

Anne Gauldin and Cheri Gaulke, *The Malta Project*, 1978. Performance at prehistoric temples in Malta. Photograph by Mario Damato. © Anne Gauldin and Cheri Gaulke.



THE RITUAL BODY AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: THE PERFORMANCE ART OF THE WOMAN'S BUILDING

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of Renee Edgington and Matt Francis.

Prologue

I would like to open this paper by recounting an experience that I had on the summer solstice of 1992, when I still lived in San Diego, the southernmost city in California. Because I had developed a local reputation as an art historian concerned with feminist issues, I was invited to a gathering of the Southern California chapter of the Women's Caucus for Art for the occasion of the solstice. Although the invitation did say something to the effect of a ritual dance, I couldn't quite believe (or didn't want to believe) that I was consciously entering into a part of feminism that I thought was best forgotten. Suffice it to say that I arrived at the gathering, which took place at a mountain adjacent to the east county home of one of the caucus members and found myself hiking up a mountain in order to take part in a "healing ritual." After burning sage, invoking the spirits of the four compass points and participating in a "sacred" dance that the teacher had learned from an African dancer "with a really cute butt," I hiked back down the mountain, eager to get away from a group of women who I believed were victims of a deluded consciousness. At the time that I participated in this ritual, I had very little familiarity with the performance art done under the umbrella of the Woman's Building. Had I been more familiar with the work, I would have realized that the ritual in which I participated was typical of the sort of performances produced by the students and

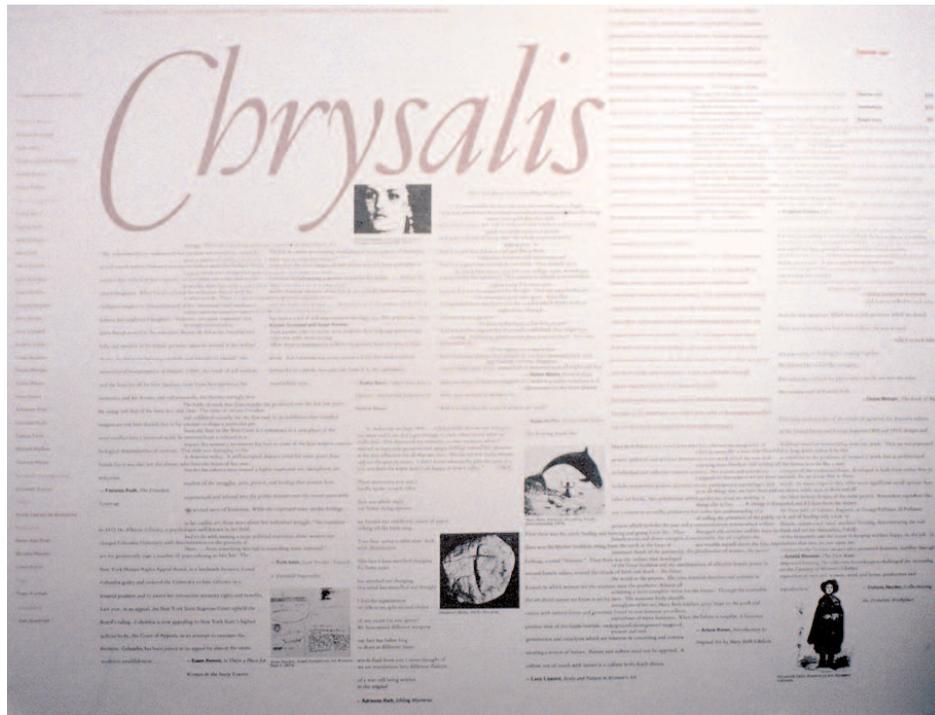
faculty of the Woman's Building, and that often this sort of ritual was either a part or a precursor of feminist activism. Suzanne Lacy, who is best known for her public performance events organized to protest violence against women, often did private ritualistic performances in tandem with the larger event. This was the case with *She Who Would Fly*, a totemic performance done at the same time as *Three Weeks in May* (1977), a performance event designed to increase awareness of rape.¹ Cheri Gaulke, who helped found two activist performance collectives (The Feminist Art Workers and the Sisters Of Survival/S.O.S), early in her career performed a private birthday ritual derived from Native American tradition and engaged in an elaborate Goddess-worshipping ceremony on the island of Malta.² Anne Gaudin, who along with Jerri Allyn founded The Waitresses, a performance collective of present and past waitresses who did impromptu skits at local restaurants about the plight of real waitresses, created a number of ritualistic performances, including *The Malta Project* (with Gaulke, 1978) and a private healing ritual of her own, which she did with her mother. Many of the women who participated in the 1992 mountaintop ritual had come of age in the mid-seventies. At the very least, they would have been familiar with the performance work done at the Woman's Building, and some of them had probably seen it firsthand. For these women, a ritualistic ceremony honoring a matriarchal tradition was the first step in creating a woman's culture from which they could act politically.

Not being familiar with either the Woman's Building or the performance art done by the faculty and staff of the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) at the time, it seemed to me that taking recourse in feminist spirituality was an apolitical gesture that accomplished very little. One of my close friends and mentors was the late artist and AIDS activist Renee Edgington, who founded the Los Angeles-based collective Powers of Desire. Along with Edgington, I believed that the most effective type of activist art was that which challenged hegemonic and oppressive representations and policies with a knowledgeable and calculated re-deployment of oppressive imagery. I was very influenced by the writing of Douglas Crimp and believed that his arguments about the most effective forms of AIDS activist art were equally relevant for other political art forms, including that with a feminist agenda. Following Crimp's lead, I was suspicious of any art that attempted to "transcend" the conditions under which it was made. What I experienced on the mountain that night seemed very far removed from the sort of political intervention in which I was interested. I believed that very little was accomplished that night, other than that the participants felt better because they had done something that cemented their feminist bond and reinforced their feminist principles. Several months later, however, I was invited to protest the Tailhook scandal in front of the Miramar Air Base by the same group of women who had been dancing on top of the mountain. Clearly there was some sort of connection between the political—i.e., public—event that took place at Miramar and the private ritual on the mountain, if for no other reason than many of the same women were involved in both. I do remember

being somewhat surprised that there was any connection at all. Nevertheless, I was not convinced that feminist spirituality was necessary or even desirable for feminist political action.

I had plenty of company in my skepticism. By the mid-eighties and early nineties, many feminists had become dissatisfied with the solutions offered by cultural feminism—a separate sphere for women in which everyone participated in a matriarchal society of sharing and understanding. Cultural feminists, with their Wiccan ceremonies and images of the goddess, were perceived by critics from a variety of disciplines as undermining the feminist movement by trading in actions for activism. In her history of radical feminism, for example, Alice Echols suggests that cultural feminism derailed the more politically engaged project of radical feminism.³ The problem with cultural feminism, according to Echols, was that it "turned its attention away from opposing male supremacy to creating a female counterculture," which often degenerated from the laudable goal of empowering women into a facile valorization of one's personal lifestyle choices, bathed in a hazy glow of Goddess-inflected spirituality.⁴ In an extremely influential article, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making," Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis argue that a truly radical art is not one that glorifies an "essential female art power" through recourse to female spirituality, but rather one that understands the "question of representation as a political question . . . an understanding of how women are constituted through social practices in culture."⁵ Somewhat surprisingly, given their concern with a critique of representation, Barry and Flitterman-Lewis are particularly critical of seventies activist art, writing that "these more militant forms of feminist art such as agitprop, body-art, and ritualized violence, can produce immediate results by allowing the expression of rage, for example, or by focusing on a particular event or aspect of women's oppression. But these results may be short-lived, as in the case of heightened activism resulting from an issue-oriented art work."⁶

In defense of Barry and Flitterman-Lewis, the writings of so-called cultural feminists were often long on poetic metaphor and short on concise political analysis. Much of the language employed by cultural feminist writers such as Mary Daly, Charlene Spretnak, and Susan Griffin, writers who published frequently in *Chrysalis*, the magazine of women's art and culture published at the Woman's Building, was generally a rather uncritical representation of stereotypical qualities associated with (white) women. Nevertheless, they represented an important early attempt to articulate an alternative mode of language and representation that was non-patriarchal in its orientation. Even more to the point, feminist spirituality was an important tool for the Woman's Building artists, who used the imagery and ideas of cultural feminism in order to articulate an alternative representational vocabulary that successfully challenged existing hegemonic representational codes. At the Woman's Building, feminist spirituality worked as a catalyst between the personal experiences shared in



Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, *Chrysalis* poster. Two color offset printing, 23" x 17½". Woman's Building Image Archive, Otis College of Art and Design.

consciousness-raising sessions and the political art that was produced from them, transforming what would have been fruitless sessions of complaining into an enterprise with mythical underpinnings.⁷ Such spirituality legitimated the connection between the body and the mind and stressed that the experiences of the sensual, sensate body were as important as those of the sentient mind. It provided a ready-made cache of alternative images of women, images that seemed to fly in the face of patriarchal stereotypes of women. This was particularly important in the case of activist performance art, which was often conceived with the idea that at some point the media would show up and the piece would be on the evening news. Finally, feminist spirituality, with its mythological pantheon of goddesses, fairies and witches, had particular relevance for a group of artists familiar with the history of Western art and mythology. It is little wonder that Suzanne Lacy—student of Judy Chicago and Arlene Raven, faculty member of the FSW, and teacher of Cheri Gaulke, Anne Gauldin, and Jerri Allyn—found Daly's *Beyond God the Father* to be a profoundly influential book.⁸ In Southern California at least, feminist spirituality allowed rather than prevented feminist performance artists to articulate a radical reading of the female body as the basis for a feminist consciousness that in turn produced a (feminist) model for an engaged form of art making. Far from derailing activist art, feminist spirituality made it possible.

The cultural feminism of the Woman's Building could be characterized (to borrow the words of Teresa de Lauretis) as more a project “than a description of existent reality.... This may be utopian, idealist, perhaps misguided or wishful thinking, it may be a project one does not want to be a part of, but it is not essentialist as is the belief in a God-given or otherwise immutable nature of woman.”⁹ Writing approximately nine years after the publication of “Textual Strategies,” de Lauretis was able to be more charitable about cultural feminism without sacrificing any of her theoretical rigor. Along these same lines, I would propose that the activist performance art of the Woman's Building could be re-read through the lens of postmodern theories of representation and language and not be found to be wanting. In looking back at these activist performances from the seventies, as I propose to do for the remainder of this essay, I am struck by the similarities between this work, which was generally collaborative, colorful, and very public, and the artwork generated from AIDS activism, particularly that of Edgington and the two collectives that she founded along with her partner Matt Francis: Powers of Desire and Clean Needles Now. In comparing AIDS activist work with the activist performance of the Woman's Building, I would like to argue that the visual language employed by these earlier artists worked to re-present oppressive images in the contemporary media, and, what is more, re-presented them in such a way as to implicate the viewer in their critique of the existing social structures. I would also argue that the artists of the Woman's Building did in fact challenge oppressive social structures through the deployment of their own sexualized and particular bodies, and that the presence of these “bodies” was crucial to the success and meaning of these performances. Finally, I want to demonstrate that the so-called essentialism seen in the work of these artists was in fact a late twentieth-century response to the hegemonic representations of women in the media, rather than a refusal to engage critically with the manner in which women were constructed in and by patriarchal society.

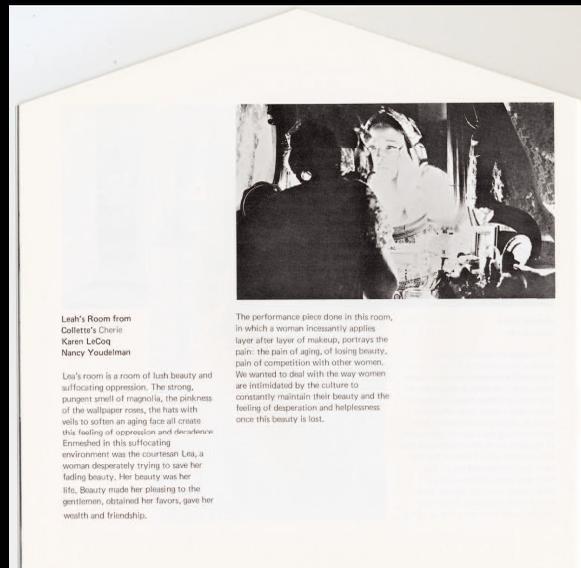
I. The Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse*

Woman's Building members spawned a number of interesting and provocative performances during the late seventies and early eighties. In this paper, due to the limitations of space, I propose to look at three of them: *Ablutions* (1972), performed by Lacy, Chicago, Sandra Orgel, and Aviva Rahmani; *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977), a performance event organized by Lacy and Leslie Labowitz; and *Ready To Order?* (1978) a week-long performance event performed by The Waitresses. I have chosen these three performances because they span a particularly fertile time for feminist performance art in Southern California: from the period immediately before the Woman's Building opened to the period just prior to the Reagan-era eighties, a period that represents the last utopian gasp of this particular form of art activism. Before discussing these three performances, I think it is necessary to give some background on the Feminist Art Program (FAP) and its first performance event, which took place at *Womanhouse*. The



Top: *Womanhouse*, 1972. Exhibition catalog cover featuring Miriam Schapiro (L) and Judy Chicago (R) sitting on the steps of *Womanhouse*. © California Institute of the Arts Archives.

Right: *Womanhouse*, 1972. Exhibition catalog page picturing *Leah's Room* from *Colette's Chéri* by Karen LeCoq and Nancy Youdelman. © California Institute of the Arts Archives.



Leah's Room from *Colette's Chéri*
Karen LeCoq
Nancy Youdelman

Leah's room is a room of lush beauty and suffocating oppression. The strong, pungent smell of magnolia, the pinkness of the wallpaper roses, the hats with veils to soften an aging face all create this feeling of oppression and bewilderment. Enmeshed in this suffocating environment was the courtesan Leah, a woman desperately trying to save her fading beauty. Her beauty was her life. Beauty made her pleasing to the gentlemen, obtained her favors, gave her wealth and friendship.

The performance piece done in this room, in which a woman incessantly applies layer after layer of makeup, portrays the pain: the pain of aging, of losing beauty, pain of competition with other women. We wanted to deal with the way women are intimidated by the culture to constantly maintain their beauty and the feeling of desperation and helplessness once this beauty is lost.

Feminist Art Program, which Chicago founded, was based on a radically different approach to teaching art, an approach that would carry over to the FSW at the Woman's Building. This approach was premised upon consciousness-raising sessions, a tool used nationally in the women's movement to help women realize that their feelings of worthlessness and depression stemmed from the unequal social conditions in which they lived. "Consciousness raising," according to Faith Wilding, "helped us to discover the commonality of our experiences as women, and to analyze how we had been conditioned and formed on the basis of our gender....As each woman spoke it became apparent that what had seemed to be purely 'personal' experiences were actually shared by all the other women; we were discovering a common oppression based on our gender, which was defining our roles and identities as women."¹⁰ The consciousness-raising sessions became the basis for much of the art made by the students of the FAP who explored topics that had previously been off-limits, such as women's roles, women's sexuality, and violence against women. When the FAP moved from Fresno State to California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (who was on the faculty at CalArts) decided to begin the FAP with an intense, collaborative project that would involve all of the students and would use the consciousness-raising methodology developed by Chicago. The result was *Womanhouse*, an abandoned mansion in residential Hollywood transformed into a collaborative installation that dealt with the ambivalent relationship that women had with the home. In addition to the installations, *Womanhouse* featured evening performances done by the students of the FAP. These performances, which are documented in Johanna Demetrakas's 1972 film *Womanhouse*, were for the most part fairly straightforward explorations of women's roles in patriarchal society; the two exceptions were *Waiting* and *The Birth Trilogy*.¹¹

Although many of the performances done for *Womanhouse* explored the feelings of entrapment and oppression that women felt when forced to confine their activities to the home and child rearing, only one of the performances actually dealt with rape. In the piece *Three Women*, Shawnee Wollenmann's character, Rainbow, describes to her friends a gang rape. A free and easy spirit, Rainbow finds herself at a party where she quickly becomes separated from her "old man." After doing a large amount of drugs, Rainbow fell in with a group of men, who eventually gang-raped her, or, as she put it, "took turns balling me."¹² *Three Women* was developed from the role-playing exercises that Chicago had her students engage in; the events narrated in the piece had some basis in truth but had not actually happened to the participants. Nevertheless, Rainbow's testimony, which Demetrakas included uncut in her documentary film, is absolutely chilling. Speaking in a high, rather vacuous voice, Wollenmann began the narrative by talking about how her old man had given her this marvelous jacket, a jacket that felt so wonderful that she had worn it to the party on the night that she was gang-raped. When she came to after the rape, all of her clothes, including the jacket, were gone. She never saw either the jacket or her old man again. "It was really a

bummer man...but, you gotta stay above it, man, you gotta have love, or you can really get brung down...."¹³

The notion that this young woman's body was violated by a group of hippie men who were supposedly more enlightened than their fathers is fairly disturbing. What is even more disturbing is the matter-of-fact manner in which Wollenmann's character accepts the circumstances of the rape. All of her feelings of loss and betrayal are projected onto the jacket, which she seems more upset about losing than she does her "old man." Rainbow's narrative would have been difficult to hear even if Wollenmann had simply stood in the middle of the *Womanhouse* living room and recounted the story in her normal voice. Instead, she was part of a group of three women, all of whom were lounging on brightly patterned pillows and rugs while wearing wildly colorful clothing and wigs and speaking in exaggerated voices. Wollenmann's costume was particularly colorful: a rainbow-colored Afro wig, copious sparkle make-up, flowing robes, and plenty of heavy jewelry. On the one hand, the presence of Wollenmann's corporeal body, or at least the record of the presence of her corporeal body in Demetrakas's film, serves to connect her experience to the Real in a way that no depiction of rape, no matter how graphic, can accomplish. Body art, or the presence of the body in the art, "proposes," as Amelia Jones suggests,

proximity: as a critique exploring rather than repudiating the seductions of late capitalism through specific bodies that force the spectator's own narcissistic self-containment to account (through its reversibility) for the "other" of the artist as the artist accounts for her or his interpreters by performing specific bodies that force the interpreter to acknowledge her or his implication in determining the meanings of the artist/work of art.¹⁴

Jones's notion of the "proximity" of the performing body is certainly relevant to my own experience viewing the performance. The first time that I saw Rainbow in Demetrakas's film, I found myself wondering whether or not the performing body recorded on film had actually experienced the sexual violation that she was narrating. Identifying with the character of Rainbow through the shared corporeal experience of having a woman's body that is equally vulnerable to masculine attack, I found myself feeling increasingly un-comfortable as Rainbow's tale of a hippie love fest turned into a story of a gang rape. My feeling of discomfort was enhanced by the off-camera sounds of the audience, whose initial laughter upon encountering Wollenmann's over-the-top character had changed to an eerie silence by the time she had finished mourning the loss of the magical jacket.



Three Women, a performance by Shawnee Wollerman (front), Nancy Youdelman (rear) and Jan Oxenberg (not pictured), at *Womanhouse*, 1972. Silver gelatin print, 10" x 8". Photograph by Dori Atlantis.



Ablutions, performance by Judy Chicago, Suzanne Lacy, Sandra Orgel, and Aviva Rashmani, 1972. Venice, CA. © Judy Chicago, courtesy Through the Flower Archives.

II. Ablutions

On the other hand, the almost clown-like make-up worn by the three women, an effect exacerbated, for me at least, by the overall reddish tone of the film, served to counteract the proximity that the “real” presence that their performing bodies invited. Wollenmann’s exaggerated persona and her breathy, little-girl voice reinforced the notion that this was role playing, and that at the end of the performance piece everything would be all right and Wollenmann would revert back to her identity as a feminist artist who was too canny to end up in the same situation as *Rainbow*. After *Woman-house* closed, Chicago continued to meet with the students in the FAP’s Performance Workshop and explore imagery and ideas through consciousness-raising. The performance that resulted from these meetings was *Ablutions*, which was performed late in the spring of 1972, just before Chicago left CalArts in order to found the Woman’s

Building. *Ablutions* was conceived as a means of speaking out against rape and its devastating effects on women. Perhaps it was the desire to present a less mediated representation of the Real rape that caused Chicago and her students—Lacy, Rahmani, Orgel, Jan Lester, and Jan Oxenberg—to seek out women who had actually experienced rape and tape-record their testimonials. According to Lacy, the initial conception of *Ablutions* was to simply seat an audience in a darkened room and play these testimonials.¹⁵ While this idea might not seem terribly radical today, when it is fairly common to turn on the television and catch celebrities and non-celebrities alike testifying to their experience of rape without shame or fear of reprisal, in the seventies nobody even acknowledged that rape existed, let alone talked about it. Lacy recalled that in order to assemble the stories of women who had been raped, she and Chicago had to “literally . . . go down dark streets and end up in strange places in the middle of the night, tape recording these stories.”¹⁶

In making the decision to include accounts of rape that were connected in some way to the “Real” experience of that rape, Chicago and her students were on to something. One of the themes that appears frequently in the writings of Arlene Raven and other “cultural” feminists is the importance of naming, of having the power to tell one’s own story. “The testimony of rape. . . the telling is exorcism, a ritual of healing through repetition. . . .”¹⁷ Raven’s words would later be echoed by Trinh T. Minh-ha, who suggested that “the story of marginality” can only be untold by the storyteller, who speaks to the tale rather than about it.¹⁸ Telling the tale, rather than giving the history, is a crucial strategy for those on the margins who have not traditionally had access to the Lacanian realm of the Symbolic and representation. As drama critic Jeanie Forte has argued,

Actual women speaking their personal experience create dissonance with their representation, Woman, throwing that fictional category into relief and question. Shock waves are set up from within the signification process itself, resonating to provide an awareness of the phallogentricity of our signifying systems and the culturally determined otherness of women.¹⁹

Raven rather astutely recognized the way in which the violence of a supposedly neutral rhetoric in fact upholds the gender hierarchy between men and women and is imbricated within actual violence against women. While it is probably too simplistic to argue, as Susan Brownmiller does, that “rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear,” rape does function, as de Lauretis has suggested, as the sign of a power struggle to maintain, rather than disrupt, a certain kind of social order. Noting that “gender-neutral expressions” such as spousal abuse or marital violence imply that both spouses engage equally in battering each other, de Lauretis argues that even as those terms “purport to remain

innocent of the ideology or of the rhetoric of violence, they cannot avoid and indeed purposefully engage in the violence of rhetoric."²⁰

III. The Ideology of Rape

One of the stories that ended up on the final version of the tape was that of Raven, who, inspired by her work with Chicago on *Ablutions*, would help to found the Woman's Building the following year.

Judy Chicago was making the *Ablutions* tape when I visited her in the spring of 1972. I had been raped three days before, and I was experiencing the shock, panic, self-loathing and despair of the raped victim, because I felt so helpless all I could do was lie there and cry. But I rose on the third day anyway to pursue my survival and future, guided by my woman's intuition that they could be divined. . . by flying three thousand miles to perform a ritual of speaking pain and of initiation with a woman I had met, powerfully, only once.²¹

For Raven, participation in the ritual performance *Ablutions* was an important milestone in overcoming the terror and horror of the violation of her body. It was also the means by which Raven cast off her previous identity and became reborn into the feminist community. Sometime during that first meeting, Chicago suggested that she take the surname Raven as a sign of her new identity, just as Chicago's decision to "divest" herself of the name Gerowitz signified her own new feminist identity.²² Comparing *Ablutions* to a "Wiccan response to the devil's warlocks," Raven credited the ritual performance with breaking the spell cast by the dark ritual of rape. *Ablutions* gave Raven the means by which to exorcise the rape, to name the violence that was done to her and therefore take control of that discourse:

As I broke silence, I entered at the same time the healing ritual/performance of *Ablutions*. I see this act, in retrospect, and symbolically, as initiation into the circle of women with whom I would bond over and over to create the feminist institutions, educational methods, criticism, publications, relationships, and the art about which I am now writing.²³

Telling the tale is clearly therapeutic. Is it enough, however, to simply re-tell the tale, to re-present it from the vantage point of the experiential body? Or does one run the risk of merely opening new opportunities for (self) surveillance, new conditions under which female bodies can and must be disciplined? Rape testimonials, to which the plethora of examples from tabloid television and gossip magazines attests, do not

necessarily alter the circumstance by which rape is perceived. Rather, these testimonials serve to reinforce the notion that no woman without the protection of a benevolent male is safe in any situation. Given the ubiquity of the myth/ideology of rape, it was, and is, absolutely imperative to counter that myth, to provide an alternative position from which the story of rape can be retold. The problem that plagued early feminists was how to do that retelling without simply reifying an ideology of the victim or sensationalizing the act of rape. As Hannah Feldman puts it:

In some ways, it would seem that to name rape, and those who perpetrate it within a culture which condones it, reinforces that same culture's allowance, even prescription, that gender difference be inscribed in women's experience, thereby labeling them already raped or inherently rapable. To some degree, marking the commonness of rape would seem to enhance the culture of fear in which women live.²⁴

Feldman's cautionary words against an unproblematic embrace of visibility politics are well taken. However, the alternative—to not speak at all, is equally unfeasible. Arguing that "to name oneself as a rape survivor works to empower the speaker who, by rejecting the silence that usually accompanies rape, reclaims, in part, the subjectivity lost in such a violation," Feldman suggests that the testimonial, the act of enunciation from the "contaminated position of the survivor," provides a real and viable option to the traditional account of rape permitted under the existing legal systems, an account that essentially tells the story of the rapist's desire.²⁵

Although Feldman doesn't elaborate on how one can enunciate from "the contaminated position of the survivor," it seems that in order to do so the woman who is raped must somehow "speak" her bodily pain against the rhetoric of violence, the patriarchal ideology of which rape is a violent manifestation. Apparently, the young women who conceived of and performed *Ablutions* came to the same conclusion as Feldman, and realized that, while the testimonial of the experience of rape was important, the method of enunciation was equally so. Gradually, the students in Chicago's performance workshop elaborated upon the initial conception, transforming *Ablutions* into a complex ritual of corporeal actions/representations that took place against the backdrop of the rape testimonials. The final performance, according to Chicago, explored the themes of "binding, like Chinese foot-binding, brutalization, immersion, body anxiety, and entrapment" through a series of images and actions that were indissoluble from the corporeal and gendered bodies of the performers.²⁶ In choosing to explore ritualistic, mythological images of female bodily pain in tandem with the testimonies of rape, Chicago and her students found a way to enunciate from the position of the victimized body without reinforcing the ideology of rape.

IV. Images of (Not) Rape

Unlike the performance *Three Women, Ablutions*, which was performed only once, was never filmed. What remains of the performance for viewers are four photographs, reproduced in Chicago's autobiography *Through the Flower*, which depict first the empty performance space with three metal tubs and broken eggshells scattered around the room, then the performers bathing and binding each other while a fourth woman, Lacy, nails kidneys to a wall. In the last image, three bodies are left bound and wrapped in the space, which has now been connected by a giant spider web of string. As two other photographs of this performance, one published in *The Power of Feminist Art* and the other published in *TDR/The Drama Review* make clear, the spinster was Suzanne Lacy, who is shown holding a very large coil of twine.²⁷ In addition to these photographs, which by virtue of being taken in black and white have an antique appearance that belies their relatively contemporaneous status, there also exists Chicago's published description of the piece, included in the appendix of *Through the Flower*. This description adds the sequential narrative that the iconicity of the photographs elides. In a space filled with broken eggs and piles of rope, kidneys, and chains, three women took turns immersing themselves in bathtubs that contained viscous substances such as eggs and mud, while a nude woman was bound/spun to a chair. At the conclusion of the performance, Lacy and her accomplice left the bound, wrapped women, while Raven's "I felt so helpless," played again and again. *Ablutions* had a profound impact on everyone who was there. In Lacy's words:

[T]he audience was stunned. . . . Apparently, several people just sort of gagged and ran for the door at the end of it. They had never been exposed—not only with that information at that level of detail, but to women's perspective on it. And the rage and the intensity of victimization that was in the piece. In fact, a couple of the women who were in the piece, one of them. . . . had an emotional reaction to allowing herself to participate from the vantage point of the victim.²⁸

What is striking about *Ablutions* is the way in which it dealt with the discursive and representational structures that surrounded the ideology of rape. Significantly, *Ablutions* provided an opportunity for the first time for the raped body to speak, both at the level of signification (the taped voices) and the pre-symbolic, or semiotic level (the "bathed" and bound bodies of the two nude women, the kidneys on the wall). What made *Ablutions* so compelling at the time that it was performed was its intertwining of interrelated, but different discourses—the recounting of the rape using the symbolic language of the Father, and the experience of the rape from the perspective of the bodies of the bathed and bound women. By the end of the performance, the audience was brought into an uncomfortable proximity (to borrow Jones's term) with rape, a

proximity that forced them to share a corporeal connection with those whose bodily space had been egregiously violated by a patriarchal code of sexual behavior. Certainly the intended message behind *Ablutions* was the oppressiveness of rape; all of the images invoked through the agency of the performing bodies of Chicago and her students were meant to reinforce how dehumanizing and demoralizing the experience of rape was for all women. And yet, the photographs of the event, taken by Lloyd Hamrol, Chicago's then-husband and a well-known Los Angeles sculptor, read differently than Chicago and her students perhaps intended them to. The broken eggshells, meant to symbolize the violation of subjectivity, look like flower petals or cotton balls in both the tiny reproductions in *Through the Flower* and the full-page reproduction in *The Power of Feminist Art*. Meanwhile, the bloody kidneys nailed to the wall, deprived in the black-and-white photographs of the visceral qualities of smell and texture, look like a garland of dark shapes. Finally, the bound women, wrapped head-to-toe in white bandages and suspended in an ethereal web of white twine, seem somehow embryonic and promising, caterpillars waiting to emerge rather than mortally wounded butterflies.

V. An Hysterical Poetics

My reading of *Ablutions*, based on photographs taken after the fact, would seem to contradict the intended meaning of the performance. I would argue, however, that since the meaning of the image often exceeds the stated intentions of its maker, that they compliment that meaning. It seems to me that the strength of *Ablutions* lies in the decision to employ corporeal imagery that simultaneously referenced mythological constructions of femininity and challenged those constructions. Mieke Bal, in her analysis of Rembrandt's *The Suicide of Lucretia* (1666), argues that traditional narratives of rape shape or construct a meaning that often obliterates the violence of the original act. Narratives such as that of Wollenmann, no matter how compelling, ultimately serve to distance the woman hearing the narrative from the actual violence of the act. In the social construction of rape, which Bal rightly characterizes as a public, semiotic act,²⁹ rape is a type of murder/suicide, in which the victim somehow commits the act herself. Bal is therefore particularly interested in Rembrandt's *The Suicide of Lucretia* because it does not permit "Brutus"—i.e., patriarchal discourse—to discursively structure this rape. In Rembrandt's version, Lucretia is shown at the moment of her suicide, her dress stained with blood, almost as though the corporeal traces of her body's violation had oozed out onto the surface of the painting despite her efforts to contain it. Bal, clearly indebted to the work of Julia Kristeva, characterizes this corporeal ooze as an hysterical poetics, a way that the body can speak both visually (pre-linguistically) and verbally. Speaking from the position of the hysterical semiotic is a means by which the violence of rhetoric (narrative) can be countered. Thus, the testimony of rape must in some way originate, as Feldman suggested above, from the pre-linguistic body that experienced that violence. The excretory and excreting bodies in *Ablutions* gave a corporeal

dimension to the taped testimonials. What is more, they created a gap between the violent rhetoric—the testimonials—and the visual images. This disjunction is even more pronounced today, due to the fact that what remains of the performance is little more than black-and-white photographs, through which, I have argued, those bodies speak differently yet again. The performing bodies were not merely acting out the narratives of rape heard over the speakers that night; they were narrating a different experience from a corporeal position and substituting a rebirth of subjectivity for the murder/denial of rape.

It was particularly significant, therefore, that *Ablutions*, which was performed at the studio of Laddie Dill in Venice, California, took place in an art context rather than on the street or in someone's home. The mythology of high art and great masters, firmly in place since the Renaissance, has always worked to deny the way in which art and artists are imbricated by and within patriarchal ideology and narratives. The history of art is full of images of rape told from the point of view of the man, from Rubens's *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (1615–18), Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women*, and the plethora of images of rape/conquest in modern painting to the rape/conquest scene in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, a paean to the generative power of male genius. Bal's reading of Rembrandt, a name which has become so completely equated with high art that it has been used to sell an expensive brand of toothpaste, is an attempt to free his work from the rhetorical straightjacket of narrative, which, although not commensurate with its image, nevertheless supersedes the meaning of that image. Bal makes a compelling case for reading Rembrandt's images differently than the traditional rhetoric of art history might allow; it is doubtful, however, that she could have made an equally compelling case for many other artists.

The decision by Chicago and her students to use rape imagery that originated in an "hysterical poetics" of the body, rather than traditional masculinist codes of representation, was significant for several reasons. First, it revealed, as Bal would say, the rhetoric of violence, the semiotic and corporeal violation that is rape. It demonstrated that rape was in fact a violation on two levels: a crime against a woman's subjective identity and a violation of her corporeal integrity. Second, by virtue of taking place within a high art context, it challenged the very discourse that worked to make rape into rhetoric, to deny the semiotic violence that rape in fact represents. *Ablutions*, in a sense, was one possible answer to Linda Nochlin's famous question "Why have there been no great women artists?" Why indeed, when to be an artist meant participating in an ideological construct that denied female subjectivity, an identity that even the most persistent female artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Mary Cassatt were unable to transcend.³⁰ Art, and art history, have been gendered male. As Griselda Pollock has pointed out: "Women have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structural sexism of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy. What we learn about the world and its

peoples is ideologically patterned in conformity with the social order within which it is produced."³¹

The women who conceived of *Ablutions* realized this and attempted to interrupt the traditional art historical discourse in which women were turned into the sign Woman and deprived of their own subjectivity. *Ablutions* actually contained many of the elements that make up art's more traditional re-presentation of rape: mythological imagery, female bodies, and rhetorical narrative. What is missing is the ideological sleight of hand that causes these elements to come together to form one (true) meaning. With *Ablutions* these elements remained disjunctive, contradicting rather than complimenting one another. It is little wonder that the audience didn't quite know what to say when confronted by the performance.

VI. Suzanne Lacy

Most of the women involved in *Ablutions*, including Chicago, chose not to continue with performance art. The one exception was Lacy, who has not only continued organizing performances up until today, but has done so on a much more public scale. After graduating from the FAP with an MFA in art, Lacy was invited to join the faculty of the FSW at the Woman's Building. This association with a fledgling feminist art institution gave Lacy two things that she desperately needed in order to realize her ambitious performances: a group of committed students and colleagues who were able to help and collaborate with her and friendly institutional support. Along with her main collaborator, Leslie Labowitz, Lacy staged three major performances that dealt with the issue of sexual violence against women: *Three Weeks in May* (1977), *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977), and *Take Back the Night* (1978). Together, Lacy and Labowitz also founded Ariadne: A Social Art Network, a collaborative organization that served as an umbrella for facilitating feminist activist performance such as The Incest Awareness Project, performed by their students. Of the three, *In Mourning and In Rage*, conceived and executed on the heels of *Three Weeks in May* and performed quickly as a knee-jerk reaction to the increasingly salacious media coverage of the Hillside Stranglers and their victims, best epitomizes the fusion of the mythological and the media-friendly that Lacy and Labowitz sought in their public performances. The image of the seven-foot female mourners draped in black is one that continues to have currency even today. At the same time, this image is suggestive, as Lacy and Labowitz intended it to be, of pre-historic, matrilineal societies in which female mourners performed a powerful act of societal healing that served to strengthen the community, a community that Lacy and Labowitz began to build with *Three Weeks in May*. *In Mourning and In Rage* can best be understood by reading it through the lens of *Three Weeks in May*, a three-week performance event that began on May 4, 1977. In late 1977, as word of the predatory Hillside Stranglers (so named because they left the often tortured, raped, and strangled bodies of their female victims on the sides of the hills in Los Angeles), Lacy and Labowitz must

have realized that counteracting the public rhetoric of rape was not something that could be accomplished with any one action, even one as inclusive and far-reaching as *Three Weeks in May*. *In Mourning and In Rage* was in many ways a condensed version of the earlier performance, designed to hammer home the message about violence against women first articulated in May of 1977.

VII. Three Weeks in May

For *Three Weeks in May*, Lacy installed two large maps in the City Mall, located in downtown Los Angeles not far from City Hall. On one map, she recorded the location of rapes reported to the police by stamping a large red stencil "RAPE" on the site where it occurred. On the other map, she pinpointed the location of rape crisis centers, police precincts, and battered women's shelters. In addition to the maps, she organized a series of events, including three public performances orchestrated by Labowitz, and a self-defense demonstration. The performance was tremendously successful as a piece of activist art, which is the way it has been presented in recent accounts of the piece.³² What is often overlooked is that *Three Weeks in May* was not simply an activist event in which artists participated, but was instead a carefully orchestrated performance designed to facilitate interaction between various groups and coalitions in order to forge a new dialogue/discourse about rape. *Three Weeks in May* caused elected public officials, activists from the feminist community, media reporters, office workers, and feminist artists—five very different groups of people—to rub shoulders. Lacy could very well have had a disaster on her hands if she had not had an extremely well organized vision of the entire event prior to the opening press conference on May 4. Fortunately, she was organized. She also had an art event that in many ways was difficult for the general public and critics alike to conceive of as art. For Lacy, who has always been extremely concerned with expressing an aesthetic vision in her work, the inability of critics to fully comprehend her performance has been frustrating. According to Lacy:

Three Weeks in May was explained by critics as being about rape (which it was), but never analyzed in terms of its structure—simultaneous juxtaposition of art and non-art activities within an extended time frame, taking place within the context of popular culture. Women's art is a complex integration of content and structure, and neither can be overlooked for a real critical understanding of it.³³

VIII. Allan Kaprow

The inability of critics and audience alike to recognize the aesthetic elements of this performance can largely be traced to the influence of Allan Kaprow, rather than Judy Chicago and Arlene Raven, on Lacy's work. Lacy completed her MFA under the auspices of the FAP at CalArts where Kaprow was a member of the faculty. Faced with the

choice of studying with John Baldessari (the Conceptual artist who trained David Salle and Eric Fischl) or Kaprow, Lacy chose Kaprow, because she believed that his teaching methods and philosophy were much more compatible with feminism. Kaprow's ideas about dissolving the boundary between art and life became for Lacy the means by which she could unite avant-garde art practice with her desire for feminist activism:

Kaprow's project, to investigate the border between art and life, was a theoretical substratum for feminist artists wishing to unite art, the conditions of women's lives, and social change. . . . If art could be an articulation of real time and images collapsed into a frame of daily life, as Kaprow argued, then political art need not only be an art of symbolic action, but might include actual action. . . . At the intersection of the questions Kaprow asked of the artist's role and the challenges Judy Chicago raised to the relevance of female experience, there grew the possibility of feminist activist art.³⁴

It was due to Kaprow's influence that Lacy had taken her work outside of the gallery, in the process making art out of non-art events such as self-defense demonstrations and press conferences. Given that Kaprow's aesthetic could be characterized as a non-aesthetic, one could argue that the failure of critics and audience to recognize the art elements of *Three Weeks in May* was symptomatic of its success as a piece of work that effectively bridged the gap between art and life. As I have suggested in my reading of *Ablutions*, however, countering an art/art history discourse was hardly an empty exercise. For *In Mourning and In Rage*, Lacy, along with Labowitz, staged a spectacle whose primary effect was visual and which therefore had a much stronger aesthetic impact than the earlier performance. At the same time, performed as it was in a public forum (rather than the private artist's studio that was the site of *Ablutions*), it was able to obtain the same high visibility as *Three Weeks in May*.

IX. In Mourning and In Rage

On the morning of December 13, 1977, approximately sixty women met to form a motorcade, which followed—funeral style—a black hearse that pulled up before Los Angeles City Hall. Nine women mourners, six-foot-tall actresses wearing heels and headdresses in order to bring their height up to seven feet, alighted from the hearse and moved to the steps of City Hall, where they spoke one at a time in memory of all the violence that had been done to women. One by one, the women, against the backdrop of City Hall and a banner that read "In Memory of Our Sisters, Women Fight Back," stepped up to the microphone. As each woman spoke, the chorus of mourners chanted "In memory of our sisters, we fight back." Finally, a tenth woman, dressed in red, approached the microphone, crying out "I am here for the rage of all women; I am here for women

fighting back.”³⁵ *In Mourning and In Rage* concluded with a statement from the artists, a presentation of demands for self-defense and emergency listing of rape hotline numbers, and speeches by local politicians, including Los Angeles City Council-member Pat Russell. In spite of a very loud airplane, folk singer Holly Near sang an a cappella song composed especially for the event, and the Los Angeles City Council Members promised to support the demands of the feminist organizations that collaborated with Lacy and Labowitz on the piece. Six television channels covered the performance, and Lacy and Labowitz were asked to appear on several talk shows.

X. Images of Feminist Anger

In Mourning and In Rage was documented both photographically and in a video made by L.A. Women's Video Center for the Woman's Building. The photographs of the event, which have been reproduced in a number of publications, including *The Power of Feminist Art*, always show the black-clad women with their foot-high headdresses and covered faces lined up in an atavistic row that projects female anger and empowerment. This effect is actually enhanced in the video presentation of the event, shown in conjunction with the photographic documentation in the 1998 exhibition *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979*, at Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, which includes a very determined Lacy helping the women to alight from the hearse, and emphasizes the absolute silence of the women, broken only by their short speech at the microphone. According to Lacy and Labowitz, the performance sought to transform the archetypal image of the female mourner in order to create “a public ritual for women to share their rage and grief, to transform the individual struggle to comprehend these assaults into a collective statement.”³⁶ In all likelihood, the powerful images of the female mourners had less of an effect on the immediate conditions under which the brutal rape and murder of young women was being reported than did the presence of Councilmember Russell, the support of the City Council, and the extensive media coverage.³⁷

It is these images of black-clad women standing silently in an accusatory line, however, that have continued to resonate in the collective imaginations of feminist activists. Women who are not even familiar with *In Mourning and In Rage* and who would have been too young to have participated in the performance in any case have used the imagery of the performance again and again. In 1989, I participated in a similar performance organized by two pro-choice activists that protested the first Bush administration's attempts to undermine *Roe v. Wade*. As various feminist activists, including attorney Gloria Allred, spoke about the necessity of keeping abortion safe and legal, I, along with a number of other women clad in black, filed silently on to the platform of the Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park, San Diego, in a silent and symbolic protest against the numbers of women who died due to botched abortions. Although minus the headdresses, we created a powerful image as we stood in the late spring

sunlight of Southern California. This mythological “performance” of which I was a part has resonated with me in a way that my other activist actions have not. I somehow felt myself to be a part of something bigger, as though I had tapped into a part of my female essence that was atavistic and ancient. I realize, of course, that my response was predicated not so much on the fact that I had “discovered” a part of myself that was rooted in the chaos of the collective unconscious, but rather that the ideological forces that addressed me in contemporary Western society were powerfully cemented by an ordinary mythology peopled with archetypal characters. Nevertheless, I think that my response to participating in this type of performance, while certainly not universal, testifies to the effect made possible by the strategic deployment of mythological and ritual imagery. Lacy's and Labowitz's decision to use imagery from feminist mythology was a strategic attempt to provide an image that would resonate in a positive way with those who watched the nightly news. At the same time, I'm not sure that they would have characterized it as merely strategic. Both Lacy and Labowitz had a powerful belief in the sustaining power of a mythology that was feminist in origin.

XI. Feminist Mythology

Lacy's engagement with this spirituality, as mentioned above, began with her association with the Woman's Building. Although Lacy's work in the seventies became increasingly public, she continued to do private, ritualistic performances along the line of *Ablutions*. In *Three Weeks in May*, Lacy had kept the public event—the stamping of the maps—separate from the private ritual—*She Who Would Fly*—out of the belief that a ritualistic performance would not be accessible to a broader audience. Labowitz, on the other hand, had always used ritualistic forms in her work, although it was not until she arrived in Los Angeles that she realized the significance of her imagery: “When I came back to L.A. and met Suzanne Lacy it was like ‘Aaaaahhh!’ Suddenly all of this stuff started to make sense. I learned a tremendous amount about feminism and the roots of my imagery. We were able to combine . . . my direct public approach and her roots in feminist ritual and performance, making it into the form that we are doing now.”³⁸

The resonant image of black-clad women originated, therefore, not with Lacy and her cool, Kaprowesque aesthetic (at least for her public performances) but with Labowitz, whose career had taken a radically different direction than that of Lacy. Labowitz went the traditional route, getting a BFA and an MFA from Otis Art Institute in 1972. At Otis, Labowitz was exposed to the formalist Conceptual art that was currently in fashion in the art world. Although Judy Chicago had arrived in California and started the FAP, Labowitz herself remained largely uninterested. “I really was one of these typical female art students who had a lot of male friends, who talked about ideas with men, who looked very masculine in the sense of the way everyone dressed kind of . . . neutral and not very feminine. Although I had long hair.”³⁹

Labowitz did do one performance that anticipated her later feminist work

while still in graduate school. In *Menstruation Wait*, Labowitz sat at Otis for several days and waited for her menstrual period. The performance was over when her period began. Although *Menstruation Wait* (1972) conceptually and structurally had a lot in common with Happenings and Fluxus-inspired Actions, its external content, as well as its emphasis on the female body, made it very controversial and Labowitz was almost kicked out of school. Ironically, Labowitz, who was married to a German artist, applied for a Fulbright Fellowship in order to execute another *Menstruation Wait* in Düsseldorf, West Germany. Based on that performance, Labowitz became the first woman at Otis to be awarded a Fulbright.⁴⁰ In Germany, Labowitz executed another *Menstruation Wait* in the entrance hall of the art academy in Düsseldorf in 1972. The hostile and/or puzzled reaction of the audience taught Labowitz that “the expression of women’s experience was not acceptable even in art.”⁴¹ Labowitz did find a nascent feminist community with a strong pro-Marxist stance in Germany in 1972. Influenced by the Marxism of her fellow German feminists, Labowitz’s subsequent performances were designed to politicize their participants and their audiences. “The performances would work on the level of public ritual, uniting participants and a mass audience in a spiritual bond that creates community by politicizing its members.”⁴²

XII. Joseph Beuys

Although Labowitz was involved with the German feminists, it was her shaman/teacher, Joseph Beuys, who had the most influence on the fusion of aesthetics and politics that characterized her mature work. In the ruins of postwar Germany, Beuys emerged as an artist of international reputation who became famous for his explorations of German mythology and magic. Prior to his appointment at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf in 1961, Beuys had led a rather quixotic life, running away from home as a teenager in order to join the circus and learn performing tricks, and then joining Hitler’s Luftwaffe at the age of nineteen. Beuys claimed to have been shot down over the Crimea in 1943 and rescued by nomadic Tartars, who covered him in animal felt and fat in order to raise his body temperature. In 1947, he enrolled in the Düsseldorf Art Academy. In 1955, he disappeared from Düsseldorf in order to work in the fields, reappearing at the end of the fifties with a series of drawings. In 1961, he was appointed professor of monumental sculpture at the Kunstakademie; he was fired from his post at approximately the same time that Labowitz arrived in Germany. In the performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, done in conjunction with his first one-person exhibition in 1965 at the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, Beuys covered his head with honey and gold pigment, tied a steel sole to his right foot and a felt sole to his left, and spent the next three hours whispering explanations to a dead hare that he held cradled in his arms, a hermeneutic and shamanistic performance designed to suggest the creative mystery of the artistic process.

Beuys’s shamanism was particularly appealing to Labowitz because of its

political dimensions. After performing an art action on July 20, 1964, (the anniversary of a failed assassination attempt against Hitler) in Aachen, West Germany, that caused right-wing students to attack him, Beuys became increasingly political, founding the German Student Party in 1967, and the Organization for Direct Democracy in 1970. His art actions became increasingly politicized. At the international Documenta 6 exhibition in 1977, he established a Free International University that included discussions on topics such as nuclear energy and equal rights for women. From her mentor, Labowitz learned that political art could be made more powerful through a skillful deployment of imagery. Because she was a woman working in the United States (a nation of media images that seeks to appropriate all histories yet remains curiously devoid of its own) rather than a man working in Germany (a nation that is perhaps overly obsessed with its own mythology), Labowitz took the role of shaman-behind-the-scenes, organizing but not participating in her performance events.⁴³ Prior to doing *In Mourning and In Rage*, Labowitz had done several performances in which the black-clad women had made an appearance, including a German performance, entitled *Paragraph 218*, against an anti-abortion proposal and her four part-performance *Myths of Rape*, done in conjunction with Lacy’s *Three Weeks in May*.⁴⁴ *In Mourning and In Rage*, a performance that has been appropriated and re-appropriated for feminist actions, could be considered to be the penultimate expression of Labowitz’s use of mytho-political imagery: an imagery that simultaneously appealed to the late-twentieth-century Los Angeles media and yet managed to suggest a time that was far removed from the context in which it had recently appeared.

XIII. The Effectiveness of Political Art

On the day following *In Mourning and In Rage*, the LAPD found the body of yet another woman who had fallen victim to the Hillside Stranglers. *In Mourning and In Rage* might have been successful as a performance event designed to enhance media awareness. It was not successful, however, in preventing yet another brutal torture, rape, and murder of a woman. *In Mourning and In Rage* had sought to change the parameters of our understanding of rape and the patriarchal ideology that shored it up. The seven-foot mourners had thus attempted to place the rape/murders perpetrated by the Hillside Stranglers into a larger context of societal misogyny and violence against women. The fact that a woman was raped/murdered during the evening following the performance is not so much an indication of Lacy’s and Labowitz’s failure to use performance as a vehicle for change as it was a sign of the profoundly misogynist nature of patriarchal society. In the media coverage surrounding the Hillside Stranglers, the women who fell victim to these predatory men had become little more than sexualized bodies who were (stupidly) in the wrong place at the wrong time: *all* women were potential victims, but sexual women were more likely to fall victim than those women that controlled their sexuality. *In Mourning and In Rage* might have been deemed (and certainly has been



Powers of Desire, *Jillin Jackin' Off Jacket*, modeled by Renee Edgington, ca. 1992-1995. Performance group founded by Renee Edgington and Matt Francis. Photograph by Powers of Desire.

canonized) as an unequivocal success in the annals of feminist activist practice. To a large extent it was. Nevertheless, it leaves open the question, posed by Barry and Flitterman-Lewis, as to whether it simply (and facilely) transformed mourning into rage, equivocating on the former in favor of the latter.

The answer to this last question cannot be reduced to a comparison between feminist art that interrogated patriarchal representation versus feminist art that celebrated an innate female power. *In Mourning and In Rage* had an immediate effect because it was able to mobilize fear and turn it into positive action and righteous anger, at least for a while. The problem with any activist performance art, particularly pieces such as *In Mourning and In Rage* that deal with terribly brutal subject matter, is that it is difficult to sustain the initial energy that produced the piece in the first place. A performance designed to be “media-friendly” runs the risk of becoming the flavor of the month. Addressing women’s rights was fashionable in the seventies, less fashionable in the eighties and nineties. Drained and exhausted from dealing day in and day out with such brutal subject matter (which was never more than a catchy hook for the local media), Lacy and Labowitz backed off from their earlier agitprop performances. They collaborated several more times after *In Mourning and In Rage*, organizing a performance structured after *Three Weeks in May* for Las Vegas entitled *There Are Voices in the*

Desert (1978) and designing a float under the auspices of Ariadne for the Take Back the Night March in San Francisco in 1978. *Take Back the Night* was the last major performance structure that Lacy and Labowitz collaborated on together, although they continued to work on separate projects under the auspices of Ariadne. Labowitz turned to a more personal, introspective style of performance while Lacy continued organizing large-scale performances that were geared towards exploring the connections that she believed existed between all women.

XIV. Mourning Our Collective Loss

Lacy’s and Labowitz’s decision to turn away from dealing with the atrocities perpetrated against women in their later work suggests that they in fact had not permitted themselves time to mourn. As I was preparing to write this paper, I ran across Douglas Crimp’s article “Mourning and Militancy.” The parallel between his title and that of Lacy’s and Labowitz’s piece immediately struck me. “Mourning and Militancy,” written at the height of the AIDS epidemic, was Crimp’s attempt to reconcile the seemingly passive act of mourning (candlelight vigils for the death of people one had loved) with the proactive stance of activist protest. In a powerful argument that interwove Freud’s theories on mourning and melancholy with his own personal experience as a Stonewall-era gay man and AIDS activist, Crimp suggested that AIDS activists had “transformed” their sorrow into rage simply because they had to: “Seldom has a society so savaged people during their hour of loss.”⁴⁵ The process of mourning was constantly interrupted, savaged, as Crimp put it, which in turn resulted in its being transformed into activism. And yet, militancy, which makes all violence external, fails to address the profound sadness engendered by the violence—psychic, linguistic, and physical—that gay men have endured and internalized. Thus militancy functions in some way as a denial of the pain that gay men have internalized, permitting them to continue to deny their own ambivalence. “There is no question,” Crimp concluded,

but that we must fight the unspeakable violence we incur from the society in which we find ourselves. But if we understand that violence is able to reap its horrible rewards through the very psychic mechanisms that make us part of this society, then we may also be able to recognize—along with our rage—our terror, our guilt, and our profound sadness. Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning and militancy.⁴⁶

One could make the same argument, of course, for the way in which society had time and again savaged women in their time of need by suggesting that the responsibility for rape rested with the victim rather than the perpetrator of the assault. Although Lacy and Labowitz viewed the seven-foot tall mourners as a transformation of the

stereotypical image of the powerless female mourners, they were nevertheless *mourners*, a physical embodiment of psychic pain at the loss of women's lives. Dealing with material such as rape, pornography, and incest was a constant assault on the psyches of all the women involved, a fresh attack that did not allow the psychic wounds from the previous one to heal. It is little wonder that Lacy and Labowitz were unable to continue working on this difficult material. What is amazing is that they were able to do as much as they did.

XV. Powers of Desire

In the end, I think that the success of Lacy's and Labowitz's work can best be gauged by its influence on subsequent activist performance. In 1990, Crimp came to Southern California to teach a class at CalArts. Two of the participants in that class were Edgington and Francis, who subsequently founded Powers of Desire (POD). In many ways, POD was modeled on AIDS activist collectives in New York City and Chicago such as ACT UP and Queer Nation. Like these groups, POD was heavily informed by post-structuralist theories of subject construction and a Foucauldian analysis of the workings of power and repression in every day society. What distinguished POD from these other collectives, however, was its location in Southern California, the site of performances such as *In Mourning and In Rage*. Edgington and Francis were familiar with the work that had been done by the feminists in the seventies. What is more, they knew of Cheri Gaulke, a student and then teacher at the Woman's Building. Although they did not subscribe to goddess spirituality in any manner or form, they were extremely sympathetic to the notion of doing performance that combined an expression of psychic pain with militant activism. In 1992, they created a performative installation piece for Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) entitled *AIDS Molotov Mausoleum*, which was a mausoleum wall comprised of memorial plaques dedicated to prominent AIDS activists. Each contained a Molotov cocktail that the viewer was invited to take down and throw at prominent institutions. *AIDS Molotov Mausoleum*, like *In Mourning and In Rage*, permitted the simultaneous expression of mourning and anger. Just as the image of the women standing in front of city hall retrospectively permits the viewer to mourn for women who have been victimized by violence, so too did the *AIDS Molotov Mausoleum*, which created a space for the sort of quietism that had been earlier eschewed by AIDS activists.

The *AIDS Molotov Mausoleum* was in some ways atypical of the overall art production of POD and its offspring, Clean Needles Now (CNN). In 1987, Crimp had called for a "critical, theoretical and activist" alternative to the "personal, elegiac expressions that appeared to dominate the art-world response to AIDS."⁴⁷ For the most part, the art events orchestrated by POD, which took place in the gritty streets of Los Angeles, were a response to this call. It is not surprising, then, that POD became CNN, an activist organization dedicated to preventing the transmission of AIDS from contaminated



Powers of Desire, AIDS Molotov Mausoleum, Fight AIDS not Arabs, 1992. Detail of performative installation piece, mausoleum wall with memorial plaques and Molotov cocktails, installed at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Powers of Desire performance group founded by Renee Edgington and Matt Francis. Photograph by Powers of Desire.

needles.⁴⁸ As representatives of POD and then CNN, the members wore colorful clothing, drove bizarre vehicles and generally made spectacles of themselves even in Southern California, the home of Disneyland, Hollywood, and Magic Mountain Amusement Park. Although influenced by Crimp's call to activist arms, they were also clearly indebted to an aesthetic that did not originate in New York, but rather in Southern California. The performance collectives organized by Lacy's students exemplified that aesthetic of colorful activism: The Waitresses, the Feminist Art Workers and the Sisters Of Survival. All three collectives dressed in outrageous clothing (the S.O.S. wore nun's habits that were the colors of the rainbow) and performed guerrilla actions (the Feminist Art Workers did a performance where they called women on the phone to verbally affirm rather than assault them), but of the three, it was probably The Waitresses whose work most resembled that of POD.

XVI. The Waitresses

Anne Gauldin and Jerri Allyn founded The Waitresses around 1977; they came up with the idea while driving to Santa Cruz to attend a conference.⁴⁹ The original group, which included Denise Yarfitz, Patty Nicklaus, Jamie Wildman (also known as Wild and Wild-person), Leslie Belt, Allyn, and Gauldin, initially met in order to do consciousness-raising and brainstorming about their experiences as waitresses. By 1978, they unleashed their consciousness-raising performances on an unsuspecting restaurant-going audience in Los Angeles. *Ready to Order?* was a weeklong series of guerrilla performances at various restaurants. *Ready to Order?* was loosely modeled after *Three Weeks in May* (for which Gauldin did a performance) in that it included a number of workshops and panel discussions on the history of working women, job discrimination, and assertiveness training. Like the latter performance, it also received a great deal of publicity, as public relations was another skill that Gauldin and Allyn had learned from Lacy and Labowitz. The impromptu performances, which dealt with issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination, were based on incidents that actually happened to the performers when they worked as waitresses.⁵⁰ Performances/skits included a pantomime of a waitress looking for a non-existent tip, a snotty Italian “waiter” who intimidated “his” customers into leaving a big tip, and the “Millie” awards—an awards ceremony that included the categories of the longest inconsequential conversation and longest smile.

XVII. Feminist Humor

Probably the best-known image of The Waitresses, however, is that of the waitress-goddess, a late twentieth-century version of the many-breasted Diana of Ephesus. In one typical photograph, she stands left of center, her arms raised, wearing pink grape leaves in her hair, more bunches of (fake) grapes attached to her dress, and a prosthesis with approximately thirteen breasts, some with bright red nipples, some with pink nipples, and some with no nipples at all. Gauldin, whose belief in the power of the goddess as a feminist statement infused much of her work as a Waitress, played the many-breasted goddess. While still a student at the FSW, Gauldin began doing private backyard rituals, which she later translated into performances such as *Coffee Cauldron* (1980), a fusion of Kali (the many-armed female Hindu goddess) and waitress imagery. Gauldin also traveled to the island of Malta, where she did a ritualistic and collaborative performance with Cheri Gaulke, another of Lacy’s students.⁵¹ As with Lacy’s and Labowitz’s performances, the work of The Waitresses combined an interest in contemporary issues that affected women with a mytho-poetic vision of a feminist future. There was, however, one significant difference between the former and the latter: the degree of seriousness with which each collective approached the subject matter at hand. It is much easier to find humor in the plight of a waitress (even though her plight stems from the inequities of patriarchal society) than to find humor in rape,



Above: **Powers of Desire, AIDS Molotov Mausoleum, Fight AIDS not Arabs**, 1992. Performative installation piece, mausoleum wall with memorial plaques and Molotov cocktails, installed at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). Powers of Desire performance group founded by Renee Edgington and Matt Francis. Photograph by Powers of Desire.

Below: **Ready to Order?**, 1978. The premiere of The Waitresses performance art group in a 7-day, site-oriented, conceptual art structure that took place in various restaurants and cultural sites in Los Angeles. Cofounders Jerri Allyn and Anne Gauldin were joined by Leslie Belt, Patti Nicklaus, Jamie Wildman-Webber, and Denise Yarfitz Pierre. Photograph by Maria Karras at Lafayette’s Café, Venice, California. © The Waitresses: Jerri Allyn and Anne Gauldin.



sexual violence and murder, and incest. The element of humor also made it easier to deal publicly with issues that were unpopular in society at large. “The thing I loved about The Waitresses,” Gauldin recalls, “is that humor was always a really important part of our work. It was important for us to give feminist information, but it wasn’t like cramming it down somebody’s throat, it was presenting it in a really fun, upbeat way that people could hear what we had to say.... We were kind of crackpot.”⁵²

By using humor in their performances, The Waitresses sought to engage what Rita Felski has termed the “feminist counter-public sphere,” a term that takes its name from the bourgeois public sphere of the late eighteenth century, “a critical and independent public domain that perceives itself as distinct from state interests” and that related literature and art to an explicitly gendered community.⁵³ The humorous “counter-public sphere” invoked by The Waitresses in the late seventies was invoked by POD and CNN in the early nineties as they too sought to relate literature and art to the specific experiences and interests of an explicitly gendered community—in this case, those people whose sexuality is considered non-normative. One of the most paradigmatic photographs taken in conjunction with POD was that of Edgington modeling a fancy cowboy hat and coat in which the abundant fringe on the sleeves had been replaced by condoms. Edgington’s coat appeared to contain hundreds of small nipples, just as the many-breasted Diana wore at least thirteen larger nipples/breasts on her own garment. In many ways, there is a great deal of similarity between the two photographs, with Edgington standing in a pose that mimics that of Diana. Like Gauldin, Edgington wore the *Jillin’ Jackin’ Off Jacket* for street performances and activist interventions. Edgington’s “fringe,” however, is not comprised of nipples. The condom was part of POD’s courageous attempt to spread safe-sex information in the face of an aggressive campaign of disinformation and miscommunication on the part of the media. Unlike Diana’s nipples, which served as a signifier of a prelapsarian feminist innocence, a sign of the present-day potential for a feminist utopia in which waitresses could be given their due, the condoms were a way of putting a good face on a bad thing, a reminder that safe sex was, by necessity, sex with barriers. Like The Waitresses, POD (and Edgington) used humor, “crackpot” behavior, and an outrageous aesthetic in order to effect social change. Unlike the work of The Waitresses, the performance events of POD never got beyond the desire to ameliorate a less than satisfactory present. POD (and later, CNN) came about precisely because there was no end in sight to the AIDS epidemic, and not because they could envision that end through the agency of their work. Edgington thus wore hundreds of small containers, latex barriers designed to prevent both pregnancy and the spread of disease.

XVIII. Conclusions

“ACT UP,” Mary Patten has written, “did not always acknowledge our predecessors—in fact, some of us needed constant reminders that direct action, street theater, and

media genius were not ‘invented’ by us.”⁵⁴ As I have engaged in my own research on the feminist activist performance associated with the Woman’s Building, I have wondered why art done in the name of AIDS activism has not been more open in acknowledging its commonality with the earlier work. Lacy’s and Labowitz’s use of guerrilla intervention against hegemonic media representations, their perceptive analysis of how the media functioned, and their attempt to put forth an alternate discourse to the ideology of the victim (a tactic that was also adopted by AIDS activist artists) extended and transformed the irruptive moments of Dada street performance into performative actions that could be interpreted as harbingers of the new epistemology of postmodernity because of its gender specificity. Given the commonality between seventies and nineties activist art, I suspect it was the utopian impulses and references to feminist spirituality in the former that has made it difficult for the latter to acknowledge any connections. Certainly this was my problem when I climbed up the side of the mountain over ten years ago. The goddess is deliberately anti-intellectual, or at least anti-theory. She has seemed to exist outside of theory and even history, a fiction that her advocates, with their nostalgic talk of matrifocal societies and female archetypes, have reinforced. And yet, the invocation of the Goddess is profoundly hopeful, a beacon of light in what would otherwise be a dreary landscape. Ten years later, older, wiser, and less radical, I find myself identifying with the words of Erica Rand, another veteran of the AIDS activist and safe sex wars:

We must create contexts for more broad-based theorizing and strategizing, and recognize that this requires very hard work. It requires, too, professional theorists, like consultants and academics, getting over ourselves—so that we neither presume that we have all the representational expertise nor encourage others to conclude that we do—and vigilant attention about impediments to broad-based theorizing.⁵⁵

The performance art of the Woman’s Building encompassed many aspects—autobiography, identity, activism, and feminist spirituality—all in the name of bringing about social change in an active and aggressive manner. As we enter not only a new century but also a new millennium—a time of change, optimism, and hope—it is perhaps finally time to embrace this legacy of the Woman’s Building.

Notes

1. For an overview of Lacy's performance work from the early to mid-seventies, see Suzanne Lacy, "She Who Would Fly," interview by Richard Newton, *High Performance* 1.1 (February 1978): 4–7.
2. Cheri Gaulke, interviewed by author, Los Angeles, CA, December 1995.
3. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–75*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 5.
4. Ibid., 50.
5. Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making," in *Visibly Female*, ed. Hilary Robinson (London: Camden Press, 1987), 106–107.
6. Ibid., 107.
7. This was certainly the case with the formation of the Natalie Barney Collective and the Lesbian Art Project, which were organized under the auspices of the Woman's Building. See Terry Wolverton, "Lesbian Art: A Partial Inventory," *Insurgent Muse: Life and Art at the Woman's Building* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2002.)
8. Suzanne Lacy, interviewed by Moira Roth, Los Angeles, CA, March 16, 1990. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 28.
9. Teresa de Lauretis, "Upping the Anti [Sic] in Feminist Theory," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993), 77. A slightly different version of this essay was also published with the title "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain" in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1.2 (Fall 1989).
10. Faith Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970–75," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 35.
11. The scripts of these two performances are reprinted in the appendix of Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1975) 207–19.
12. Ibid., 208.
13. Ibid.
14. Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 50.
15. Lacy, interviewed by Roth, 20.
16. Ibid.
17. Arlene Raven, *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 27.
18. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 12–13.
19. Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Performing Feminisms*, ed. Sue Ellen Case (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 251.
20. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 15; Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 32. In order to keep the logic of my argument, I have somewhat abridged that of de Lauretis, which draws upon the work of Wini Breines and Linda Gordon on family violence. De Lauretis is specifically concerned here with looking at case studies on family violence that employ supposedly gender-neutral language. Because of the applicability of de Lauretis's argument to my own, I have extended her comparison to include the way in which rape is discursively structured under the law as a gender-less crime of violence, a position that most feminists are understandably against.
21. Raven, 27.
22. In her second autobiography, *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (New York: Viking, 1996), Chicago writes at length about her decision to change her name legally to Chicago from Gerowitz, her married name. Fighting to maintain her identity in the face of the blatant sexism that plagued the California art world,

Chicago "borrowed" from the Civil Rights movements and publicly and legally divested herself of her surname, an act which required her then husband, Lloyd Hamrol, to sign legal papers. In order to announce her name change, Chicago's dealer, Jack Glenn, had an ad printed in *Artforum* spoofing the macho announcements by male artists that were regularly published in that magazine. The result was the now infamous 1971 photograph by Jerry McMillan of Chicago posing as a boxer with her new name emblazoned across her chest.

23. Raven, 27.
24. Hannah J. L. Feldman, "More Than Confessional: Testimonial and the Subject of Rape," in *The Subject of Rape*, ed. Monica Chau, Hannah J.L. Feldman, Jennifer Kabot, and Hannah Kruse (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 14–15.
25. Ibid., 14, 16.
26. Chicago, *Through the Flower*, 217.
27. The image of *Ablutions* is reproduced on page 169 in *The Power of Feminist Art*. The image in *TDR* shows Lacy nailing the kidneys to the wall, while the twine lies coiled on the floor nearby. For a discussion of Lacy's role in this piece, see Moira Roth, "Suzanne Lacy: Social Reformer and Witch," *TDR/The Drama Review* 32.11 (Spring 1988): 42–60.
28. Lacy, interviewed by Roth, 22.
29. Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
30. For a more detailed discussion of Gentileschi's work, see Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989). For a more detailed discussion of Mary Cassatt, see Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).
31. Pollock, 1.
32. See Josephine Withers's account of the performance in her article "Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming Ourselves," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, 170–71.
33. Suzanne Lacy and Lucy R. Lippard, "Political Performance Art: A Discussion by Suzanne Lacy and Lucy R. Lippard," *Heresies* 5.1 (1984): 25.
34. Suzanne Lacy and Judith Baca, "Affinities: Thoughts on an Incomplete History," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, 269. While Lacy has stated in several publications the importance of Kaprow's influence, her most sustained discussion of the importance of his teachings occurs on pages 22–24 in the interview with Roth.
35. *In Mourning and In Rage*, which is probably Lacy and Labowitz's best known performance, was documented in Lacy, "She Who Would Fly: Interview with Suzanne Lacy."
36. Lacy and Labowitz, "Evolution of a Feminist Art: Public Forms and Social Issues," *Heresies* 2. 2 (Summer 1978): 83.
37. Thanks to the performance, Lacy and Labowitz became local talk-show celebrities. Ransom money for the capture of the Hillside Strangler(s) was reallocated for women's self-defense classes. For one night, at least, media coverage shifted from a reification of the mythology of rape to images of women practicing self-defense. Finally, an intrepid reporter went down immediately after the performance to the phone company, who had initially resisted listing the phone numbers for rape hot lines in the emergency listing, and forced them to back down.
38. The Woman's Building, "Moving Out: Leslie Labowitz and Ruth Iskin on Social, Feminist and Performance Art," *Spinning Off* (April 1979): 3.
39. Leslie Labowitz, interviewed by Michele Moravec, transcript, August 25, 1994. Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 3–4.
40. Labowitz, interviewed by Moravec.
41. Labowitz and Lacy, "Evolution of a Feminist Art," 78.
42. Ibid., 78.

43. Probably the closest thing that American feminism had to Beuys was Rachel Rosenthal, who deliberately used her (constructed) personae in her performances. For an excellent overview of Rosenthal's work, see Moira Roth, ed., *Rachel Rosenthal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

44. Whereas Lacy would start first with an image of her performance and then would make her politics work with the initial image, Labowitz was always conscious of coming up with imagery that could work politically. In her best-known performance, *Paragraph 218*, Labowitz deliberately used "clear, direct images in order to avoid mis-interpretation." At the time of the performance, supreme court judges were debating whether to reinstate the law making abortion illegal in West Germany; *Paragraph 218* was performed at the city hall on the eve of the judges' vote. Part of a program put on by a women's organization, *Paragraph 218* was performed before approximately five hundred spectators, most of them women, who held up torches to light the performance area. Three women dressed in black pointed hoods and capes representing the German supreme court judges stood on a stage holding signs with 218 hands printed on them. On either side of the judges stood two women in red hoods. A woman wearing street clothes entered the performance space and screamed at the judges, "Why can't anybody hear me?" The two women in red then wrapped her in white gauze. When they were done, they threw a bucket of red paint over the by-now kneeling and wrapped woman. Finally, another woman wearing a short skirt and high heels entered carrying a six-foot long, gold penis, which she handed to the judges. The judges held it aloft, and then threw it at the audience, where it broke in pieces. In *Paragraph 218*, Labowitz deliberately created a performance that had a somewhat "raw" look, which she saw as indicative of a work that grew out of the *volk* rather than the *gesellschaft* of German society. Produced for about \$25, *Paragraph 218* was deliberately crude in a Brechtian sense in order to provide contrast with the slick images of femininity in the media. The reaction to the performance was all that Labowitz could have desired. "It was very emotional," she recalled. "After it was over, there was a period of silence where our spiritual connection could be felt throughout the group." After living in Spain for a year, Labowitz returned to California, where she very quickly became involved in the feminist community. Introduced to Lacy by the performance artist Eleanor Antin, Labowitz found herself participating in *Three Weeks in May* almost before she knew what she was doing. The four performances that Labowitz executed for *Three Weeks in May* recycled much of the imagery from *Paragraph 218*, including the gauze-wrapped woman and the judges in pointed, medieval-looking hats. In *Myths of Rape*, which was performed on May 19, 1977, six blindfolded women in black representing society's blindness carried hand-painted signs with myths and facts about rape. The women alternately assumed positions of defense and defenselessness while Labowitz handed out literature to the office workers on their lunch hours. For the second performance, on May 20, *The Rape*, Labowitz collaborated with the Women Against Rape, Men Against Rape Organization. A woman was circled by performers wearing signs identifying themselves as social institutions, while being wrapped (and silenced) from head to toe in gauze. She was then carried out of the mall on a stretcher, a "rape" victim that had been raped a second time by an unfriendly legal system. The third performance on May 21, *All Men Are Potential Rapists*, was performed and created with two men from the Los Angeles Men's Collective. In this performance, the men recreated childhood games that fostered attitudes condoning violence against women. The final performance on May 22, *Women Fight Back*, was performed on the day of the closing rally by members of the Woman's Building. Several women hid in large black cones with statements such as "gouge eyes" and "turn fear into anger" written on them. Another woman on the outside was bound by ominous figures, while the "cone women" struggled to break free. The performance ended with the rescue of the bound woman.

45. Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, Russell Ferguson et al, eds. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 237.

46. *Ibid.*, 243.

47. Crimp, "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Douglas Crimp, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 15. First published in October 43 (Winter 1987).

48. Under the auspices of Clean Needles Now, Edgington and Francis were able to open a storefront for needle exchange in West Hollywood, a space that has remained open even after their untimely deaths in an automobile accident in the summer of 1998.

49. Unless otherwise noted, most of my information comes from Anne Gauldin, interviewed by Michelle Moravec, September 20, 1992. Collection of the Woman's Building Board of Directors.

50. My description of the performances comes from Pamela J. King, "They also serve those who waitress," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, May 7, 1978. In one performance, a rude customer and a demanding employer drive a harried waitress to distraction—until she turns into "Wonder Waitress," complete with satin jogging shorts. In another performance, a comfortably garbed waitress is urged by her boss and a redneck customer to "spruce up" her appearance. She dons hot pants and high heels, and improves her tips significantly even though she spends more time flirting than working.

51. *The Malta Project* took place in the summer of 1978, as a collaborative performance executed for the participants in the Edinburgh Arts Project and the startled inhabitants of Malta. The piece begins in a church, where Gaulke, dressed like a priest with red high-heeled shoes, told the story of her father, the Protestant minister. Moving outside, Gaulke put on red shoes and danced until she collapsed at the feet of the goddess in Tarxien, the above-ground temple. Gaulke was then carried through the streets to an underground temple where Gauldin performed a healing ritual dance over her body.

52. Gauldin, Interview by Moravec, 13.

53. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989), 164.

54. Mary Patten, "The Thrill is Gone: An ACT UP Post-Mortem (Confessions of a Former AIDS Activist)," in *The Passionate Camera*, ed. Deborah Bright (New York: Routledge, 1998), 389.

55. Erica Rand, "The Passionate Activist and the Political Camera," in *The Passionate Camera*, 378.



Sheila de Bretteville (center),
Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW),
first day of the FSW's second year,
1974. Woman's Building Image Archive,
Otis College of Art and Design.