**Herstories: new cartographies of the feminine and the ‘politics of location’**

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**I- Feminism, Foucault and body politics**

*Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; (…) it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Michel Foucault)*

*Begin, though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body. (…) The politics of location. Even to begin with my body I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity. (…) Trying as women to see from the centre. “A politics”, I wrote once, “of asking women’s questions.” We are not “the woman question” asked by somebody else; we are the women who ask the questions. (Adrienne Rich)*

The questioning of identity has always been a key issue in literature and, we might add, in the arts, as the whole. My aim in this paper is to reflect on the form this very questioning has assumed today, specifically when we concentrate on the poetics and the politics of representation of the female body, the inscription of new cartographies of the feminine and the demands of a true politics of location.

Most feminist critics seem to agree that “the body” has become a key term in the discourses that define contemporary feminist thought and agenda: the body, not as a biological entity, but as a sign, a construction, a representation and a potential site of resistance. As Griselda Pollock writes,

“The new feminisms are, in significant ways, a politics of the body – in campaigns around health and the claims for female sexualities, the struggle against violence and assault as well as pornography, the issues of motherhood and ageing. The new politics articulates the specificity of femininity in special
relation to the problematic of the body, not as a biological entity, but as the psychically constructed image that provides a location for and imageries of the processes of the unconscious, for desire and fantasy.”

On the other hand, the recent proliferation of writings concerning the body from an anthropological, sociological or philosophical angle is largely viewed as being deeply indebted to Michel Foucault’s work. However, it is important to recall, as Moira Gatens argues, that “the impact of feminist theory in the social sciences has no less a claim to credit for bringing the body into limelight”. In fact, as Susan Bordo claims, if Foucault has been rightly credited for having shown us how “the body has been historically disciplined”, the feminist reconceptualization of the body from a “purely biological form to an historical construction and medium of social control (the ‘politics of the body’), was central to the ‘personal politics’ postulated by Anglo-American feminists since the late sixties and seventies”. Germaine Greer’s influential text, *The Female Eunuch* (1970), strikingly bears witness to those claims:

“It is impossible to argue a case for female liberation if there is no certainty about the degree of inferiority or natural dependence which is unalterably female ... We know what we are, but know not what we might be, or what we might have been. (...) Women must learn how to question the most basic assumptions about feminine normality in order to reopen the possibilities for development which have been successively locked off by conditioning (...) The new assumption behind the discussion of the body is that everything that we may observe could be otherwise.”

And, long before Foucault’s theories of the “docile bodies” subjected to disciplinary methods, Mary Wollstonecraft in her “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792) – a vindication both of woman’s body and her share of power – severely denounced the “deplorable state” of women, who “must submit to be a *fair defect* in creation”, their minds enslaved as a product of their enslaved bodies:

“To preserve personal beauty – woman’s glory – the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands, and the sedentary life which they are condemned to live, whilst boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles and relaxes the nerves. (...) but genteel women are, literally speaking, slaves to
their bodies, and glory in their subjection. (...) Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its guilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison.”

In this context, a very interesting point has been raised by Lois McNay in her book, *Foucault and Feminism* (1992), where, despite acknowledging the stimulating contribution of Foucault’s work to feminist analysis of woman’s subordination, she calls attention to the fact that Foucault’s thesis on power perpetuates a form of “‘gender blindness’” that has always predominated in social theory.” And she further argues: “By depicting the development of modern power as an increasingly insidious form of domination and by obscuring any lifeworld context which may organize and regulate the exercise of power, Foucault retroactively effaces the specific nature of female subordination and overestimates the normalizing effects of disciplinary power in industrial society.”

As stated by Susan Bordo, it has been a prerogative of feminism to invert and convert the old metaphor of the “body politic” found in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Macchiavelli, Hobbes and many others, into a new metaphor, “the politics of the body”:

“In the old metaphor of the ‘body politic’, the state or society was imagined as a human body with different organs and parts symbolising different functions, needs and constituents, forces and so forth (...) Now, feminism imagined the human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control – from footbinding and corseting to rape and battering, to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilisation, unwanted pregnancy and (...) explicit commodification.”

In fact, the need to “re-conceptualize the female body”, so as to bring it into a variety of discussions and struggles, from abortion to contraception, maternity, body image, sexuality, pornography, etc. has been a major concern of Feminism, since at least the 60s. Moreover, Feminism, since its very early days and campaigns has
placed a strong emphasis in the urge to bring “the feminine body into writing” – we are here reminded of Virginia Woolf’s writings, as well as, later in the twentieth century, the subversive texts of French feminists (e.g., Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva), who have strongly argued that the woman’s body is a site of difference, of struggle and resistance.¹³

Contemporary Feminism is still at odds over this issue, which, as Judith Butler reminds us, has somehow shifted from “writing the body” to “inscribing the materiality of the female body”. A new difficulty has thus been added to this process, as Butler adds in an ironical remark: ”It may be only a question of learning how to read those troubled translations (...).”¹⁴ The need to rethink the politics of representation, following the awareness of this materiality or corporeality of the feminine has thus come to mean the ”redesigning of the boundaries of the female body” and implicitly discovering new cartographies of the feminine (as we shall see allegorized in some of the photographs and paintings by women artists I will refer to, as for example, very acutely, in Jenny Saville’s ”Plan” (1993)]. Besides, feminist critics and theorists have emphasised the fact that this remapping of the female body according to a redefinition of patterns of identity, subjectivity, social roles, etc., should be seen in the context of a “politics of location”, such as Adrienne Rich demanded in the pioneering essay that I chose as one of my epigraphs, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location”, where she addresses a strong apostrophe to a famous sentence by Virginia Woolf:

“As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times “As a woman my country is the whole world”. (...) Begin, though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body.”¹⁵
Susan Stanford Friedman, in a recent book, has also underlined this issue, arguing that women engaged in a feminist practice should construct a “geopolitics of identity”, where the concept of difference, not in a reified or fetishised form, but embracing contradiction, dislocation and change, is crucial. Addressing the same question, Rosi Braidotti has also pointed out the need for "a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spacio-temporal territory" which “’embodied’ accounts illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world.” In this context, the body becomes "an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, (...), a cultural construction", ceasing to be a fiction or an immaterial entity, but instead a true “place of location” which need not be transcended but rather “reclaimed”, as stated by Adrienne Rich.

Hence, and despite the fact that we all tend to agree that it is difficult to discuss the woman’s body as a concept without essentializing it as a “pure”, self-representing femininity or reducing it to an abstraction, and, consequently, dematerializing it, the reconceptualization of the body at stake in the visual arts has become inseparable from the redefinition of identity, as a crucial field of inquiry for feminist artists engaged in this process. On the other hand, at exactly the opposite pole of this concern, is the traditional understanding of the female body as an “opaque concept”, which, likewise the concept of “woman” is always defined “in relation to”, or in some juxtaposition with “human” and even more so, to “men”, as Denise Riley argues.

Before we proceed, it is important to examine the claims raised in this context by Elizabeth Grosz. She calls our attention to the dangers of an excessive “discursivization” or “theorization” of the body, which, she argues, can easily turn into a new process of “neutralization” or “sanitization” of the whole issue. And Grosz
emphasizes, much along the same line of thought as Judith Butler, the need for Feminism to come to terms with the materiality of the female body: “…there is still a strong reluctance to conceptualize the female body as playing a major part in women’s oppression… Analyses of the representation of bodies abound, but bodies in their material variety still wait to be thought.”

The images we are going to consider, by contemporary women artists, photographers and painters (Cindy Sherman, Jo Spence, Jenny Saville and Paula Rego), daringly take issue with the representation of the woman’s body, proposing a reappraisal of its “natural boundaries”, and enacting in the process, a transgressive re-conceptualization of femininity. Their remapping of the woman's body in the social includes a dual process of simultaneously constructing and deconstructing preconceived gender categories, models and stereotypes, while challenging notions of woman as an object of representation, as well as woman as viewer of herself represented.

My analysis will mainly focus on two (by no means antagonistic) poles of this strategy of representation, which are also crucial to the definition of woman’s identity i.e., the tension between the sublime and the abject; the personal and the political.

II- The Poetics of Desire and Postmodern Irony

“Women thus function as the body for men _ correlative with the effacement of the sexual concreteness of their (womanly) bodies. If women are represented as the bodily counterparts to men’s conceptual supremacy, women’s bodies, pleasures and desires are reduced to versions or variants of men’s bodies and desires. Women are thus represented as castrated, lacking and incomplete, as if these were inherently qualities (or absences) of their (natural) bodies rather than a function of men’s self-representations.”

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I would like us to consider this quote while reflecting on some famous images of women within the so-called “Great Master Tradition” [e.g., Titian, “Venus of Urbino” (1538); Cabanel, “The Birth of Venus” (1863); Ingres, “La Grande Odalisque” (1814); Manet, “Olympia” (1863); Manet, “Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe” (1863); Gauguin, “Tahitian Girl” (1903); Magritte, “La Répresentation” (1937). And, as a mode of dissonance within the current aesthetics, an ironical representation of femininity by a surrealist woman artist, Meret Oppenheim’s “Ma Gouvernante” (1936)].

The concern of contemporary women artists, in their turn, has been primarily the problematizing of this tradition of representation, proposing as an alternative mode, the representation “from within”, which transforms women’s role in art from objects of representation into “viewers of themselves represented” capable of “returning the gaze” of the male viewer. This transgressive process, as feminist art historians have been pointing out, is part of the female counter-culture that grew particularly under the impact of the woman’s emancipation movement of the 70s.  

The images we are going to see inscribe themselves within this counter-culture. The privileged subject represented is the female body, often through the medium of the self-portrait; however, a major transformation takes place in this feminine appropriation of one of the main subject themes of the “Great pictorial tradition”: the bodies represented are redefined, their social functions are contested and reevaluated; from passively seductive bodies, they become “sites of struggle and resistance”.  

Quoting again Elizabeth Grosz:

“Bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intertextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated. If bodies are traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings, and power, they can also, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices.”  

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I believe it is essential to contextualize our observation of these images within the theoretical framework of Postmodernism, so that we can inquire into the ways Feminism has appropriated or subverted postmodern strategies or indeed added a new, more radical and political perspective to the postmodern questioning of art, through its particular usage of the tropes of irony and parody. Thus, paraphrasing Craig Owens, one might ask whether something truly new has come from the “feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation”.26

Essentially, my purpose is to explore the “double wedge” of Postmodernism, or its “paradoxical essence”, as Linda Hutcheon writes, based on the intrinsic tension that grows from its simultaneous relation of complicity with and criticism of History. And, furthermore, to consider Postmodernism’s oblique relation with Feminism and vice-versa, i.e., the nature and the quality of the feminist intervention in art, and how that has been affecting the redefinition of the concept of the postmodern itself. Thus, understanding Feminism both as a political instance (an action or intervention) and a critique of representation, could one say, quoting Susan Suleiman, that "if there existed a genuinely feminist postmodernist practice, then postmodernism could no longer be seen as the expression of a fragmented, exhausted culture steeped in nostalgia for a lost centre.” 28

- Cindy Sherman29

I will now briefly refer to the work of Cindy Sherman, who has become a crucial reference in this field (self-portrait photography) and who happens to have had recently a major retrospective of her work in Portugal. Sherman belongs to a group of North-American women artists who have been working since the late 70s and 80s
(together with Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, among many others), whose work can aptly be described through the concepts of action and intervention in the city, the street, the social space. They actively refuse the enclosing walls of the Museum, reject auratic art and the strict boundaries of each art, as well as the artificial divisions between the word and the image; instead, their purpose is to address the public and the viewer directly, provoking, stating that the personal is political, challenging consumer society, its values and its ways of enforcing authority and power.

Sherman is particularly interesting to us given her consistent work in the questioning of gender as an unfixed category. Her work is essentially theatrical, addressing the deconstruction of gender stereotypes through a sophisticated technique of “mise en abyme”, a performative parody of the icons and myths of the feminine and femininity itself. It explores the concept of representation and, as a consequence, the making of identity, through the viewers eyes: the world of fashion magazines, the mass media, the classic Hollywood movie of the ‘50s and ‘60s. It plays ironically with the concepts of the masque and travestissement, creating unsettling visions where the viewer is always confronted with the image viewed and, at the same time, herself/himself viewing the image. Sherman’s work draws largely on psychoanalysis and has often been read in this specific context translating, as Elisabeth Bronfen claims, the “hysteric language of the body”, i.e., representing the eternal disjunctions of the hysterical in relation to her identity: “Do I exist or am I the mere repetition of an image?”, “Am I masculine or feminine?” “Am I human or animal?”. 30 Sherman’s phantasmagoria, as Bronfen claims, oscillates between the representation of the process of sublimation and de-sublimation of woman as fetish, as well as the representation of narcissistic phantasies and cultural codes. Thus, while representing
woman in “clivage”, as “a knotted subject”, she deconstructs “the Western iconographic tradition which identifies Woman with Image.”  

The “Shermanesque mode of imposing distance”, as Wilfried Dickhoff writes, her creations of “illusions of identity, masks of authenticity” takes off from the very fact that she uses her own body as an image, or rather a simulacrum of a situation, where she is, at the same time, “the one on the scene and the one who watches, comprehends, and reflects on the former. (...) The photographic procedure of detaching her-self is so effective, however, precisely because Cindy Sherman puts her-selves directly in front of the lens with body and soul, a histrionic multiplication of identity.”  

Despite Sherman’s disclaimer that her work is not theoretical or conceptual, as Laura Mulvey reminds us, it would have been impossible without a whole pre-history of Feminism and its theorization of the body and representation, within the framework of Semiotics and Psychoanalysis. Her representations are, according to Mulvey, “re-representations”, a “making strange”, where she “dissects the phantasmagoric space conjured up by the female body, from its exteriority to its interiority.”

- Jenny Saville

The work of the painter Jenny Saville (following a similar trend to Sherman’s work on the portrait and the self-portrait), is clearly part of the feminist "revision" project in the context of the visual arts, the "redrawing the lines" and “natural borders” of the body, thus problematizing the normative categories that traditionally define the female body and map it in society. As Lynda Nead has argued, this project
has come to mean, on the one hand, “opening up visual culture to different kinds of images of femininity and the female body” and, on the other hand, it “has politicized the role of visibility itself”.\textsuperscript{35} The artist when asked about her personal and ideological commitment to this \textit{remapping} practice, claimed:

“I would not catalogue myself as a feminist artist but a person incredibly informed by feminism’s theories. I enjoy working with the female body - making an institution of ‘the Nude’ - a territory traditionally occupied by male artists and female models: the assessor and the assessed. A unifying interest for many artists since the 1960s has been a reworking of representations of the body and this work has evolved in tandem with feminism's discussion on representation generally.”\textsuperscript{36}

Moreover, when questioned about her particular representation of the female body and the kind of discomfort it normally caused on the viewer, she replied:

“I wanted to make images of bodies which directly returned the gaze of the viewer in a confrontational way. To make them aware of their position as ‘assessor’ by playing off the security afforded by the illusion of a familiar genre of Western nude painting against the physical nature of the paint and scale; the frontal directness of the body and its extended boundaries intended to disrupt expectations of how a ‘female nude’ should behave.”\textsuperscript{37}

In relation to the particular case of the oversized woman figure represented in the painting “Plan” (1993), Saville commented, “I’m not painting disgusting, big women. I’m painting women who’ve been made to think they are big and disgusting, who imagine their thighs go on forever …” \textsuperscript{38}

- Jo Spence\textsuperscript{39}

Similarly, in her challenging photographic work, Jo Spence explores feminine physical identity aiming at distinct targets, some more overtly conceptual, calling our attention to issues of identity and difference; others of a more pragmatic nature, crudely exposing the body and reclaiming our control over it, by focussing directly on controversial issues, such as illness and the use of therapeutics. See for example the
image “Exiled”, (Undated), from the series “Narratives of Dis-ease”, where Jo Spence, in a disturbing series of self-portraits daringly represents one of the most feared taboos: the sick, defaced and mutilated body: it is an image of the artist herself after receiving surgical treatment for breast cancer. The explicit transgression consists in the obvious aesthetic inversion of the traditionally seductive image of the female body by the public exhibition of a body made abject by sickness and deformity, which the word “Monster”, inscribed on the breast, identifies as a scream of horror and protest. The face is partially hidden by a mask, like in the “Phantasm of the Opera”, symbolizing the experience of disfiguration and consequently of exclusion; the exposed body, offered up for commiseration and violation by the public gaze still renders an evocation of a feminine image of Christ.

As Lynda Nead writes:

The female body is constantly subjected to the judgemental gaze. Whether it be the gaze of the medic who defines the body as healthy or diseased, or the connoisseur who defines it as beautiful or ugly, the female body is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgement and categorization. (...). Shock, identification, rejection, admiration, sympathy – all these are possible responses to the images. But ultimately, the power of the images lies in the fact that we are not made to witness a display but are, rather, involved in the process through which identity is formed.  

Jo Spence has been involved in the development of a trend that has been called "photo-therapy", which co-opts psychoanalysis together with a socialist feminist approach to everyday life. Despite the obvious theoretical resonance of her work as "abject" and "monstrous", in fact, as Jane Kelly rightly claims, the association of her visual practice with theory should be understood as a powerful disclaimer for "solidarity and the possibility, the necessity of change": "Not images illustrating theory, nor theory informing practice, but theory and practice combined as praxis, with the issue of function at its centre".  

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“Hoover” (1989) is an image that belongs to a completely different series, called *Libido Uprising*; it is sexually provocative, and it plays with the parodic element of the allegedly impossible alliance between two opposite poles: the erotic and the domestic – a hose from a hoover seductively curls up a woman’s leg adorned with a red high stiletto shoe and black fishnet stockings. As Lynda Nead points out, “Uprising”, the title of this image, means simultaneously “insurrection and ascent” and, in fact, there is a double trope here. On one hand, the synecdoche of the leg, as a sex symbol and as a fragment of the imagery that composes the fantasy of the femme-fatale, superimposed on the figuration of Eve and the serpent of evil; on the other hand, and, one could say, at exactly the opposite pole, the parodic deconstruction of the whole trope – a vision of the prosaic and the domestic, excelled by the detail that the owner of the leg, one can easily tell, is not a young and seductive woman anymore. Thus, if the image offers the public the pure voyeurism of an easily recognizable icon of femininity, the “feminine leg”, it is nevertheless a self-reflexive image, a *simulacrum*, perversely tied to the banality of the domestic chores which, allegedly, “kills” the erotic. The voyeuristic gaze is thus frustrated, and ironically parodied as vain and futile.

Thus, through an identical process to that used by Cindy Sherman’s masquerades and *travestissemens*, Jenny Saville’s unusual scale of painting, Jo Spence’s work exhibits the disruptive category that characterizes the nature of feminist intervention in art, exposing how the construction and deconstruction of multiple patterns of identity is articulated with multiple representations and refigurations of the female body.

III- Body Matters and Women's Empowerment
In this last section I want to give two examples of how “body matters” in contemporary women’s art and how corporeality is an essential element of women’s social and political empowerment, bearing a mark of that “female unruliness” that, as anthropologist Victor Turner wrote, “threatens any social order and seems the more threatening, the more that order seems rigorous and secure”. Both images are by the Portuguese artist long since resident in the U.K., Paula Rego. Rego’s work is recognised for its notoriously “gendered quality”, i.e., for bearing the inscription of a female commentary upon the male tradition, which she openly accepts:

“My pictures are pictures that are done by a woman artist. The stories I tell are the stories women tell. If art becomes genderless, what is it? A neuter? That’s no good, is it?”

Her art comes from “being a woman”, and having a “woman’s experience”, but is also informed by the study of Art History and the Great Masters tradition, which she transgressively appropriates (or “poaches” as she says). Furthermore, as I want to argue, Rego’s work is deeply imbued in the postmodern usage of irony and re-vision.

The first image I want to focus on is the First Mass in Brazil, a painting from 1993. It is a striking representation of woman as a colonised body, offering a palimpsestic revision of Portuguese colonial History powerfully allegorised in the image of the pregnant (raped?) woman's body, itself a metonymy for the pregnant/raped colonised land. The painting offers the viewer a superimposition of images which can be read from the background to the front of the picture, as a series of flashbacks, a sequence of dreams haunting the exposed woman’s body and, at the
same time, giving substance to her abandonment. The first glaring scene pictures the arrival of the Portuguese and the celebration of the first mass in Brazil, a representation of the symbolic union of the sword and the cross, itself observed by a group of red Indians; on the left side of the painting a huge turkey, exotically framed with white lilies, both animal and flower originating from Latin America; on the very top, in the left hand corner, a tiny woman whose white dress is stained in red, as if in flames, which could be read as a figure for witch-burning, an iconic memory of the Inquisition. As Memory Holloway writes, the painting, distinctly composed of two parts, past and present, offers a commentary on power and authority, at the same time as it interrogates the mimetism of political and patriarchal colonisation, the twin fronts of the post-colonial debate. It is a powerful and excessive representation of the colonial excess.

The second image I want to draw attention to is a triptych named “After Hogarth”, which offers Rego’s visual comment on the 18th century triptych by William Hogarth “Marriage à la Mode”.

Rego was commissioned, together with twenty-three of the “world’s leading contemporary artists to create an entirely new work in response to one of the greatest collections of European painting of the past (London’s National Gallery) ”, as the catalogue to the exhibition indicates. The Exhibition was called “Encounters: New Art from Old” and took place in the Summer of 2000 in London (14 June to 17 September 2000).


Rego’s visual commentary is a “modern love story”, or so she claims, including an “arranged marriage”, called “Betrothal”; a mother-daughter conversation
in an old-fashioned hairdresser, which she called “Lessons”; and a third picture, the most powerful of all, a citation of the Pietà, a visual tale of enduring love, devotion and suffering, a mother-son love story, here revised as “Wreck”, enacting woman as a figure of resistance, both strong and protective.

Finally, let us go back to the essay by Adrienne Rich with which I opened my discussion around the revolution in progress in the visual arts, in tune with the re-conceptualization and the de-construction of patterns of identity and difference within current debates in contemporary feminism. As I hope to have been able to show throughout this essay, the blurring of the borderlines between the sublime and the abject, the aesthetic and the non aesthetic, and, above all, the disruptive invasion of the personal into the political play a major role in this redesigning of new cartographies of the feminine and the assertion of a politics of the body which, in its turn, remains inseparable from a true awareness of a politics of location. An awareness that essentially means, as Rich put it: “Trying as women to see from the centre. A politics of asking women’s questions”.
References

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Colloquium “Corpo e Identidades” which took place in Oporto, in March 2001, and was published in its Proceedings as Cadernos de Literatura Comparada 3,4, (Porto: Granito, 2001).
10 McNay, Lois, Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self, p.46.
11 Bordo, Susan, ‘Feminism, Foucault and the politics of the body’, pp.188-89.
13 See for example Hélène Cixous’ claims in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (‘Le rire de la méduse’, L’arc, 1975): ”Write your self... Your body must be heard. ... To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength ... her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; ... inscribe the breath of the whole woman” in Marks, Elaine and de Courtivron, Isabelle, eds., New French Feminisms: An Anthology ( New York, Schocken Books, Univ. of Mass. Press, 1981), p.250; Luce Irigaray’s famous text ‘Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un’ (Minuit, 1977), as well as Julia Kristeva’s ‘La Femme ce n’est jamais ça’ (Tel quel, Autumn 1974).

For an early but very thorough discussion of the state of women’s contemporary art see Lee, Rosa, ‘Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism’, Feminist Review n.26 (Summer 1987), pp. 5-28. The number of publications in this field has had a considerable increase, suffices only to see the available number of anthologies and readers in “Visual Culture” (See for example, Evans, Jessica and Hall, Stuart, eds., Visual Culture: The Reader (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999). For its large spectrum and its particular focus on feminist theory, see Price, Janet and Shildrick, Margrit, eds., Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1999).


Cindy Sherman, American artist from Buffalo, settled in New York city in 1977. Her main areas of interest include photography, film and performance. She showed first at Artists Space in “Pictures” with a group of young artists soon achieving high profiles and quickly labeled as postmodernist. In 1980 she had her first one-person show at Metro Pictures. By 1982, she was selected for Documenta 8 in Kassel, Germany. In 1987, at the age of 33, she was given a retrospective of her work at the Whitney Museum (reference taken from Jeanne Siegal, Art Talk: The Early 80s (New York: Da Capo, 1988), p. 269.


Nead, Lynda, The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality, p.79.


Jo Spence (1934-92). Jo Spence was a British socialist and a feminist who set out to investigate how photography and the media operated – particularly in the sphere of women’s identity – both theoretically and through her photography. Some of her best-known work was a series of collaborative ventures involving role play and dressing up to investigate her and collaborator’s personality and relationship through the use of photography which she styled “Photo Therapy”. One of her major projects was documenting her own breast cancer and the attitudes of the medical establishment to this. (Reference taken from the web “Directory of Notable Photographers”).


Holloway, Memory, “Effet de mirroir: regard vers le passé, marche vers l’ avenir”, in Secrets Dévoilés: Dessins et gravures de Paula Rego (Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, Paris, 1999), p.10: “Dans un sens nous pouvons lire la gravure comme s’il s’agissait d’un événement vu à travers d’une fenêtre, une taktique habituelle de la peinture moderniste dans l’ oeuvre de Matisse où son emploi nous conduit à nous demander si nous devrions considérer la peinture comme un mur, une surface plate, ou bien une fenêtre ouvrant sur le monde. Mais pour Paula Rego, la gravure aux multiples significations agit nettement sur le personnage situé en dessous”.