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Dis/playing the phallus: male artists perform their masculinities

Amelia Jones

The phallus, according to the new Random House Dictionary, is ‘1°: an image of the male reproductive organ, esp. that carried in procession in ancient festivals of Dionysus, or Bacchus, symbolizing the generative power in nature; 2°: Anat., the penis, the clitoris, or the sexually undifferentiated embryonic organ out of which either of these develops.’ The principal function of the phallus, then, is to celebrate the primacy of the male subject by symbolizing his genital prowess in public rituals. Its secondary meaning, and I have to say I was shocked to find such egalitarianism accorded to this usually unilaterally biased term, implies a collapse of sexual difference into a nebulous, ‘undifferentiated’ pre-genital state.

This anatomically based yet radically amorphous phallus contrasts dramatically with that famous concept-cum-organ defined in coyly ambiguous terms by Jacques Lacan: ‘The phallus is not a fantasy ... nor is it such an object (part, internal, good, bad, etc ...) in so far as this term tends to accentuate the reality involved in a relationship. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, which it symbolises.’ As many feminists have pointed out, while Lacan thus imputes a radical unfixability to the phallus, he also continues to characterize it as the means of accessing the symbolic — the order of the law and the father. The relations between the sexes, he claims, ‘will revolve around a being and a having which ... refer to a signifier, the phallus ...’ Although we all know who ‘has’ and who ‘is’ in patriarchal culture, Lacan’s system arguably allows for the ambiguities and complexities of subjectivity and sexual identity and, potentially, for an understanding of the culturally specific nature of the penis/phallus conflation. The phallus is not (or not simply) the penis, though, as Jane Gallop has noted: ‘the masculinity of the phallic signifier [phallus being masculine in gender in the French language] serves well as an emblem of the confusion between phallus and male which inheres in language, in our symbolic order.’ Lacan’s phallus implies that while ‘[m]an is threatened with loss, woman is deprived’; it is a sign of the fact that the ‘subject that knows cannot be separated from the subject that can mistake the phallus for a penis.’

This paper addresses masculinity as a negotiated system of identities that are accomplished through the ritual display of phallic attributes, specifically in relation to the masculinized function of the artist — a function that could be said to exaggerate the attributes of masculinity affording power to the male subject in patriarchal culture. As many feminist art historians have pointed out, the artist
in modern western culture is a quintessentially phallic figure, one who exaggerates the characteristics of the fictional unified subject of modernism (that subject Michel Foucault has theorized as ‘modern man’). The male artist is paradigmatic of the ideologically centred subject of modernism, acting as a paternal origin for subsequent lineages of artistic production, a genius whose fully intentional creative acts are invested with transcendental value by art history — a discipline that, not incidentally, developed within the period designated by Foucault as the modern episteme (beginning roughly in 1800 and extending towards the present). Within this period, the artist has come to epitomize the centreing of the modern subject upon himself — the construction of the masculine self as a coherent individual at the expense of female subjectivity, which is thus rendered impossible to conceive. The artist has become a guarantor of Kantian transcendental unity through which Jacques Derrida has called the ‘divine teleology’ of western aesthetics — a teleology founded in the figure of the artistic genius, who is given ‘surplus value’ by God, his inspiration. The artist might be said to replace God in the modern episteme, the period of God’s demise, if Nietzsche is to be believed.

In this essay I explore the intersection of the masculine and authorial fields of subjectivity by examining the work of male artists who, in the 1960s and early 1970s, used their own bodies in or as their art: Yves Klein, Robert Morris, Vito Acconci and Chris Burden. I argue that, by displaying and performing their own bodies, these ‘body artists’ shift to varying degrees away from the transcendental and singularly masculine conception of artistic authority put into place within modernism — a conception that relies on the veiling of the actual body of the artist such that his divinity (his phallic prowess) can be ensured. As Lacan writes: ‘... the phallus can only play its role as veiled’; the artist’s authority is most effectively confirmed when the function of the phallus is masked, hidden under art-historically sanctioned symbols of artistic genius. Art history provides this veiling function both by celebrating genius as if it is divinely endowed and inherent rather than a system of attributes displayed by the artist and given value through the interpretive act, and by occluding its own investments behind a façade of objectivity. Through this veiling of the authorial and interpretive phallus, art history pretends that artistic and interpretive authority are gender neutral.

Whether consciously or not, these male body artists exaggerate the phallic properties of masculinity and authorial subjectivity to various effects. They ‘play’ the phallus, exploiting its conventional alignment with the male body to reinforce their own artistic authority and/or they ‘display’ its anatomical corollary, the penis, to potentially deconstructive ends. At the very least, through this exaggerated dis/play, they could be said to complicate the modernist strategy of disguising or occluding the link between the symbolic function of the phallus and the penis: that link that simultaneously obscures and guarantees the privileging of the anatomically male subject within western culture. It is through performing the normative attributes of masculinity that these attributes are played out as contingent rather than inherent.

It may seem problematic that I continue to focus here on the blatantly heterosexist and binary terms of the phallic division. I hope that the reasons
for this focus will become clear as I recreate in my own terms various projects of male body artists, all of whom performed themselves as heterosexual in their lives and work. While interrogating this work in terms of conventional masculinity, then, I do not mean to imply that masculinity is a fixed term, much less that the phallus is an anatomical thing that can be visually determined as its attribute. Rather, I hope to suggest that, while this work still operates within 1960s' and 1970s' assumptions about gender difference, it can also be interpreted as in some ways rupturing the very binary model of gender that it engages with — opening provocative cracks in the fabric (or flesh?) of masculinity.

Subtending this analysis will be an interest in historical concerns. I examine this work as instantiating what I see to be a shift towards a more critical approach among male artists to the phallus (to modernism's heroic artist genius figure), an approach marked by a transformation of the firmly heterosexual, masculine conception of artistic authority into a performative relationship with subjectivity and identity in general. Certainly not incidentally, this shift coincides with the rise of the second wave of feminism and of the civil rights and gay rights movements, all of which attacked the politics of normative subjectivity in white, male-dominated Euro-American culture, as well as with the development of poststructuralist critiques of modernist conceptions of subjectivity and meaning. It also, as Kathy O'Dell has argued in her extensive examination of masochistic performance art, parallels an increasing scepticism toward the state — a transformation in individuals' relationships with the social contract resulting from the trauma of the Vietnam war.

I am placing these artists, then, within a particular social and theoretical context — one in which subjectivity begins to be articulated not in terms of a Cartesian reigning, but rather as a continually negotiated exchange among individuals. I am reading body art as constitutive and exemplary of a profound shift in conceptions of the self in western culture — a shift that we might characterize as postmodern. In the visual arts, where postmodernism is generally discussed only in relation to the productive strategies employed in contemporary art practices — such as the dematerialization of the object, fragmentation and allegory, appropriation, and the merging of high and low culture — postmodernism has not been examined in relation to questions of subjectivity in any extended sense. This essay — and the book project on body art and artistic performativity to which it relates — aim to begin to fill this lacuna by exploring the vicissitudes of artistic subjectivity and interpretation within postmodernism. Because body artworks actively perform the embodied and sexualized subject of the artist in relation to a viewing audience, they provide a paradigmatic locus for an inquiry into shifts in authorial and interpretive subjectivity and conceptions of the body/self in the last thirty years.

These shifts have been marked and codified as well within poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, which have moved away from existentialist and Cartesian notions of the self to models of subjectivity as split, alienated and sexually uncertain: as performative rather than ontologically fixed. Thus Jacques Derrida argues that it is the performative act that most directly disrupts the 'self-presence of will and spiritual animation' claimed by modernist discourse. In its physicality, body art could be said to enact the 'visibility and spatiality' that, for Derrida, 'are literally the death of that self-presence.' Far from confirming the artist's metaphysical presence, then, we could argue in Derrida's terms that the material presentation of the body in body art casts this presence into doubt. The performative body of the artist makes clear the incoherences and investments of the interpretive exchange: the fact that, in Derrida's terms, '[w]hen I listen to [or view] another, his lived experience is not present to me in person'... [but mediated through] the visibility of his body.' By studying body art retrospectively, through photographs, textual descriptions, and video and film documentation — as I do here — the fundamental absence of the body in performance is perhaps made all the more evident in its elusiveness, as representation.

Finally, while it would be easier simply to condemn this work as unequivocally masculinist, I take it as a challenge to offer desiring and performative feminist readings that acknowledge both its seductiveness (in its sexualization of the male body and potential dislocation of phallic mastery) and my own participation as an Anglo heterosexual feminists in determining particular values for it. What I hope to add to an understanding of the meanings of body art and postmodernism here is an acknowledgement of the performative aspect of interpretation itself and thus of the implication of interpretive desire in the production of meaning for this work. I view this production as differing from that involved in paintings or other static objects to the extent that, when the interpreter actually experiences the body in performance rather than its representations, she/he faces a different type of identificatory bond with the performer: not a more 'essential' or more 'radical' one necessarily, but one whose effects may well be more difficult to reorder or repress due to the temporal aspects of performance (particularly its unpredictability as an open-ended narrative form) and to the immediate proximity of artist and interpreter — such that the two can potentially interact and respond to one another's reactions. My interpretive framework, then, is posed as a feminist alternative to conventional and eminently phallocentric models of interpretation that require a repression of the question of the engaged body; by addressing practices of body art and the interpretive pleasures it evokes, I am stressing the need to open this repression. My point is that body art is neither inherently anti-masculinist nor immediately phallocentric but rather — as I exchange with it here — can be read as raising important questions about the intimate relationship between masculinity and artistic and interpretive authority.

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The shift toward a performative conception of artistic subjectivity has been marked broadly in art discourse and practice since 1960 or so. Strikingly, for example, in paging through issues of art magazines from the late 1960s and early 1970s, one finds a proliferation of self-performance advertisements on the part of both male and female artists. It is important to note that the productive and receptive contexts of these images are decidedly different from those of photographs stemming from public performances — they lack the 'spontaneity' common to the photograph of a performance (the spontaneity that, even when staged, seems to act as 'proof' of the duration, immediacy and proximity that presumably
existed at the time the photographs were taken). These advertisements are, rather, the result of privately enacted poses presented within commercial venues. While we thus encounter these photographs on different grounds, they still offer us the opportunity to engage and negotiate with a playfully performative artistic figure who complicates the gender and class-coded terms of artistic subjectivity.

This self-consciously ironic subject-in-representation contrasts dramatically with the modernist artist, who is generally constructed — and constructs himself — as a fixed, masculine subject. For example, in the infamous 1949 presentation of Jackson Pollock as the greatest living artist in Life magazine (plate 13), he is aligned with a blatantly romanticized and masculine artistic authority. Pollock’s representation dramatically contrasts with the majority of images of post-Abstract Expressionist artists, who often parody or otherwise undermine this histrionic notion of artistic genius as divinely endowed (and inevitably masculine) through photographic posing. Thus, in an advertisement dating from September 1970 in Artforum (plate 14) Robert Rauschenberg perches casually on a ladder in front of a large-scale lithograph in a bourgeois plaid suit, subverting the alignment of artistic authority with a transcendentalized phallic power by refusing the macho poses and self-consciously anti-bourgeois clothing of Pollock (but also, arguably, maintaining the prerogative of masculine authority by projecting an image of himself as imbricated within his heroically monumental artwork).

Notably, this performativity is not gender neutral; the strategic self-fashioning of male artists contrasts sharply with that of women artists, as we can see by comparing Judy Chicago’s advertisement for an exhibition at California State University, Fullerton (plate 15) to Ed Ruscha’s coy promotional picture (plate 16) (both published in Artforum, December 1970 and January 1967 respectively). While Chicago fashions herself as a butch pugilist, wearing boxing gloves, satin shorts, and leaning back against the ropes of a boxing ring, humorously and aggressively transforming the image of a woman artist as retiring and passive, Ed Ruscha constructs himself as a bad boy art stud, lying in bed between two seemingly naked women. In case the reader misses the point, Ruscha’s picture is captioned ‘Ed Ruscha says goodbye to college joys.’

Both ads ironize artistic subjectivity; Chicago and Ruscha adopt the attributes of a phallic masculinity, enacting sexual difference as an element of artistic subjectivity. But they produce this masculinity — and we read it today — from radically different perspectives. Chicago, as a woman artist in the early 1970s, had a large stake in undermining the conflation of the artist with masculinity and authority (the penis with the phallus); knowing she is a woman, we read her image as a critique of this conflation. Because he is a man, we can assume that Ruscha had an even larger stake in nurturing it; certainly the effects of his parodic gesture are to empower him as both phallic (heterosexually virile)
and ironically anti-modernist. Even under the regime of postmodernism, which is ostensibly critical of the masculocentrism of modernism, such male self-display is rewarded (the relative economic value of Ruscha's and Chicago's paintings, and their contrasting levels of acceptance by art-historical institutions will confirm which artist is viewed more favourably by the market). What I am defining as the postmodern performativity of the artist subject, then, still often maintains relatively conventional gender codes.

Similarly, Klein, Morris, Acconci and Burden have also performed themselves in relation to the phallic attributes of masculinity. Again, it must be stressed that the dynamics of self-display I examine here generally took place initially within a theatrical context (Acconci alone of the four often performed for film or video cameras in private). While I was not present for the live performances, I read the still photographs and textual descriptions documenting these events as moments taken from an extended narrative. Most of the still images I discuss here, like the advertisements I introduced above, are the result of carefully choreographed actions that were monitored, staged and distributed by the artist in question; key to this discussion, then, will be the issue of self-construction.

As is evident in the still photographs taken of his public performances and in the portraits he posed for throughout his career, Yves Klein, for example, could be described as a master of performativity, a brilliant fashioner of the artistic self. Early on in his life, Klein was a self-trained Rosicrucian, living a life of self-discipline to attain the transfiguration of the body promised by the esoteric theories of Max Heindel. In Klein's words, he wanted to create 'in the ego the power to purify the physical body and the astral body and the body of desire'. When he decided he was an artist, somewhat late in his brief life of thirty-four years, Klein transferred his Rosicrucian training into Romantic models of artistic genius, with figures such as Delacroix and Van Gogh functioning as levers to shift the orgasmic spiritualism of his religious training into modernism's more practical spiritualism of artistic genius. Thus, in his writings Klein makes inflated, romantic claims of artistic production — such as, the artist 'puts a soul in his creation'.

Klein's other early disciplinary project was to learn judo, a system of rigorous self-control aimed at merging the physical and cognitive sides of the self. Already by the late 1940s (when he was in his early twenties), then, Klein had committed himself to a systematic self-construction that involved both body and mind, attempting to break down the usual barriers constructed in western culture between body and mind to project himself as a total and, in his terms, 'universal' subject. As Rotraut Klein, his wife, later said of him, 'He was absolutely a mystic man. He was like Jesus.' Or, as Jean Tinguely described him, 'Yves Klein was absolutely the champion in every category of anguish.' The self-imposed heroic drama of the Kleinian subject, orchestrated via public statements and writings, carefully posed photographic portraits, and photographs of performances, marks an nth-degree example of the masculinity of the heroic artist figure of modernism — to such an extreme that Klein can certainly be interpreted as subverting its characteristics through excess.

It is perhaps in his performative actions that we can most directly examine the ways in which Klein made masculinity function for himself — both ironically and deadly seriously at the same time. Klein's most notorious self-promotional act is perhaps his photographic Leap into the Void from 1960 (plate 17). Publicly claiming these pictures as documents of a single, high-risk, metaphysical leap into space, Klein nonetheless published two different versions, exposing his own

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manages both to critque the phallus and to possess it, with this photographically rendered act paradoxically celebrated as exemplary of the postmodern critique of modernism’s emphasis on existential risk.

Yves Klein mastered the art of self-fashioning, brilliantly drawing on the very tropes of masculinity (the tough judo athlete, the finely dressed bourgeois gentleman) that his work simultaneously celebrates and undermines. Posing as a Christ-like figure, abusing his body with amphetamines and leading himself to an untimely death at the age of thirty-four, Klein stoked the fires of adulatory hero worship in art-historical narratives, which tend obediently to point darkly and portentously toward this final oblivion as if it were inevitable, given Klein’s great genius. Thus, Pierre Restany, Klein’s most enthusiastic supporter, writes: ‘The Man-Christ is the conscious instrument of a transitory mutation. No audacity is forbidden as long as the goal is to “feel higher and see bigger”’. . . . Yves Klein’s sudden death was an answer . . . A prolongation of his physical existence would have added nothing.” Thanks to his death, retrospectively determined as a dramatic climax to a life of supernatural brilliance, Klein joins the ranks of the angst-ridden masters of modernism.

There are easier ways for the male artist to ensure his authorial prowess than to die, however. While other European artists such as Joseph Beuys and Hermann Nitsch seem to have abandoned irony completely in their appeals to Christian ritual and the militaristic attributes of masculinity, male artists from the United States during the 1960s and ’70s tended to work, like Klein, in ironic and overtly sexualized ways, both against and with the grain of phallic authority. The US artist Robert Morris, for example, also contrived performative images of himself that play with conventional masculine artistic subjectivity. As with Klein, Morris’s ironic self-constructions allowed him to empower himself through ambivalence, his smug parodying of the attributes of masculinity placing him in the paradoxical position of anti-modernist mastery.

In 1962, for example, Morris executed his I-Box (plate 18). Here, Morris flaunts his disrobed body, blatantly contextualizing its alignment, as anatomically male, with the authoritative ‘I’ of artistic production. Smirking, as if enjoying his defiance of the conventional system of veiling by which the body of the male artist is covered up and/or hidden away to further its claims to phallic mastery, Morris stands unabashed behind the wooden ‘I’. In fact, the very structure of the piece, with its hinged door that the viewer must open to gain access to the photograph of the fully exposed figure of the artist, intensifies (yet reverses) the voyeuristic relation implicated in the ascription of phallic power to the male subject: it is the artist, normatively the possessor of the so-called ‘male gaze’ (and the authorial ‘I’), whose body is given to the scopophilic and fetishizing look of the viewer.

In his infamous self-constructed image on a Castelli/Sonnabend Gallery poster from 1974 (plate 19), Morris appears overtly to enact the alignment of the male body as penis with the empowering phallus. In this image, as Mira Schor has written in her essay ‘Representations of the Penis’, Morris ‘turns himself into a penis, a GI helmet forming the head, and his bare and oiled pecs and biceps the shaft. But, decorously, he is shot from the waist up and for good measure you can spot his BVDs waistband at the bottom edge of the photograph.”
Schor stresses that Morris's body operates as phallus only through the occlusion of his anatomical penis. Furthermore, because of his access to authorial power as a male subject in patriarchy, Morris's self-phallicization has radically different effects from that more common fetishization of the female body in western art as substitute for her ostensibly lacking phallic organ — as a comparison with Lynda Benglis's contemporaneous parody of fetishization makes clear (plate 20). Benglis's Artform advertisement from 1974, which quickly became the more infamous of the two, was made in dialogue with Morris's poster and the two were lovers at the time. Hoisting a huge plastic dildo (a 'phallus' that could hardly be more obviously artificial) against her taut, greased and clearly female body, Benglis explicitly illustrates the culturally determined disjunction between being a woman and wielding the phallus.

Morris, conversely, adopts the excessive attributes of a specific type of masculinity (working-class tough guy, his S/M garb also signalling the dangerous marginality of gay male subjectivity). By doing so, one could argue that he dislocates the signifiers of masculinity, exposing it as a construction. One could just as easily make the point, however, that he shows as constructed a particular type of masculinity — one that is distant from his actual experience, and so does not threaten his artistic subjectivity as a middle-class, straight, white male artist. Either way, Morris also affords himself a knowledge of masculine authority that Benglis can only mimic. It must be strongly stressed again that because of our identification of Morris as a male artist, we read his adoption of phallic attributes differently. As a male artist Morris, while certainly projecting an ironic awareness of the constructedness of masculinity, also has an entirely different relationship to the masculine than do feminist body artists such as Benglis — artists who, perhaps particularly in the 1970s, had far more of a stake in thoroughly dismantling the tropes of masculine genius. Feminists under patriarchy have often been forced to access knowledge at least in part through the aggressive appropriation of phallic attributes that are not seen as properly theirs; for Morris, the phallus is ostensibly always already 'his'. While the women enact themselves in self-exploratory scenarios, Morris — as male artist — takes on the role of master, of teacher, of the subject who supposedly knows.

Morris's power comes from his carefully measured parody of masculine authority. Benglis's power, if momentary and ambiguous, stems from her exposure of the deep prohibitions surrounding artistic subjectivity (the prohibition against women playing the role of artist, and that against unveiling the artificiality of the phallus of artistic authority). The effects of this asymmetry are reflected in contemporaneous and subsequent interpretations of the two artists and their performative actions. While Morris's poster is generally discussed as an amusing and intelligent critique of masculinity, Benglis's has engendered hostile if not hysterical responses. Thus, in a letter published in the subsequent issue of the magazine by a group of Artforum editors, the ad is condemned as an 'object of extreme vulgarity'. Benglis's 'extreme vulgarity' is precisely that which exposes the masculinism of artistic and critical authority, prompting the frantic attempts to devalue the piece on the part of these editors, who have a stake in keeping this masculinism (the phallus of critical authority) veiled. While Benglis and other feminist body artists (such as Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke) have been marginalized from histories of contemporary art, Morris, conversely, is incorporated within mainstream art history as a critic of the mastery of the male artist subject and as a Minimalist genius — perhaps because he still remains familiarly (rather than threateningly) phallic in doing so.

The performative pieces I have discussed so far display the male artist's body to the exclusion of others — building up a narcissistic relationship to conventional artistic masculinity that is simultaneously critical and exploitative of the phallic attributes of male authorial prowess. Both Morris and Klein, however, also performed their relationship to the female body directly in several pieces from the 1960s. The productive as well as receptive aspects of these pieces tell us more about how masculinity operates ambivalently, if still empoweringly, in relation to male body art.

It is notable, for example, that Morris's collaborations with women artists and dancers — potentially radically dislocating of masculine artistic subjectivity as they may be — are reinscribed as his masterworks within art-historical studies, where the women are defined as adjuncts or models. Thus one of his best-known performances from the period, Site (1965), which stemmed from Morris's plan to do a collaborative project with Carolee Schneemann, is defined by Maurice Berger in his recent book on Morris as follows: Morris 're-creates a symbolic world of manual labor and prostitution ... Morris's representation of labor ... communicated to other artists the need to recognize their labor as legitimate and productive.' Berger, typically, recasts the work as entirely Morris's,


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endowing him with the power to teach Schneemann how to recognize her prostituted labour 'as legitimate and productive'. Presenting the prostitute yet denying her active subjectivity (she stared impassively and motionless), Morris took on the active role of labourer in a metaphorical gesture toward his own artistic prowess in the piece, examining not labour in general but the risk and difficulty lending heroic status to artistic creation. Schneemann herself has expressed irritation at having been demoted in the piece to the role of immobile and sexualized symbol of female ‘labor’ and consternation over her construction by male artists and by art historians in general as, in her words, 'cunt mascot ... PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE, BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN SELF-IMAGE'.

Morris initially gained his interest in performance through his association with the highly experimental Judson Dance Group and organized several performance projects that involved women respected as choreographers and dancers. He performed with dancers Yvonne Rainer and Lucinda Childs in Waterman Switch, for example, at the Judson Memorial Church in 1965. In this piece, Morris and Rainer danced nude up parallel wooden tracks, clutching each other in an awkward embrace, while Childs, cross-dressed as a businessman, walked beside them pulling a ball of twine. Locked together, Morris and Rainer struggled back and forth to the tune of a love aria by Guiseppe Verdi; at the end of the piece, Morris poured the contents of a bottle of mercury down Rainer's back. Berger again supplies a reading that constructs a masculinist sexual subtext to this love duet: 'The slithering mass [of mercury], rudely hitting the floor, serves as a metaphor for the deflowering [of the virgin] — a transgressive, voyeuristic passage that implicates both spectator and performer.'

At this point, addressing Morris's interpretation as invested and performative, we need to ask exactly who is implicated in this deflowering and in what way. If Morris were perceived by the male critic as displaying his nudity and unveiling his sexuality in concert with that of an equally renowned female artist (Rainer), then the piece could be seen as promoting a reading critical of the binary logic of conventional norms of sexual difference. Eliciting male and female spectatorial desire (with either male or female spectator afforded the opportunity for either the male or female body as object of desire), Waterman Switch could then be read as a proto-feminist tour-de-force, a critique of the alignment of creative genius with the hidden male body, of the visual objects of desire with the exposed female body. However, Morris's final gesture, as interpreted for us by Berger, closes off this potential by specifying in a disturbingly conventional way who is in control, who is able to sexualize and who is destined to be sexualized. Following Berger's reading, the spectator implicated in an active sense must take a masculine position to identify with the acting figure, Morris, while Rainer — avant-garde dancer, filmmaker and theorist — is subordinated to him as reactive and victimized (deflowered) female body.

Underlined by irony, Yves Klein's public 'anthropometries' performances from 1960 to 1962 (plate 21) are far more overtly and dramatically abusive of the female body than Morris's performative pieces. Here, Klein specifically veils his own body, this time behind the classic trope of masculinist modernism, the naked female form. As photographs of his public Anthropometries of the Blue Period (21 Yves Klein directing Anthropometries of the Blue Period, Galerie internationale d'art contemporaine, Paris, 1960. Photograph by Harry Shunk.)

(turned at the Galerie internationale d'art contemporaine, Paris, 1960) show, far from integrating his body in any direct way, Klein stood imperiously aside, directing the models to move in various positions across the canvas with their paint-smeared bodies. He described the effects of his strategy as follows:

These living brushes are under the constant direction of my commands ... Personally I would never attempt to smear paint over my own body and become a living brush; on the contrary, I would rather put on my tuxedo and wear white gloves. I would not even think of dirtying my hands with paint. Detached and distant, the work of art must complete itself before my eyes and under my command. Thus, as soon as the work is realized, I stand there, present at the ceremony, spotless, calm, relaxed, worthy of it, and ready to receive it as it is born into the intangible world ...

Dressed in formal attire and accompanied by his 'Monotone Symphony', in the public performances of anthropometries Klein deliberately exerted a masterful
control over his female tools. Although they did the work, dirtying and displaying their bodies, Klein refuses to give them credit for formulating the image ('the work', rather, 'completes itself . . . under [his] command'). Generating the images without fouling his hands with their propulsion into the world, Klein's calculated distance both ironizes the mythology of the action painting hero thrusting his body across the canvas on the floor, and increases his own mastery by assigning himself the authority of another sort: the authority of detachment, of irony, of knowingly subverting only to maintain the reign of the phallus. As one critic wrote, due to their production, 'which was coolly beautiful and sensual to a very high degree', the anthropometries 'will remain one of those audacious marks of appropriation which signals Klein's genius.'

Klein staged other less dramatically public performances of the anthropometries for close friends and for photographers. In a subsequent, more private version of the anthropometries, Klein worked closely with one model. While Klein is dressed in his standard formal garb, working to keep his body clean and in control, photographs of this performance, in contrast to those of the version at the Galerie internationale d'art contemporaine, depict Klein dirtying his hands as he rubs paint over the front of the model's body and roughly drags her across the canvas (plate 22). The images of the private anthropometries show a far less controlled artistic subject: notably, for example, in one of these pictures Klein can be seen pursing his lips, a gesture that betrays a physical and emotional investment in the process of making that Klein seems studiously to avoid in the public version of the piece (or at least in the photographs he had published to document it). Klein's remarkable projection of sexual control is key to the functioning of these images. Far from accentuating the sensual aspects of the act of smearing an unclothed body with paint, even in the photographs of the private performance Klein touches the model at a distance and handles her roughly. He played up this aspect of his bodily control in statements stressing his cool detachment in the face of the female models' desire such as: 'At first they thought me crazy; afterwards they could no longer keep themselves away from coming to pose for me . . . The irresistible master, Klein not only wields the phallus, he withholds its genital substitute to maintain his power (a power seductive even to the feminist interpreter, as my fascination with this work will attest).

It is the very skill with which Klein manipulates the attributes of masculinity and artistic potency that makes him desirable even to the feminist reader, endowing him with cultural power. The subversive aspects of Klein's attitude seem confirmed by his statement repudiating the transcendentalism and masculinism of modernist painting:

I loathe artists who empty themselves into their painting, as is quite often the case today. Morbidism, rather than thinking of the beautiful, the good, the true in their painting: they express, they ejaculate, they spit out every horrible, rotten, and infectious complexity in their painting as if relieving themselves and putting the burden on others, 'the readers of their works', of all their sorry failures.

And yet, Klein's romantic emphasis on 'the beautiful' and 'the good' and 'the true', his continual fascination with the phallic attributes of artistic subjectivity, and his addiction to the power afforded by an adoption of the signifiers of a hyper-masculinity — all argue against any simplistic notion of Yves Klein as radically deconstructing artistic authority. As he parodies it, so he wields it. Klein dis/plays the phallus always in a highly coded, and coyly self-empowering way,
seducing his audience (both then and now) through a dramatic and highly controlled ambivalence that enables him both to critique and make use of the phallic attributes of the artistic subject. 40

Klein's ostentatiously offensive objectifications of the female body in the anthropometries reiterate even as they parody the closed systems by which modernist art production and reception, under a façade of neutrality, continue to compose rigid and exclusionary structures of artistic meaning and value: while the male artist plays with his authority, the female is still body — fetishized phallic substitute. I would like to turn now to a number of performative works that more directly and violently enact the alignment between phallic attributes, including the male artist's penis, and the power assigned to the male creative subject. The other male body artists I am addressing here — Vito Acconci and Chris Burden — exposed their bodies in masochistic rituals, raising the question of how violence operates in relation to masculinity: do violent acts perpetrated on the male body build up its image as an inviolable vessel of unified subjectivity, or dislocate the strategic coherence of masculinity through the desecration of its physical repository? Extending my earlier points, I insist that potentially they do both — the particular effects of each performative act are contingent on its productive and receptive contexts — particularly, here, on my own interpretive exchanges with the photographic, textual and filmed traces that remain to document these male bodies in performance.

In Vito Acconci's best-known performance piece, the infamous Seedbed of 1972 (plate 23), he lay under a ramp in the Sonnabend Gallery three days a week and masturbated when visitors entered the gallery, magnifying his moans and whispers over a loudspeaker.41 Mira Schor's essay 'Representations of the Penis' discusses Acconci's piece as exemplary of the way in which male artists explored masculinity in the early 1970s only to reaffirm its privileges. She argues that in determining his goal as 'the production of seed', Acconci makes the gallery 'the site for the production and display (although unseen) of male sexuality . . . There is reference and allusion to the penis, but the artist and his penis . . . remain hidden in a mantle of art.'42 And yet, one could also argue that Acconci is surfacing the erotics of the marketing of art: the commodification of male procreative prowess via a hidden mechanics of transference, whereby masculinity is most valuable when it is carefully hidden behind (and conflated with) the objects of art. Either way, one must agree with Schor that in the performance itself Acconci hid his penis from view (although one can strain to view it in one of the photographs used to document the event).43

Acconci published a statement about Seedbed, part of which reads as follows: 'Whenever I happen to reach climax, the viewer might want to pick himself or herself out of the crowd; the viewer might want to think: he's done this for me, he's done this with me, he's done this because of me.'44 On the one hand, in specifying the interpolated visitor as female or male, it would seem that Acconci further opens the subject/object exchange of artistic production to a radicalizing, polymorphous erotics of viewing and hearing. On the other hand, Acconci's statement makes clear the narcissism his interest in intersubjective exchange involves: 'he's done this for me', etc. While enthralled by the observer's response to him, Acconci's fascination returns to himself — and particularly the power of seduction he can wield, as an artist, over a gallery audience. This performance, then, can be interpreted as being both masculinizing — in its narcissistic empowerment of the performing male subject, and feminizing — in that his performative, masturbatory act positions him as object of (and desiring of) the viewer's desire, exposing a 'desire to desire' on his part that aligns him with the 'problematic relation to language and [its] . . . signifier par excellence (the phallus)', that defines and circumscribes the female subject in patriarchy.45 As object of the viewer's desires (themselves anticipated and projected by Acconci), Acconci feminizes himself, staging an oscillatory circuit of bi-sexualized desires between himself and his audience.

In Conversions I—III, his performative films from 1970–1971, Acconci brutalizes his hairy, clearly masculine body directly, ostensibly in an attempt to transform it into a feminine one. First he takes a candle and burns off his chest hair, in his published statement explaining that 'once my chest is hairless . . . I pull each breast in a futile attempt to develop a woman's breast'. (plate 12) The second part of Conversions consists of Acconci 'walking, running, jumping, bending over, . . . all the while', he explains, 'attempting to keep my penis "removed", held between my legs.' Finally, in Conversions III, in an apotheosis of his feminization, a woman kneels behind him and he pushes his penis back into her mouth (plate 25). Acconci describes this act as follows: 'when I'm seen from the front, the woman disappears behind me and I have no penis, I become the woman I've cancelled out.'46 Schor interprets this act as simply

23 Vito Acconci, Seedbed, 1972; photograph and text documenting performance at Sonnabend Gallery (detail, photograph). Photograph by Larry Lame, courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery.
misogynist, writing, 'the phallus reinserts itself over the erased/lacking woman, even as the penis is hidden, as usual.'47 And yet, in its effacement of both masculinity (the hiding of his penis) and femininity (the 'cancelling out' of the woman) could this ritual not be said to enact the reciprocity of gender identity and the fundamental lack installed at the core of all subjectivity? Again, I would argue that both dynamics are at play in Accconi's works, which I read here as attempts to take apart systems of gender difference through performative displays of his sexual body and thus as far more sceptical of conventional masculinity than the body artworks of Klein, Morris, or Burden. Accconi projects himself as ejaculating yet victimized, the directing subject of the action and the receptive object of spectatorial desire — marking the ultimate exchangeability and interdependence of each element in the supposedly oppositional categories of viewer/viewed, male/female, subject/object.

In discussing the work of Accconi, and comparing it to that of an artist such as Chris Burden, the role of masochism in the dis/play of male artistic subjectivity needs to be addressed. It must be stressed, however, that these artists' masochistic acts are carefully staged for viewing audiences; masochism in their case, then,


is to be understood in a metaphorical rather than clinical sense.48 According to Freud, masochism is a perversion experienced by the male subject, one characterized by a passive attitude toward the sexual life, or a narcissistic and feminized relation toward sexual pleasure (a dynamic that would, of course, correspond to Accconi's feminization as described above).49 The masochistic subject fantasizes about being beaten or tortured, the object of another, usually female, subject of violence. For Freud, male masochists 'invariably transfer themselves into the part of a woman; that is to say, their masochistic attitude corresponds with a feminine one.'50 And yet, as other theorists of masochism have argued, this perversion can also function as a means of ensuring the coherence and power of the masochistic subject. Theodor Reik, for example, writes, 'The masochist ... cannot be broken from the outside. He has an inexhaustible capacity for taking a beating and yet knows unconsciously he is not licked.'51 Hence, the masochist's self-mutilations serve to reinforce the impenetrability of the heroic male body, its survivability under any violent circumstance.

Paralleling Reik's observation, Gilles Deleuze argues in his study of masochism...
that the masochist hardly relinquishes power, as Freud's model of passivity would suggest: 'the masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her . . . prompts the harsh words she addresses to him. It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer . . .'. The masochist, then, commands the very action by which he suffers. With Aconci, this action was primarily self-inflicted. With Chris Burden, however, Deleuze's model follows more directly, as he usually ordered others (usually male friends) to perform violent acts upon his body. Thus, in the infamous Shoot (1971), Burden, who had just finished his graduate work at University of California, Irvine (where he studied with Robert Morris and others), stood in a gallery and ordered a male colleague to shoot him; the bullet grazed his upper arm (plate 26).

Burden carefully staged each performance and had it photographed and sometimes also filmed; he selected usually one or two photographs of each event for display in exhibitions and catalogues, where the photographs are accompanied by a 'relic' from the event and by Burden's laconically macho description of the performance action. In this way, Burden produced himself for posterity through meticulously orchestrated textual and visual representations. As with Klein, art critics and historians tend to exaggerate further the heroic effects of Burden's actions; thus Donald Kuspit celebrates Burden's self-destruction as follows:

Burden's early self-torturing performances were . . . more extreme than the typical avant-garde risk-taking . . . Burden's destructiveness is more complicated than the usual daredevil 'flirtation' with death . . . The ingenious way Burden keeps changing [his] method [of self-testing] . . . forces us to ask to what desperate purpose he is proving himself. Who is the self that keeps wrestling with the angel of death? . . . [Burden] has his hand on the very pulse of art.

For Kuspit, Burden's self-inflicted suffering seals his claim to the phallus of artistic authority.

Other pieces by Burden performed during the early to mid-1970s enact the ambivalent and ironic yet potentially self-affirming relationship to masculinity I am attributing to his work. In Trans-Fixed, performed in 1974 (plate 27), Burden ordered a colleague to nail his palms into the roof of a Volkswagen, which was then pushed halfway out of Burden's garage in Venice, California. The engine, Burden's explanatory text reads, 'was run at full speed for two minutes', then the car was pushed back into the garage. The relics from this piece were, appropriately enough, the two nails used to attach Burden's hands to the car. Of course, as with the bloody ritual performances of Hermann Nitsch, Trans-Fixed evokes the crucifixion of Christ and the martyrdom of his saints, positioning Burden metaphorically within the ranks of divine artistic sacrifice attained by the suicides of Vincent van Gogh or Jackson Pollock.

It is provocative, then, to think of Burden's work as verging on Christian masochism, explored by Reik as the form of masochism in which 'the subject functions both as the victim and as the victimizer, dispensing with the need for
an external object. For Reik, Christian masochism is the most extravagantly exhibitionist of all masochistic perversions, all of which have an exhibitionist element: "the suffering, discomfort, humiliation, and disgrace are being shown and so to speak put on display ... In the practices of masochists, denudation and parading with all their psychic concomitant phenomena play such a major part that one feels induced to assume a constant connection between masochism and exhibitionism. Masochism requires a witness.

In Movie on the Way Down of 1973 (plate 28), Burden's exhibitionism is at its most direct and revealing; to my knowledge, this is the only piece among his works in which Burden actually exposed his penis. As the audience members entered a gymnasium at Oberlin College in Ohio to the accompaniment of light piano music, they were confronted by the body of Burden, completely naked, suspended by his feet from the ceiling and holding a camera pointed at the floor. As soon as the music stopped, in Burden's words, 'an assistant in the rafters severed the rope with an axe blow. I crashed to the floor, got up, dressed and left. Apparently, nothing but the macho drama of an axe blow could symbolize the physical risks of the artistic process for Burden. While constructing a situation of extreme vulnerability, exposing his flesh to the desiring and surely horrified gazes of his audience, Burden still maintained an explicitly masculine relationship to pleasure, pain and creative risk.

And yet, this exhibitionism of the unclothed male artist's body, in explicitly displaying the flaccid penis, makes its alignment with the phallic of artistic authority potentially difficult, to say the least. In addition, as Kaja Silverman has argued, 'Christian masochism has radically emasculating implications, and is in its purest forms intrinsically incompatible with the pretensions of masculinity' because of its reliance on the spectatorial gaze. I would argue as well, however, that the exhibitionism of Christian masochism, as epitomized in the case of Jesus Christ, assigns the sufferer an incomparable role of centrality and power in relation to those who view him. Furthermore, while Christ can hardly be said to have controlled his torturers, Burden certainly does; like Yves Klein — and like Deleuze's masochist — he rigorously directs situations of putative danger in order to construct himself as both heroically martyred and bravely surviving.

Masochism has other particularly troubling effects within cultural representation. As Paul Smith has argued in his trenchant discussion of Clint Eastwood's periodic, masochistic helplessness in Hollywood action films, 'the masochistic stage of such narratives cannot be presented as a complete castration and ... the possibility of transcendence must always be kept available. The masochistic trope in this sense must be no more than a temporary test of the male body.' In fact, it is in suffering through the agency of paternal law (the phallus) that the male body emerges triumphant:

... the male masochist in important ways obeys and serves the phallic law ... Male masochism is at first a way of not having to submit to the law, but equally importantly it turns out to be a way of not
male artists dis/playing the phallus

breaking (with) the law... Male masochism might, finally, be seen as another way for the male subject to temporarily challenge his desire for the father and to subvert the phallic law, as ultimately another step in the way... of guaranteeing the male subject as origin of the production of meanings...

Masochism, grasped in this way, would be a closed space where masculinity sets the terms and expounds the conditions of a kind of struggle with itself — not a struggle necessarily for closure, but a struggle to maintain in a pleasurable tension the stages of a symbolic relation to the father — a struggle in which, ironically, the body becomes forgotten.63

Finally, Smith points out that not only is the 'masochistic moment' actually antifemale, but it 'is often crucially anti-homosexual in its significance.'64 That is, as we see especially with Burden, the masochistic moment aims to reassert the integrity of the male heterosexual body — an integrity commonly secured through the conflation of the penis with the phallus of paternal law. Shorn of his illusory claim of bearing the phallus, the male artist is feminized or homosexualized. In short, he is no longer an artist as this figure is conventionally understood in western culture.

However, Smith also argues that this continual process of reinforcing phallic male subjectivity, which requires the suppression of the actual body of the male subject, resides alongside 'a residual, barely avowed male hysteria'. In every case, a 'hysterical moment', he argues, 'marks the return of the male body... as it exceeds the narrative process...'.65 In a sense I am reading the works of Klein, Morris, Acconci and Burden in such a way as to resurface this suppressed male body — which is enacted yet just as dramatically veiled behind the symbolic functions of artistic authority and art-historical interpretation.

To lead towards an ending for this essay — and to the same time to establish a new starting point from which we might begin to rethink these questions involving the dis/play of the phallus in body art — I would like to introduce a male artist whose recent performance projects I interpret as brutally enacting the return of the male body of which Smith writes, and who actualizes the masochism that Acconci and Burden theatricalize without implicating themselves in its clinical 'perversions'. Leaping ahead to these pieces from the late 1980s and 90s will also afford an interesting contrast to the performative male bodies of the 1960s and early 1970s. The period from the late 1980s and 1990s is, of course, that in which I am situated as I write this and from which I have the opportunity to experience male bodies in performance theatrically rather than in representation;66 it is also a period of vastly different identity politics from the earlier one — characterized within feminism and its corollaries (such as queer and third world theory), by an expanding conception of the self as conflictively identified in terms of race, class, sexuality and so on, rather than as simply male or female. While it is outside the scope of this essay to examine these politics in detail, they certainly inform and are informed by male body art projects in this period.

As I interpret them here, the explicitly masochistic works of Bob Flanagan,

a contemporary Los Angeles poet and body artist, interrogate masculinity in a manner simultaneously violent and self-effacing and thus confuse the common tendency to define the disabled male body as emasculated. They encourage the development of a highly charged interpretive exchange between artist and visitor that in my view obviates the authoritative posing I identified in much of the earlier male body art and enables the more polymorphous identity politics of the 1990s. Flanagan was born with cystic fibrosis, an incurable and fatal lung disease. Unlike the other artists I have discussed, he thus begins from a position of extreme physical vulnerability, his bloated and spine-filled lungs making every breath a strain, every action a chore. Flanagan experiences intense internal pain through his illness.

In phenomenological terms, illness concretizes the body, forcing the subject to become hyper-aware of his/her body-in-pain. Sartre writes of the pain of illness as 'revealing' or confirming the physical body of the subject.67 Illness, then, can be said to force the subject to recognize her/his existence in relation not only to another but to the tortured self (alienating the body from the consciousness). As a person disabled by illness and a practising masochist, Flanagan's relationship to his audience could be seen as doubly imbricated and yet doubly distanced: his flamboyantly performed relationship to pain draws us in (parallelising our own psychic traumas), and yet removes him from himself and thus from us as we have identified with his pain.

Flanagan, who is a poet rather than a trained artist, is also unusual in that he entered the art world through performative sadomasochistic practices in private S/M clubs in San Francisco and Los Angeles; he approaches performance from the perspective of a clinical masochist apparently attempting to externalize his internal pain. Accordingly, his performative works are emphatically raw and far more explicitly sexual than the other pieces I have discussed: Flanagan actually mutilates (or has others mutilate) his flesh, reducing the pain of illness — which exacerbatingly scrambles the boundaries between the physical and the psychic — to the less ambiguous agony of the definitively physical. By directing the pain outward, contriving a situation in which an external force causes it, Flanagan becomes momentarily (if illusory) 'unified' as the victimized object of the acts of another. When he lacerates his own flesh, the masochistic strategy constrains him as both acting subject and receptive object of violence, merging subjectivity into objectivity for both Flanagan and his audience and thus confusing the security of either identification.

Flanagan's pieces would be far more confrontational than Burden's, were it not for Flanagan's mode of presentation. Closer to Acconci than Burden in his style of performance, Flanagan mitigates the horror of his suffering through humour and a self-effacing charm that one might associate with a conventionally 'feminine' personality. As a performer, Flanagan is eminently likeable — a 'good hostess' rather than a Burden-esque 'bad boy'. Intertwining acts of piercing, laceration and mutilation of the flesh with direct, personal narratives describing his close relationship with bodily pain, Flanagan breaks down resistance to the brutality of S/M practices through an amenable amateurish presentation style, approaching the audience intimately and congenially and interpellating us as collaborators in his masochism. While Burden affronts, Flanagan confronts and
violating acts work to attain the state of deferral desired by the clinical masochist, whereby castration (the torture) is relegated to foreplay such that pleasure is always already incipient. (And yet, as Flanagan insists, the pain itself produces a pleasurable effect for him.)

Through his masochistic performance of his body, Flanagan exposes his reliance as a masculine subject on the witness, as well as, in certain cases, the dominatrix. As a feminist viewer particularly drawn to Flanagan’s flaunting of his lack, I interpret his work as radically dissociating the penis from its alignment with the phallus as anchor of the symbolic order. Relegating the anatomical organ of male sexuality to the category of pure flesh, Flanagan dis/plays his penis as penis rather than veiling it so that it can pretend to the role of phallus. Any metaphysical value normatively attached to the organ is stripped away. And, perhaps more importantly, by enacting himself publicly through acts of mutilation perpetrated on his unveiled masculine body, Flanagan makes evident the dependence of his identity-in-pain on the reactions of his audience: the male artistic subject exists only in relation to those for whom he performs.

In Flanagan’s recent installation/performance work, Visiting Hours, at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (plate 30), he had himself pulled up to the ceiling by his ankles like Burden in Movie on the Way Down (plate 28). Hoisted up periodically by his partner and dominatrix Sherree Rose, Flanagan nonetheless moved away from Burden’s macho linkage of danger and artistic risk toward a complex exploration of the relationship between physical suffering and an ironic version of artistic turned masochistic transcendence. This dramatic moment of self-display was one part of a large-scale installation filling the gallery with the bizarrely interwoven accoutrements of torture, childhood and medicine: a ‘waiting room’ with S/M-filled children’s magazines, a cruciform video installation showing Flanagan being mutilated and gagged, a journey turned bed of nails, a toy chest filled with whips, chains and a large crucifix, and so on. In the centre of the gallery, a space designed to look like a slightly decrepit hospital room contained Flanagan, who — when he was not ‘dangling above’ — sat in bed holding ‘visiting hours’ (plate 31).

Far from distancing himself from the inquisitive looks and questions of threatened and baffled audience members, as Burden had done, Flanagan gave himself over to them, spending many hours a day advising distraught strangers on the pleasures of S/M and the struggles associated with his illness. While the modernist artist veil his body behind mysterious symbols of creativity, aligning himself firmly with conventional heterosexual masculinity, Flanagan exposed his in an interactive display exploring masculine subjectivity as masochistic and so always already contingent on the viewing and dominating other (the witness and the dominatrix). At the same time, of course, Flanagan becomes an anti-masculinist authority of sorts — as is suggested by my privileging of his work here as more definitively anti-phallic than that of Burden, Acconci, Morris and Klein.

* * *

In closing I would like to reiterate my argument that one can approach and

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interact each of these practices in a number of ways. Far from being simply radical and subversive, or simply regressive and phallocentric, each of these practices both strategically unhinges the phallic/penis/artist equation and, in some ways, reinforces it. The moments that are the most eroticizing and disruptive of the penis/phallus conflation for me are those in which a charged relationship with the interpreter is allowed to surface — in which, in Paul Smith's terms, the male body returns to exceed the narrative processes of interpretation such that, for example, my investments and desires are exposed as I recreate these moments for the reader of my text.

One could argue provisionally along the lines of a model of masochism offered by Kaja Silverman that these moments mark instances of 'heteropatriarchal identification', a situation in which a radical transference of subjectivity is encouraged, such that the self is located in the site of the other.70 As I have interpreted Flanagan's *Visiting Hours*, for example, he displays his disease-ridden male body in such a way as to encourage the visitors' exchange with it and to promote the dynamic circulation of desire among and between the witnesses of this masochistic act and its subject/object, the artist. This situation contrasts with what Silverman calls moments of 'idiopathic identification', in which the self swallows the other, incorporating him/her to build up a sense of integrity and power. Idiopathic identification might be exemplified by Klein's *Anthropometries* or Burden's *Movie piece*, which, as I have interpreted them here, work rigorously to control the artist/spectator relation, enacting the male body as definitively 'masculine' in an attempt to predetermine meaning: to incorporate the other (the female body and/or the spectatorial subject) and to reiterate the male artist as a 'subject supposed to know'.

Finally, it is my relationship with these works (retrospectively for the first four artists, and contemporaneously only with Flanagan's *Visiting Hours*), and the reader's with my text, that determines their meanings here and now. Returning to my own subjective responses, I can only continue to stress the ambivalence and undecidability of any male subject's relationship to masculinity. For masculinity, like any subject position, is a condition whose significances and radical or regressive effects are contingent on the contexts in which it is produced and in which it is read. And my relationship to masculinity, as a feminist but also as a heterosexual, is one of ambivalence itself: I have a critical disdain for certain of its aspects, but a flagrant and irrepressible desire for others.

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Notes

1 I initially presented a version of this paper in London at the 1993 Association of Art Historians meeting as part of the 'Visualizing Masculinities' session organized by Andrew Stephenson. I am grateful to Andrew Stephenson for inviting me to present this material, and to Nancy Ring, Marcia Pointon and Paul Binski for their excellent suggestions towards revising the essay. I would also like to express my gratitude to the University of California, Riverside for providing me with an Affirmative Action Career Development Award, which enabled my completion of this essay.


3 Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 140, 146, 156. Kaja Silverman has also examined this mutually sustaining relationship between the penis and phallus, this 'dominant fiction' of masculine subjectivity, which 'lurges both the female and the male subject . . . to deny all knowledge of male castration by believing in the commensurability of penis and phallic, actual and symbolic father.' Kaja Silverman, *The Dominant Fiction*, Male Subjectivity at the Margins, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p. 42. Furthermore, as Judith Butler has argued, Lacan inadvertently deconstructs his own phallicentric formulation by positing the phallic as both originating significations, as the origin of the symbolic order (he theorizes it thus in his *The Meaning of the Phallus*), but also as initially determined in relation to the male gender identity, and only subsequently initiated, according to Lacan's essay 'The Mirror Stage', within the mirror stage of the subject's development. Butler reads these two essays against each other, in order to exacerbate this contradiction (the phallus cannot be both the originary function of the symbolic, presumable a 'neutral', pre-social function, and the always already masculine: socialized, penile) organizing force of the body's coherence as initially perceived in the mirror stage). She uses this contradiction to expose the phallic as a symptom, arguing that its conflation with the penis is a 'transvaluing denial of (the penis)' . . . substitutability, dependency, diminutive size, limited control, partiality, rather than its symbolic guarantor. Judith Butler, *The Lesbian Phallus and the Mother Imaginary*, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, *The Phallus Issue*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 153, 155.

4 See, for example, Jo-Anna Isaak, 'Seduction without Desire', *Vanguard*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Summer 1987), pp. 11–14.

5 In *The Order of Things*, Foucault defines modern man as a figure developing in the late eighteenth century and characterized by his desire to centre himself upon his own origin (the male gender pronoun) in particularity fitting in this case, given Foucault's blindness to sexual difference). Needless to say, then, modern masculinity — a figure endowed symbolically and provisionally (though, as Lacan would insist, never in any actual sense) with the phallus. Lacan places the development of the mythical unified 'I' in the early seventeenth century with the development of Cartesiansim. See *The Subject and the Other: Aphafism* *(1964)*, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Alan Sheridan (trans.), New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1981, pp. 216–29. In Silverman's terms, the subject 'I' instantiates the 'dominant fiction' of masculine subjectivity, wherein the male subject (who, I would add, is implicitly straight, white and upper middle class), 'refuses to recognize an unwanted feature of the self by projecting it onto the other, i.e. by relocating it' — a process exemplified by this male artist's conventional objectification of the female body as fetish to palliate his anxious fear of lack. Silverman, *The Dominant Fiction*, p. 45.


8 Lacan, *The Meaning of the Phallus*, p. 82.

9 Of course other social, political and economic shifts have been noted as characteristic of the postmodern by theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Andreas Huyssen and Fredric Jameson — including the radicalization of the political climate in France and the United States in the 1960s, the explosion of new technologies of representation, and the culture of the simulacrum fostered by late capitalism.

10 In her sophisticated study, O'Dell unfortunately reduces the historical picture to this one event, which she treats rather simplistically as the motivating factor for performance art — particularly masochistic performance — in the early 1970s. Kathy O'Dell, *Toward a Theory of Performance Art: An Investigation of Its Sites*, PhD dissertation, The City University of New York, 1992.

A notable exception to this avoidance of the question of subjectivity in discussions of postmodernism in the visual arts is the work of Thierry de Duve, who has theorized postmodernism, with all of its contradictions, as a 'paradoxical productive' in his book *Au nom de l'art*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1989, see especially pp. 68–89. In De Duve's terms, postmodernism is that which is spoken as beyond the modern (entailing the embodied act of speaking). And yet, this act of speaking exposes the investment of the speaker in the drive to periodization and interpretive mastery that characterizes modernism. This very speaking portrays the speaker as both modern and postmodern. See also my more detailed discussion of the performativity of postmodernism in *Concluding Remarks*, chapter 6 of my book *Postmodernism and the Em-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 203–13.

12 My book will be a feminist history and theory of body art and the performativity of the artistic subject from the 1960s to the present. I employ the term 'art' rather than 'performance art' throughout this project because the former is a broader term and I wish to encompass the entire body of work not only performances but pieces per se but also images and other artistic projects that perform the artist in various ways (such as the advertising portraits I discuss below).

13 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1967), David B. Allison (trans.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 35, 38. Thierry De Duve also provides a provocative analysis of this situation, arguing that the 'co-presence of the performer and of the public implies a notion of presence that is antipodal to what classical philosophy means by presence ... it is a type of presence that, in fact, 'supposes the mediation of a reproductive system'. De Duve, however, is speaking about a particular kind of performance, an anti-utopian, minimalist, structuralist performativity that 'interiorizes the reproductive apparatus and exposes it to view as the putting in practice of its functioning'. In fact, De Duve is talking about the question of value and performativity by turning, once again, to strategies of production to define 'progressive' vs. 'repressive' practices.
32 Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 64.

33 For examples of this performance see *Yves Klein 1928–1962*, pp. 198–201.

34 Cited by Rosenthal, *Assisted Levitation*, p. 126. Rosenthal implicates the audience in her description: 'The audience, on the one hand rendered glamorous by being in the presence of pure art at a chic cultural event, has on the other hand been turned into voyeurs: both the sexual kind, who get a kick out of watching naked women make fools of themselves in public, and the art world kind, who desire to watch the artist at the moment of creation.' (p. 125) Her disturbing use of the term 'voyeurism' points out the intensity of spectatorial involvement put into play by Klein's performative event.

35 In his public statements, Klein insisted on differentiating himself from Pollock and his French counterpart, Georges Mathieu, as well as from the expressionist and performative Japanese Gutai group. Thus Klein stated, 'many art critics claimed that via this method of painting I was in fact merely reenacting the technique of what has been called "action painting". I did all I could to make it clear that this endeavor is opposed to "action painting" in that I am actually completely detached from the physical work during its creation. [Unlike the Pollock's, who smear themselves with paint ... I would never ... smear paint over my own body and become a living brush in Rosenthal, *Assisted Levitation*, p. 124.]'

40 D'Onofrio engages performances of his relationship to his penis as dislocating, rather than confirming, the veiled penis/phallic phantasm that conventionally empowers the male artist. In another piece, *Reception Room* (1973), in which he lay naked on a table rolling back and forth underneath a white sheet and exposing his piercing to the notion that the performance work (particularly the masochistic performance piece) is necessarily more co-creative/post-performative work because it 'literalizes and metaphorizes the figurative split' in the subject experienced during the Lacanian mirror stage, 'profoundly accelerating ... the questioning process' (pp. 243–44). D'Onofrio's claim for performance work because of the implied literal presence of the artist's body within it is questionable in that it reinforces the very modernist metaphysics of presence — and particularly the illusion of the coherent individual — that performance art is said to criticize. It is, however, almost necessary to resist making recourse to some notion of ontological priority when discussing the effects of performance art. I have attempted to negotiate and theorize this aspect of performance (its seductive promise of presence) without succumbing to its wiles, but there are certainly moments here when I, too, am guilty of drawing on its appeal to substantiate my arguments.


53 Burden's description of his performance events rarely reveals whether the perpetrator of the violent act upon his body was male or female, but in those cases where he does the text gives this information, the figure is most often male.

54 Illustrations of the performances discussed here can be found in *Chris Burden: A Twenty-Year
Survey, exh. cat., Newport Harbor: Newport Harbor Museum of Art, 1988. I focus in this essay on Burden's more overtly violent — and more explicitly macho — performances; in other pieces, he presents himself more ambiguously in relationship to the audience in such a way that issues of gender and subjectivity are more subtly highlighted. I discuss several of these in my essay, 'The Clothes Make the Man' (see note 17).

55 The artist described Shoot, for example, as follows: 'At 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet away from me', in Chris Burden: A Twenty-Year Survey, p. 53. Like Klein, Burden tends to reinforce his authority through his decidedly masculine, laconic yet forceful self-presentation style (especially evident in films that document his life and work and include interviews with Burden, such as Peter Kirby's Chris Burden: A Video Portrait, made in 1988).


57 Kaja Silverman commenting on Reik, 'Masochnism and Male Subjectivity', Male Subjectivity at the Margins, op. cit., p. 196.

58 Reik, Masochism in Modern Man, p. 72.


60 O'Dell argues that Burden's work — in particular his performances involving bed-like structures — 'fall[s] short of playing the 'deconstructive role' she attributes to masochistic performance in general (see note 48, above, for my critique of the essentialism I feel this analysis implies). For O'Dell, Burden's performances work only to unexpress the formerly repressed aspects of the social contract, rather than setting up a more productive negotiatory relationship with the audience.

61 Silverman, 'Masochism and Male Subjectivity', p. 198. Paul Smith argues that 'in much occidental cultural production the Christ figure could be said to have operated chronically as a privileged figure of the pleasurable tension between the objectification and what I will call the masochizing of the male body ...' in 'Action Movie Hystera, or Eastwood Bound', Differences, vol. 1, no. 3 (1989), pp. 98–9.

62 Smith, 'Action Movie Hystera, or Eastwood Bound', p. 98.

63 ibid., p. 102–103.

64 ibid., p. 95.


66 In fact, as will undoubtedly become clear through my tone in writing of Flanagan's work, he is not only someone I have watched perform, but a personal friend as well. I thus have a far more personal and probably more highly charged investment in his work than I do in the earlier projects, which have by now engendered their own history of responses and representations and have thus become reified in certain ways.

67 'The illness is therefore not known', Sartre writes, 'it is suffered, and similarly the body is revealed by the illness and is likewise suffered by consciousness', in Being and Nothingness, p. 443.

68 Nacht defines masochism as an attempt to save the primary attributes of masculinity and subjectivity (that is, the penis) through a partial sacrifice of other, less crucial parts of the male body in his book, Le Masochisme, third edition, Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1965, see especially p. 7.
