

Certainly the sexual test was a no-win situation for white women. If a white woman accepted a black man’s sexual advance, she risked being ridiculed as loose; if she spurned him, she left herself vulnerable to the charge of racism. Of course, the interracial relationships that developed in these projects often grew out of genuine caring and affection. But some black men used white women in an effort to reclaim their manhood and some white women used black men to prove their liberalism or expiate their guilt.⁶⁴⁰

Within this climate, began the first significant discussions on the role of women in the movement, and the start of a schism between feminists within and outside the New Left (known as the Radical-Politico split). Many white women in the movement felt that they were being coerced and used sexually and that they were seen primarily as sex objects and not contributors. This perception was often also confirmed by the attitudes by many of the men in the movement, as perhaps best demonstrated in Stokely Carmichael’s infamous quip about the “Position of Women in SNCC” being “prone.”

⁶⁴⁰ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. 30.

The problematic legacy of sexual liberation did significantly color how many feminists felt about the role and function of sexuality. While for some feminists, taking pleasure in opposite sex relationships was considered central to their identity, for others this issue was more problematic. Koedt, herself, theorized that restricting the sexual exchange to simply between men and women would serve to perpetuate the sexual power dynamics that subjugate women. In her affirmation that of the role of the clitoral orgasm, she notes: “The establishment of clitoral orgasm as fact would threaten the heterosexual *institution*. For it would indicate that sexual pleasure was obtainable from either men *or* women, thus making heterosexuality not an absolute, but an option.”⁶⁴¹ Koedt postulates, therefore, that by asserting the centrality of the clitoral orgasm women’s sexual pleasure into the discourse and practice of sexual expression, the sexual power dynamics that serve to render women inferior to men could be altered dramatically, leading to greater social equality beyond the bedroom.

Other feminists, like the group Radicalesbians, took Koedt’s assertions about the possibilities of homosexual encounters between women even further, arguing that heterosexual women were “dependent on male culture for their [self]-definition,” whereas lesbians were truly woman-identified women.⁶⁴² While these issues would play out more fully in the 1980s, the role of sexuality and sexual expression was definitely conflicted and contested by various feminists within and beyond the art world. Recognizing the degree to which women’s sexual expression was a contested

⁶⁴¹ Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm." 377.

⁶⁴² Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. 216.

territory, we can therefore understand not only the basis of Wilke's work but the criticism thereof as well.

Conclusions

Because feminism is ultimately derived from personal experiences, the use of sexuality in both Hannah Wilke's and Carolee Schneemann's work can be unquestionably determined as feminist. Moreover, for both women, the performance of sexuality was meant to enact a sense of agency over each woman's body and her pleasure; by performing sexuality themselves, Wilke and Schneemann were able to create a discourse about women's sexuality that comes from women. Through their performances, they presented an unabashed critique of the objectification of women in the service of men's sexuality and sexual politics. The fact that other feminists challenged this expression of sexuality in their work is thus indicative of the diversity that existed within feminist thought and activism.

Moreover, the distinctions between their works serve to highlight how feminism in this period changed significantly between 1960 and 1979. Over the course of the decade between Schneemann's performance of *Meat Joy* (1964) and Wilke's performance of *Super-t-Art* (1974), American feminism re-emerged as a major social and political movement, among which there was an extensive amount of diversity in thought and action. While both works sought to critique the passive construction of women's sexuality and both works transgressed discursive norms about sex, the nature of their performances and the responses they garnered were dramatically different

given the distinct climates of the moments in which *Meat Joy* and *Super-t-Art* were performed.

When Schneemann performed *Meat Joy*, “Second Wave Feminism” was a nascent movement; very little had been written about women’s roles in sexuality and the nature of sexual politics. Compulsory heterosexuality, as Adrienne Rich would later term it, was by and large the norm in 1964, and Schneemann’s engagement with heterosexual sex and women’s sexual liberation — controversial issues in their own right — was not necessarily viewed as a reaffirmation of men’s dominance over women. On the contrary, Schneemann’s sexual liberation was considered central to the feminist content of the work. Because she put on display the fact that women are more than just objects to be consumed, and highlighted the naturalness of the sexual act through likening the process to the central need of eating, Schneemann used her work to challenge the regressive climate that rendered women’s subordinate. She presented a sexual exchange separate from the conjugal one that dominated the prevailing discourse of the time and affirmed an alternative to the marital role for women in both sex and life. Schneemann performed the work in a moment where sexual liberation and radicalism were linked; the work was first performed in May of 1964, coinciding exactly with “Freedom Summer.” As such, Schneemann’s display of sexuality in *Meat Joy* can be understood as a radical challenge to the regressive and oppressive politics that sought to subjugate significant sectors of the population comparable to other instances of sexual liberation from this period.

Schneemann's embrace of sexual liberation as a form of feminist challenge was emblematic of the particular moment in which she created *Meat Joy*, and shortly after the works' creation, sexual politics — specifically for feminists — became a central and complicated issue. Between 1964 and 1974, when Wilke performed *Super-t-Art*, a significant amount of attention was paid to the issue and role of sexuality by feminists. In 1970 alone, Kate Millet and Anne Koedt published watershed treatises on the nature of sexuality and the treatment of women therein. Major shifts in the view of sexual identity — particularly with regard to the “woman-identified-woman” and lesbian feminism — facilitated a climate wherein Wilke's inquiry into the nature of women's objectification was seen by some as exhibitionistic and narcissistic, playing into men's fantasies and further affirming women's subordinate status through the heterosexual exchange. That is not to say, however, that all women viewed Wilke's work in this manner; on the contrary, Wilke's position and the criticism she received serves to illustrate the plurality of beliefs on sexuality within Second Wave feminist thought. The fact that her work was seen as liberating by some and regressive by others, highlights the ways in which the multiple feminisms that characterized just white feminism — to say nothing of the racial distinctions amongst feminism during this period — were distinct and often contradictory.

While the differences between Wilke and Schneemann's works does serve to illustrate how feminism changed and the diverse forms that feminism took on over the course of a decade, the works are similar in their aim. Both Wilke and Schneemann sought to use their performances to challenge the passivity of women's sexuality. Each

artist likened the physical body to food in their work in order to highlight the ways in which women are presented and treated as consumable entities. Because both women found sexuality to be central to their identities as women and as artists, both sought to create works wherein women are sexually active. In *Meat Joy*, the women in the performance engage directly in the kinetic act of sexual pantomime, instead of being passive objects from which men take their pleasure; the women in the performance have their own sexual pleasure, which they derive from the meat around them. Moreover, Schneemann uses the form of meat not only to liken meat to women's bodies, but to all bodies, highlighting the natural inclination we all have for sex by likening the gustatory and sexual appetite. In so doing, she creates a work that challenges the regressive nature of the prevailing sexual discourse that renders women passive subjects of sexuality.

Wilke, on the other hand, also challenges the passivity that has been considered a central aspect of women's sexuality, but she does so by subverting and undermining the conventional representations of women's sexuality. In *Super-t-Art*, Wilke presents herself in a manner that oscillates between "virgin" and "whore," evoking both canonical art historical representations of women, but also those of popular culture. She uses the euphemism of "tart" in the title in order to highlight the ways in which a woman's sexual expression serves to objectify her. She highlights how calling a woman a tart serves to render her both anonymous — tart typically being a categorical distinction that serves to obscure the rest of a woman's identity — and consumable, becoming something that is solely known as an agent of men's

pleasure. Moreover, by using religious imagery, specifically that of the crucifixion, Wilke highlights how the rendering of women's bodies into food is distinct and gendered, through the stark contrast she draws between the function of her "tart" and that of the Eucharist. In so doing, Wilke, drawing on her own personal experience as sexual and sexualized woman, challenges the ways in which women's sexual function becomes the sole marker of her identity, and how women's bodies are treated as items for the consumption of men.

Both Wilke and Schneemann, therefore, illustrate in their works the experience of "being eaten." In illustrating how women's bodies are likened to food when they are rendered sexual, both artists challenge the discourse that sought to discount their agency in sexual experience. For these two artists, sexuality was — and is, in the case of Schneemann — a central part of their identity. Yet the prevailing discourse of postwar femininity, and even to some extent of Second Wave Feminism, left very little room for women to assert their own sexuality. In creating works that challenge the dominance of men's sexual pleasure and the notion of women's passivity, both Wilke and Schneemann sought to liberate women's sexuality.

Conclusion: Historicizing Feminist Art

By looking at the history of women's art production in the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of food, we are able to see the great diversity that existed within women's art practices at the time. Feminist art of this period was not a singular and monolithic entity, but rather was comprised of various individual women's efforts based on their own experiences. Like the broader social and political movement, members of the Women's Art Movement embraced the multifaceted nature of feminist thought and activism that emerged during the era of Women's Liberation. Because there was room for variation and disagreement within feminism, and because feminism was understood to be highly personal, feminism and women's art was able to flourish, and women artists were able to break from the margins and into the center of the art world.

Given the extent to which women artists in the United States made considerable strides in terms of their artistic production and professionalization in the 1960s and 1970s, it is no surprise that *ARTnews* decided to dedicate an entire special edition to the successes of the Women's Art Movement in the fall of 1980. Yet the celebration of feminism victory in the art world and in the United States more generally would ultimately prove to be extremely premature, and much of the progress towards the goals of the Women's Liberation and Women's Art Movements would ultimately be undermined in the subsequent decades. Many artists and activists from this period look back upon the aims of "Second Wave Feminism" and view the movement's ultimate outcome as a failure, especially in light of how feminism has

shifted and changed over the past 40 years. As Lucy Lippard noted in 2012: “Today the notion of feminist community is far less powerful, more splintered — in part because of right-wing ascendancies, in part because postcolonial theory has highlighted the weaknesses of earlier ‘multiculturalism,’ and in part because the women’s movement did succeed in integrating women artists into the mainstream, a double-edged sword evident in the reactionary eighties.”⁶⁴³ In the intervening decades, the efforts and aspirations of feminists both within and beyond the art world during the 1960s and 1970s have been stifled and the narrative of their activism has been significantly undermined by contemporary perspectives on the role and status of feminism in American politics.

The 1980s and the 1990s ushered in a new understanding of the role and function of feminism within American society, and with this change came a re-historicizing of women’s activism in the previous decades. The shift from radical to cultural feminism and the eventual decline of “Second Wave” feminism in the 1980s and 1990s coupled with the rise of a new brand of cultural conservatism has tainted the ideals of feminism as espoused and practiced by women activists and artists during the 1960s and 1970s transformed feminism from a multifarious and multifaceted social and political movement into the problematically monolithic construct. As a result, the historicizing of the Women’s Art Movement has neglected to consider the diversity of feminist activism and thought that comprises the individual basis of the

⁶⁴³ Lucy Lippard, "Foreword: Going around in Circles," in *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (Los Angeles, CA: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011). 14.

works of women artists during the 1960s and 1970s. This dissertation thus serves to unsettle these common assumptions that feminist art is a singular movement comprised of a uniform style, demonstrating instead the variations that existed across women's art practices within a single class and racial group on a common theme that are the result of an individual woman or collective's engagement with feminism during this period.

The change in understanding of feminism in the 1980s and 1990s is the result of myriad factors, from both within and outside the feminist movement. The shifts in focus of the feminist movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s from radical feminism to "cultural feminism," on the one hand, functioned to alienate many of the women who had previously ardently supported the movement. As Ellen Willis noted in 1984: "I was a radical feminist activist in the late 1960s. Today I have the odd feeling that this period, so vivid to me, occurred fifty years ago, not a mere fifteen. Much of the early history of the women's liberation movement, and especially of radical feminism [...] has been lost, misunderstood, or distorted beyond recognition."⁶⁴⁴ Willis continues to assert that her brand of feminist radicalism has been subsumed by this new brand of cultural feminism which she describes as having the

primary goal of [...] freeing women from the imposition of 'male values,' and creating an alternative culture based on 'female values.' Cultural feminism is essentially a moral, countercultural movement aimed at redeeming its participants, while radical feminism began as a political movement to end male supremacy in all areas of social and

⁶⁴⁴ Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism," in *The 60s without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press in cooperation with Social Text, 1984). 91.

economic life, and rejected the whole idea of opposing male and female natures and values as a sexist idea, a basic part of what we were fighting.⁶⁴⁵

For Willis and many other women who had been involved with Radical Feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the new brand of feminism was anathema to their activism, and thus rendered many formerly active feminists disinclined to participate in the new form of the women's movement.

The most extreme iterations of cultural feminism, as Willis notes, frequently went full circle from being critiques of patriarchy to reaffirming women's "essential" and submissive qualities. Moreover, cultural feminists, unlike their predecessors, were dogmatic in the singularity of their approach to feminism. Willis writes:

In the late 1970s, cultural feminists' emphasis shifted from actual violence against women to representation of sexual violence in then media and then to pornography. Groups like Women Against Pornography and Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media adopted pornography as the quintessential symbol of a male sexuality assumed to be inherently violent and oppressive, then made that symbol the focus of a moral crusade reminiscent of the 19th-century social purity and temperance movements. Predictably, they have aimed their attack not only at male producers and consumers of porn, but at women who refuse to define lust as male or pornography as rape and insist without apology on their own sexual desires. While continuing to call itself radical feminist — indeed, claiming that it represents the only true feminist position — the antiporn movement has in effect collaborated with the right in pressuring women to conform to conventionally feminine attitudes.⁶⁴⁶

Cultural feminism, and the anti-pornography movement in particular thus served to alienate (formerly) sympathetic participants by asserting the singularity of

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. 91.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid. 113.

their approach as **the** only understanding of feminism, while at the same time promoting an understanding of womanhood that is defined by an almost Victorian moralism. As such, the efforts to unsettle femininity from the implications of women's subservience and sexual passivity were undermined by a new, dogmatic approach to feminism.

While the ascent of cultural feminism functioned to undermine the progress of women's activism from within the movement, external factors also contributed to the re-evaluation of feminism in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular the ascent of a new brand of conservatism in the Reagan/Bush era and the anti-feminist rhetoric espoused by figures from Phyllis Schlafly to Rush Limbaugh also functioned to taint feminism, rendering its adherents fanatical pariahs, and thus limiting its appeal to younger generations. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, considerable effort was made by high-profile conservatives to paint feminists as "irrational extremists who want far more than equal rights."⁶⁴⁷ Their campaign was to malign feminism through exposing it as an anti-family, anti-capitalist authoritarian regime. As Toril Moi notes, these campaigns were relatively effective in shifting the public perception of feminism because

However objectionable they may be, Robertson's and Limbaugh's vociferous rantings outline three fundamental ideas about feminism that have become virtual commonplaces across the political spectrum today: (1) feminists hate men and consider all women innocent victims of male power; (2) feminists are particularly dogmatic, inflexible, intolerant, and incapable of questioning their own assumptions; and (3) since every sensible person is in favor of equality and justice for

⁶⁴⁷ Toril Moi, "'I'm Not a Feminist but...': How Feminism Became the F-Word," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (Oct. 2006). 1736.

women, feminists are just a bunch of fanatics, a lunatic fringe, an extremist, power-hungry minority whose ideas do not merit serious assessment.⁶⁴⁸

Both Limbaugh and Robertson, like Schlafly before them, had a vast media platform and a captive audience through which they were able to publicly denigrate feminism.

This conservative rhetoric combined with the internal disjunctions within feminism as a social and political movement functioned to undermine the diversity of feminist thinking and activism that had flourished in the previous decades, rendering the term synonymous with a monolithic and dogmatic ideology wherein there is only one way to be a feminist and to participate is to admit to a whole host of socially reprehensible ideas. As such, it became considerably fashionable amongst scholars, artists, and activists to distance themselves from feminism in the discussion of their work. As recently as 2006, art historian Carol Armstrong has included equivocating language about feminism in a book celebrating the 30th anniversary of Linda Nochlin's challenge to the masculine hegemony of Western art history. In the preface to *Women Artists at the Millenium*, Armstrong writes: "Sometimes I consider myself a feminist, but I have to admit, sometimes I don't; especially when feminism entails orthodoxy, the espousal of permanent victimhood, or gender self-hatred — feminist misogyny is just as prevalent as Jewish anti-semitism, for example; and I for one am a girl who has

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid. 1737.

always liked being a girl.”⁶⁴⁹ Armstrong’s comment reflects the reluctance that has become prevalent in academia and American culture more generally to align oneself with feminism for fear of being affiliated with militant misogyny that have risen to prominence since the Reagan/Bush era.

That Armstrong included this sentiment in her introduction to *Women Artists at the Millennium* demonstrates the extent to which this negative conception of feminism has impacted how women’s art has been understood more generally. While the work is not solely about women’s art production during the era of “Second Wave” feminism — the volume includes chapters on works from Agnes Martin’s work in the 1950s to Mona Hatoum’s practice in the 1990s — the text directly refers to the legacy of the Women’s Art Movement, seeking to consider the implications of feminism’s impact on women’s art production more wholly. As such, Armstrong’s attempts to temper her association with feminism is emblematic of a larger scholarly trend wherein the relationship between feminism and women’s art is understood to be tenuous or even tangential given the emergent negative connotations of the word. Scholars have, therefore, largely abandoned the history of feminist activism in considering women’s art production during the 1960s and 1970s, neglecting the vast pluralism of the social and political movement for women’s liberation during that period.

In addition to neglecting the specificity of feminism in historicizing women’s art practices from the 1960s and 1970s, scholars have also largely neglected the

⁶⁴⁹ Carol M. Armstrong and M. Catherine de Zegher, *Women Artists at the Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006). xi.

particular context of this period in terms of the political and economic climate of the art world, failing to recognize the substantial differences in the art world today from that of 40 and 50 years ago. This view generally neglects to consider the profound impact of the “Culture Wars” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Philip Yenawine notes:

Without question, the culture wars of the late 1980s and ‘90s changed the context in which the art world operates, particularly in its relationship to government. A vocal, organized, and motivated body politic, rooted in fundamentalist religious beliefs, hauled art from the margins of society, where it thrived, to the center stage of American culture, where it appeared bizarre and even ludicrous. Conservative cultural critics, given an opening by the movement’s religious leaders, bashed everything from elitism to declining moral standards. As both preachers and politicians decried some art as sinful, blasphemous, or unpatriotic, they sought to reduce or eliminate public funding for art in general.⁶⁵⁰

Questions of the function, form, and content of art and the position of the arts in American culture were of considerable consideration in the 1980s and 1990s. Controversies raged over public art and publically funded works, ranging from the removal of Richard Serra’s minimalist *Titled Arc* (1981) from the Federal Plaza in New York City to the political debates over the content of artists’ work including but not limited to Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs, Andreas Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (1989) and the thwarted funding of artists like Karen Finley and Holly Hughes, who ultimately sued the National Endowment of the Arts. In the latter cases, the idea of national patronage combined with a conservative rhetoric that frequently challenged

⁶⁵⁰ Philip Yenawine, "Introduction: But What Has Changed?," in *Art Matters : How the Culture Wars Changed America*, ed. Julie Ault, et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1999). 9.

the validity of these works as “art” to lead to a new level of public scrutiny for what makes art worthy of public attention.

Yet at the same time as the validity of artworks were being challenged by American politicians, artists were developing and implementing new and varied forms of artistic expression at a remarkable rate. Yenawine writes: “The culture wars happened in the midst of unprecedented artistic activity, a part of which as an expanding spectrum of artists whose works were exhibited. New sites, new media, new venues, and new issues abounded, many of them reacting to what had come before.”⁶⁵¹ Among these new forms of art practice were ideas such as appropriation art — wherein artists like Barbara Krueger and Sherrie Levine repurposed existing artistic imagery, ultimately challenging the cultural value placed on master works and iconic imagery — and relational art, a term coined by critic Nicolas Bourriaud to describe works that function around the interaction of individuals in the space of a gallery, such as when Rikrit Tiravanija served viewers cooked pad thai as a part of his aptly titled work *pad thai* at the Paula Allen Gallery in 1990. These new forms of practices served to challenge the idea of the art object and had a significant impact on how we consider the role of the artist in creating an artwork.

These shifting conceptions of the nature of art and the status of the artist have greatly informed recent scholarship on postmodern art, even though such these understandings are the result of relatively recent social and political phenomena. While there are similarities in content or gesture — for example, there is a clear

⁶⁵¹ Ibid. 9.

similarity between the efforts of appropriation artists and that of Pop artists in the 1960s to replicate existing imagery within an artist's work — the aim and understanding of these practices are quite distinct, and are highly informed by the historical context of each movement. The lack of historicity in scholarship on postmodern and contemporary art has had profound implications for the misunderstanding of feminist art from the 1960s and 1970s, with perhaps the most glaring case of this being the debates over the interpretation of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*.

A significant amount of criticism of Chicago's work, as previously noted, has focused less on the impact that the work had on the museum going public, favoring instead to malign the work for Chicago's essentialist and exclusionary subject-matter and for Chicago's employment of volunteer labor, yet given the historical context of the work, such criticism is largely unfounded. As noted in Chapter 3, questions of authorship and the use of volunteer labor have raged for decades. Many critics have lambasted Chicago for considering herself the author of the work despite her use of a large volunteer workforce, but these criticisms are more the result of art world debates during the 1980s and 1990s around the nature of authorship and originality in the Culture Wars than any legitimate desire to exploit to labor of others on the part of Chicago. As I have argued in Chapter 3, for Chicago, the use of volunteer labor was understood as a form of feminist collective art activism on the part of both Chicago and the participants of The Dinner Party project akin to other forms of socially engaged and feminist art in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus the anachronistic approach

employed in these criticisms of Chicago's use of labor neglect an essential component of the work's creation and impact.

Similarly, Chicago's *The Dinner Party* has also frequently been maligned because of the shifting understandings of feminism in the decades since she created the work. The content of *The Dinner Party* is emblematic of 1970s feminism, and as a result is heavily gynocentric and myopic in its approach to the study of women's history. As previously noted, the "guests" presented at Chicago's table are primarily white, middle or upper class women, and the representation of womanhood Chicago has chosen for the basis of her work is highly essentialist. With the emergence of new forms of gender theory — most notably Judith Butler's conception of gender as a performative category separate from biology and the emergence of post-colonial and intersectional approaches to feminism — and the shifting cultural understandings of feminism more broadly, *The Dinner Party* has been criticized for Chicago's emphasis on the female biology as the essential quality of womanhood and the systematic exclusion of women of color.⁶⁵² While these criticisms are completely valid — Chicago did do these things in creating the work — they employ a similar anachronistic understanding of the nature of Chicago's feminism and her intention behind the project.

While Chicago's work is still an extant monument to which different viewers will have their own reactions on the basis of their own individual experiences and understanding of feminism, in historicizing the work, it is important to understand that

⁶⁵² Jane F. Gerhard, *The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013). 247.

Chicago's approach to her subject matter was intended to inform viewers and establish a collective feminist history, not to alienate viewers. By approaching her work, and the others that have comprised this dissertation, through the historically specific lens of 1960s and 1970s feminism in the United States the piece can be understood as emblematic of a particular moment in American art and women's history. Recognizing that feminism of this period is quite dissimilar from the stereotypes that subsequent decades have anachronistically employed to dismiss it, we can thus appreciate how and why these women artists engaged with the discourse and activism of Women's Liberation in their work and what they sought to achieve through their art practices.

Moreover, by considering the specific ways in which women artists engaged with feminism in developing their practices, engaging in art activism, and establishing new collaborations and alternative art institutions, we can better understand how women artists emerged from the shadows of the great men artists to significant critical acclaim in the course of two decades. We can further comprehend how these efforts functioned to systematically support women in the arts and thus increase their public visibility. With this knowledge we can then begin to assess to what degree the political and artistic climates of the following two decades functioned to undermine the career successes of women in the arts, and how women artists negotiate their identity as a part of their professionalization.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to demystify some of these problematic assumptions about the nature of feminism and of socially engaged art in the 1960s and 1970s in order to illustrate the ways in which feminist art in the United States during

this period was a highly diverse and complicated entity. I argue that feminist art at this time was neither a style nor a product of a zeitgeist, but instead involved a deeply personal approach to the subject of gender inequality. By comparing the works of two different artists on a similar theme in each chapter, I have illustrated the diversity of expression that existed amongst artists who engaged with feminism during this period. Moreover, using such a comparison, I have conveyed how factors such as age, geography, and personal history have informed how different women artists have engaged with issues of gender in their work. Furthermore, I have examined how women's art activism fits into the larger picture of the "Women's Liberation Movement" and socially engaged art practices in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, I have illuminated central aspects of feminist art that have been overlooked by conventional narratives of women's art production in order to challenge the problematic assumptions employed in previous works on the history of feminist art.

Given that feminism and women's art are continuing phenomena, which develop and transform with every generation, understanding how women artists used their practices and their collective action in order to agitate for greater representation in the art world and for societal change more broadly in a given moment can help us to understand how art activism can succeed and fail in the present moment. Recognizing the success of the Women's Art Movement in the 1970s, we can understand how the formation of new institutions, the emphasis of collaboration and cooperation in women's art practices, and the function of art as a form of consciousness raising can

work to bring about substantial change. As Lucy Lippard writes: “As we recall these histories, we are still going around in circles — an image not of futility but of a future in which the work we have done will be useful for the next generations of women, providing a scaffolding for the next Woman’s Building.”⁶⁵³ Indeed, although the progress of women’s social and political equality and their advancement within the art world is more circular than linear, Lippard is correct in her assertion that if we truly look at the history of women’s art activism in previous generations, then we can learn from their efforts to further the cause for subsequent generations.

⁶⁵³ Lippard, "Foreword: Going around in Circles." 15.

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Appendix

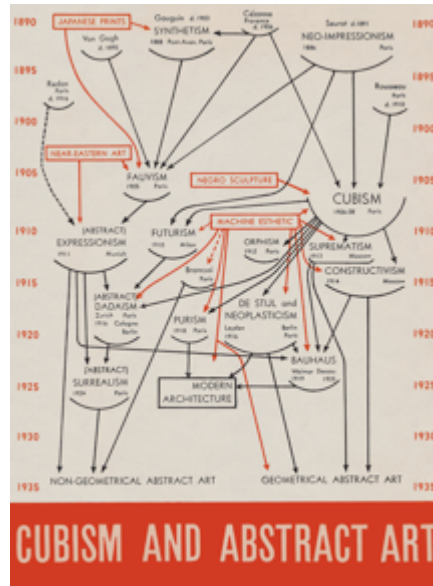


Figure 1: Alfred H. Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936)



Figure 2: Women at the Miss America Protest in 1968



Figure 3: Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.), Chicago Coven Protest of the Financial Building, 1970



Figure 4: Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.), "Confront the Whoremakers" pamphlet, 1969



Figure 5: Charles Brittin, *Peace Tower Installation in Los Angeles* (1966)



Figure 6: Lucy Lippard in Art Worker's Coalition Action



Figure 7: ARIADNE: A Social Art Network, *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977)

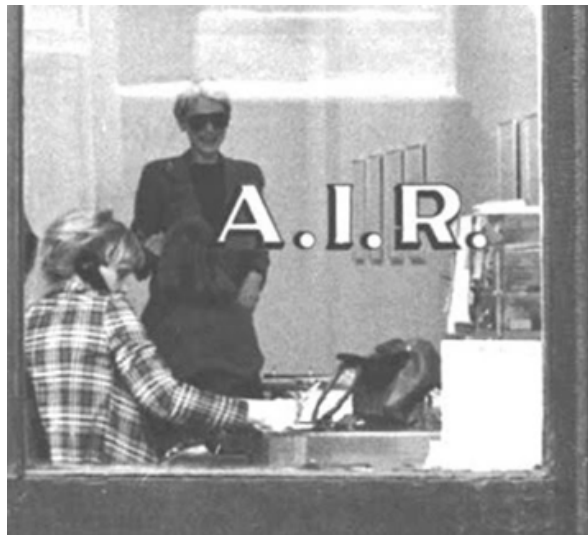


Figure 8: A.I.R. Gallery circa. 1970



Figure 9: Mary McNally, *Kate Millett's Naked Lady on the Roof of the Spring Street Location* [of the LA Woman's Building] (1980)



Figure 10: Mary Beth Edelson, *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* (1972)



Figure 11: Harmony Hammond, *Floor Piece V* (1973)



Figure 12: Alison Knowles, *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* (1962)



Figure 13: Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975)



Figure 14: Alison Knowles, *Bean Rolls* (1963)

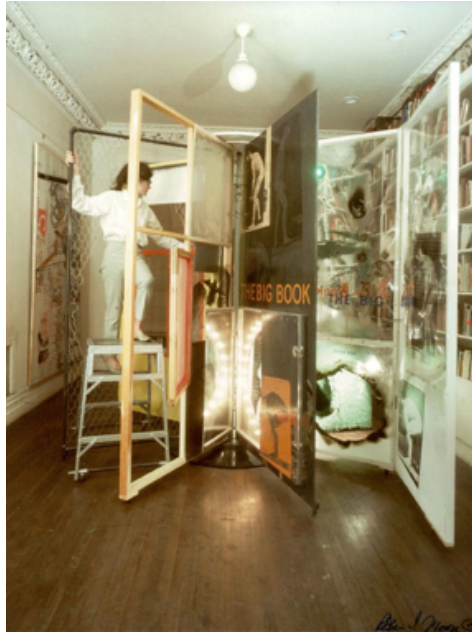


Figure 15: Alison Knowles, *The Big Book* (1980)



Figure 16: Alison Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch* (1967)

I WISH TO BECOME A GOURMET. I DO THIS BECAUSE I FEEL IT WILL ENHANCE ME AS A HUMAN BEING. THAT IS, IT WILL BETTER ME AND MAKE ME A MORE VALUABLE PERSON TO MYSELF AND OTHERS. I WILL BE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE GOOD THINGS, THE THINGS THAT MAKE LIFE PLEASANT. THE GOURMET IS A SENSITIVE PERSON; HE KNOWS GOOD FROM BAD AND FROM NOTHING-SPECIAL. QUALITY. ANIMALS EAT TO SATISFY THEIR HUNGER, TO STAY ALIVE. AS PEOPLE WE DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT. I MEAN WE DON'T HAVE TO DO ONLY THAT. WE CAN MAKE EATING INTO AN EXPERIENCE. WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ANY MORE ABOUT WHERE THE NEXT MEAL WILL COME FROM--FAR FROM IT! IF ANYTHING, WE EAT TOO MUCH. THERE'S FOOD ALL AROUND. THE QUESTION IS HOW TO PICK AND CHOOSE--TO KNOW WHAT'S REALLY GOOD. . . .

Figure 17: Martha Rosler, *Postcard #1* from *A Budding Gourmet* (1974)



Figure 18: Martha Rosler, *The East is Red, The West is Bending* (1977)



Figure 19: Martha Rosler, *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977)



Figure 20: Martha Rosler, *Global Taste: A Meal in Three Courses* (1985)

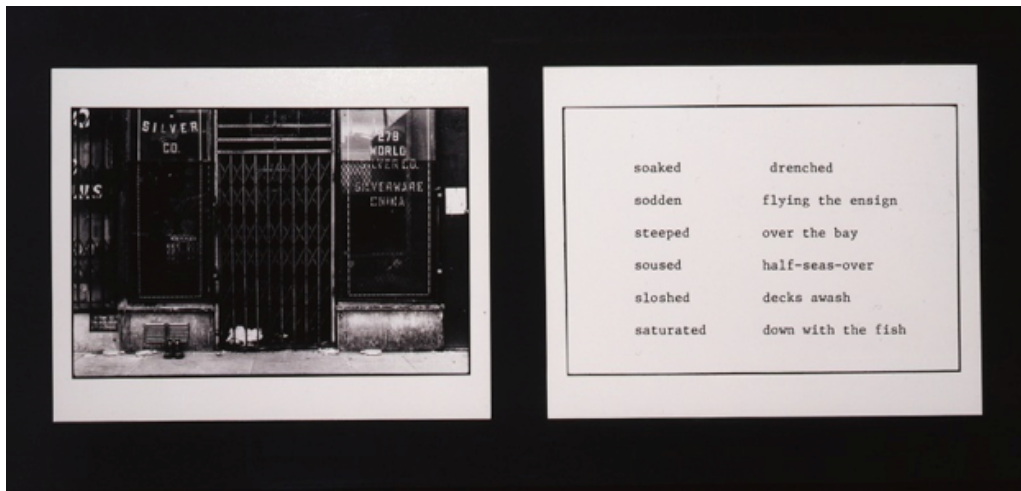


Figure 21: Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-5)



Figure 22: Martha Rosler, *Cargo Cult* from the series *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain* (1966-72)



Figure 23: Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home, House Beautiful* (1967-72)



Figure 24: Protest signs at the Women's Strike for Equality 1970



Figure 25: Judy Chicago, *Rainbow Pickett* (1965)

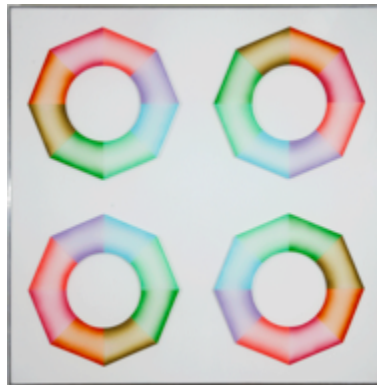


Figure 26: Judy Chicago, *Pasadena Lifesavers #4* (1969-70)

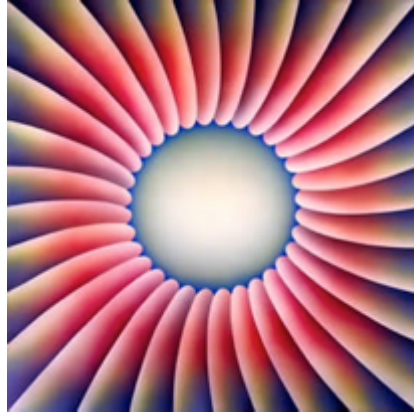


Figure 27: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower* (1973)



Figure 28: Judy Chicago, Installation view of Entry Banners from *The Dinner Party* (1974-9)




Figures 29: Judy Chicago, Installation views of *The Dinner Party* (1974-9)



Figures 30: Judy Chicago, Installation views of *The Dinner Party* (1974-9)



Figures 31: Judy Chicago, Installation views of *The Dinner Party* (1974-9)



READY TO ORDER?

We are six feminist women artists. Between us, we have waitressed 16 1/2 years. Because of abusive treatment on the job, all but one of us have found other work. On April 25 - May 1, 1978, we will waitress again, as a group of artists, "The Waitresses." Through our performances, we will make known our experiences as women, as artists, as waitresses.

Janie Wilkerson, Denise Yañez, Anne Gaudin, Leslie Bell, Jeryl Allyn, Paul Nicklaus

SCHEDULED MENU OF EVENTS

We continue to serve the public, this time offering a new kind of menu. Our latest includes art performances by "The Waitresses." In our exploration of waitressing, we have located these key issues: stereotype, i.e., waitress as mother/hourly, servant/ slave, and sex object; women and money; women and work; and sexual harassment. Each performance will focus on one issue while naturally touching upon all of them. To provide a fuller experience during this week, we've included various workshops, panels, and discussions. We hope you'll enjoy our palatable assortment of events. Bon appetit!

Tuesday, April 25

Some Histories of Women Working in Los Angeles \$2.00

7:30 p.m. Panel Presentation and Discussion
Bernice Martinez, Chairperson, Association of Black Feminists, Focus: Black Women; Maria Vandelover, Focus: Latina Women; Belko Sosa, Member, Asian Women's Rap Group, Focus: Asian Women; Dorothy Giddin, Secretary, 20 years, Focus: Office Workers; Alicia Mabeck, Spanish Translation.

Guerrilla Performance I
"The Waitresses"
Improvises waitress actions performed in various restaurants around L.A. to establish a sense of unity among us and our sister workers.

Miércoles 26 de

Discriminación Laboral en Los Angeles
7:30 p.m. Presentación del panel y discusión.
Shirley Johnson, Tema: Mujeres Negras; Maria Vandelover, Tema: Mujeres Chinas; Bernice Martinez de Livingston, Representantes de Fat Underground; Alicia Health Care, 133 Blvd. Gaudin, L.A., 90210

Segunda Actuación de Guerrilla
THE WAITRESSES are a group of Los Angeles artists who create performance events addressing the issues of money, class, service jobs and sexual harassment on the job. The group was formed in 1977 by students in the Feminist Studio Workshop at the WOMEN'S BUILDING.

Figure 32: The Waitresses, Program for *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 33: The Waitresses, *Beauty is Money* from the performance series *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 34: The Waitresses, *The Fashion Show* from the performance series *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 35: The Waitresses, *Wonder Waitress* from the performance series *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 36: The Waitresses, *You're All Wet - A Waitress Fantasy Come True* from the performance series *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 37: The Waitresses, *The Great Goddess Diana* from the performance series *Ready to Order?* (1978)



Figure 38: Susan Frazier, Vicky Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch, *Nurturant Kitchen* from the installation *Womanhouse* (1972)



Figure 39: Feminist Art Workers, *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-81)



Figures 40: Feminist Art Program, *Womanhouse* (installation view) (1972)



Figures 41: Feminist Art Program, *Womanhouse* (installation view) (1972)



Figures 42: Feminist Art Program, *Womanhouse* (installation view) (1972)



Figures 43: Susan Frazier, Vicky Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch, *Nurturant Kitchen* from the installation *Womanhouse* (1972)



Figures 44: Susan Frazier, Vicky Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch, *Nurturant Kitchen* from the installation *Womanhouse* (1972)



Figure 45: Feminist Art Workers, *This Ain't No Heavy Breathing* (1978)



Figure 46: Feminist Art Workers, *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-81)



Figure 47: Feminist Art Workers, *Heaven or Hell?* (1977-81)



Figure 48: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972)



Figure 49: Martha Rosler, *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977)



Figure 50: Marilyn Monroe in Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* (1959)



Figure 51: British model Twiggy in 1967



Figure 52: Eleanor Antin, *Blood of a Poet Box* (1965-8)



Figure 53: Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots* (1971-3)



Figure 54: Eleanor Antin, *Representational Painting* (1971)



Figure 55: Eleanor Antin, *King of Solana Beach* (1974)



Figure 56: Eleanor Antin, *Eight New York Women* (1970)



Figure 57: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath* (1862)



Figure 58: Amedeo Modigliani, *Reclining Nude* (1917)



Figure 59: Eleanor Antin, *Eight Temptations* (1972)

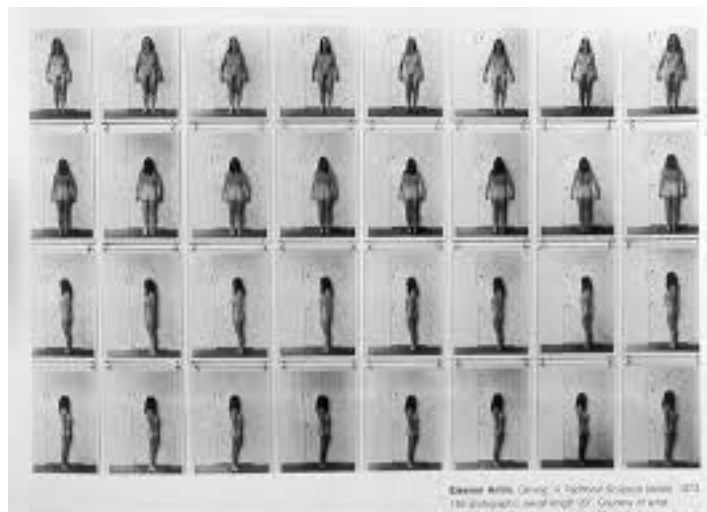


Figure 60: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972)



Figure 61: *Achetez des Pommes*, Late-Nineteenth Century French Advertisement



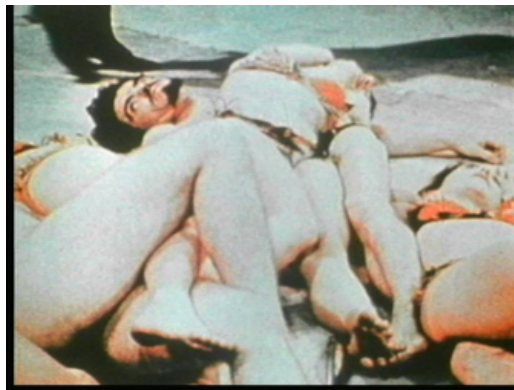
Figure 62: Linda Nochlin, *Achetez des Bananes* (1972)



Figures 63: Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy* (1964)



Figures 64: Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy* (1964)



Figures 65: Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy* (1964)



Figures 66: Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy* (1964)



Figure 67: Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1962)



Figure 68: Carolee Schneemann, *Fuses* (1965)



Figure 69: Hannah Wilke, *Early Box and Six Phallic and Excremental Sculptures* (1960-3)



Figure 70: Hannah Wilke, *Untitled* (1974-7)

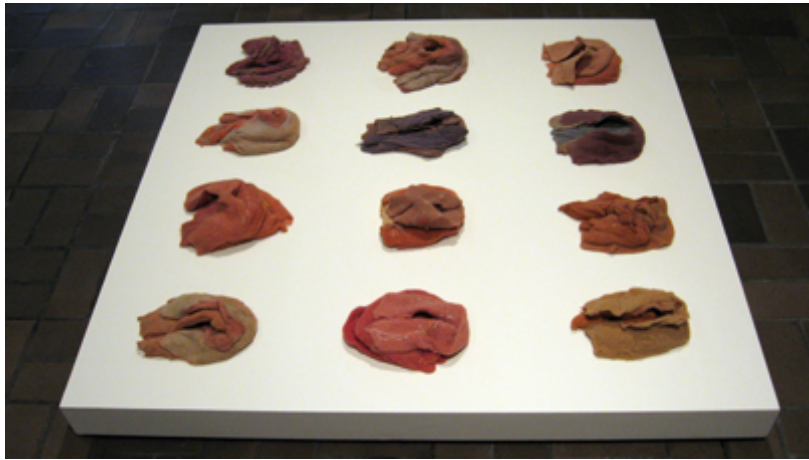


Figure 71: Hannah Wilke, *Laundry Lint (C.O. 's)* (1974)



Figure 72: Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1975)



Figure 73: Hannah Wilke, *Through the Large Glass* (1976)



Figure 74: Hannah Wilke, *Fork and Spoon* (1974-5)



Figure 75: Hannah Wilke, *Sweet Sixteen* (1977)



Figure 76: Hannah Wilke, *I Object: Memoirs of a Sugargiver* (1977-8)



Figure 77: Hannah Wilke, *Super-t-art* (1974)