



MALE SELF-STAGING

This essay focuses on the relationship in art between gender and power, and on the past decade's increased interest in man and male identity as subjects of study. A relatively obscure theme previously, the contention that man is in the throes of crisis has become a major topic within gender research. The amount of literature on man has skyrocketed since the contours of this fresh academic field were first defined around 1990. The relationship between art and gender drew attention and critical analysis in the wake of the feminist reform movements of the 1960s. It is during this time that we also find a dawning interest and desire among male artists to use their own masculinity as a theme in their works. This theme is particularly apparent in works by several artists using self-staging in some sense, as in Yves Klein and Chris Burden's hyper-masculine actions of the 1960s, and Vito Acconci and Paul McCarthy's self-compromising or abject outpourings at the beginning of the 1970s. Instead of taking their own gender identity for granted, as something natural and unequivocal, these artists dealt with issues related to maleness as a role; as something constructed. Masculinity is emphasized as behavior that is exhibited, acted out and demonstrated. Prominent artists of the 1990s have also addressed this topic in different ways, using self-staging and meta-masculine themes. Matthew Barney, John Coplans and Peter Land are three such artists: Barney has produced films and videos revolving around body-building aesthetics, sports and male hero figures; Coplans reveals his own, naked body in photographic works and Land has staged scenes of himself as a falling figure in implicit dialogue with artists such as Klein, Burden, Acconci and McCarthy. Their works play on time-honored traditions in Western visual culture in general, and the relationship between art and gender in particular. However, before considering their production in depth it may be useful to consider the background for the interplay and relationships in their works.

Standard Identity

The statement that man is in a state of crisis refers to the fact that fixed meanings and positions associated with gender are being eradicated; man is being dislodged from his naturalized predominant position as the standard identity. In English, as we are well aware, man means both a male and humankind in general, with the white, Western, heterosexual man traditionally serving as the representative measure for identity in Western culture; the normative standard to which all other forms of identity must relate. Simone De Beauvoir was among the first to devote greater attention to this relationship:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined limiting criteria, without reciprocity.¹

The tacit nature of this representative function infers that man is the standard artist identity, and the entire question of gender seems to have been particularly notable in the area of art. Art history has been written in a manner that has upheld the classical masculine figure as indisputable norm. The artist's identity often becomes the context and point of departure

when art made by women, gays or non-Western persons is considered and discussed. That this naturalized, male artist identity has not been subjected to extensive scrutiny is naturally due to the fact that he is the traditional, normative artist figure. The artist pair Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset have recently called for greater awareness and sensitivity to this identity: “One may compare heterosexual masculinity in contemporary art to a large roundabout that everyone else has to deal with — driving around it on the outside— but who actually relate totally taciturn. It continues to occupy the most space in art institutions and the private art market, yet no one has bothered to define this identity theoretically, in the same way that female and homosexual artist roles have been examined.”²

Performative

It is common in gender research to distinguish between the biological and the socio-cultural aspects of the sexes: sex & gender. The concepts refer to the distinction between biological determinism on the one hand, and sociological relativism on the other. A great deal of feminist-oriented literature argues for an understanding of gender and identity as something that is culturally constructed, often with De Beauvoir’s famous expression “one is not born woman, but rather becomes one”³ as a starting point. Judith Butler is among those researchers who have adamantly refuted and criticized De Beauvoir’s understanding of gender as a cultural construction. For Butler, the performative element is essential to how we understand gender, sexuality and identity, and is an integral and irrefutable part of language: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”⁴ The very concept of gender is, in itself, an act of power, a means that forces us to accept the idea of masculinity and femininity as compulsory binary opposites. More than a social construction, Butler understands gender as performative; the unequivocal is shown to be a series of performances or ‘operations’ that mark out complex meanings within the prevailing normative system. According to Butler’s definition, the white, straight, male (artist) body, as with other forms of identity, is shaped through different kinds of “identificatory projections of normative subjectivity.”⁵ Gender is no longer viewed as something stable in relation to a cultural construction; rather, it is practiced and produced. It is adopted and learned, and may thus also be redefined. In the context of this essay, this ‘performative’ aspect of gender is interesting, and is able to serve as a tool in considering how topics of masculinity and maleness are approached and expressed in recent art. The performative concept is based on the belief that there is nothing ‘natural’ or culturally innocent about gender and sexuality. Butler is an important researcher within the field queer theory, influential in extraditing man from his position as ‘norm’ and instead viewing him as a sexual, subjective and non-neutral entity.

Jackson Pollock



As art historian Amelia Jones has shown, there is good reason to begin with the phenomenon Jackson Pollock in discussions of recent art's masculine self-staging themes.⁶ Pollock's images and the way that they are perceived do not only render his work a paragon of late modernism's aesthetics in general. His production is also uniquely qualified to demonstrate modernism's masculine aesthetics, resonating with the self-revelation and bravura that is essential to this aesthetic. The enormous attention and significance accorded Pollock's paintings during the 1950s enables them to represent what was typical of the attitudes and thinking that dominated the epoch's — and in a larger sense, modernism's — trend-setting art scene. His works demonstrate contemporaneous notions of artistic creativity, subjective expression and how the artist's role was to be performed.

The impact of Pollock's expression, with the large scale, violent gestures, bold lines and splattered paint, connoted male virility and potency in a quite obvious manner. These paintings contain any number of masculine-related mechanisms and metaphors: large sizes, dominance, action, territorial markings, energy and a longing to become one with the painting. His own description of technique and approach also emphasizes the masculine in his paintings:

My paintings do not come from the easel... I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting... I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping, fluid paint.⁷

The sexual undertones of the work process are thus reinforced by the metaphors that Pollock chooses to use in his description of it. The artist penetrates the virginal, countering canvas, so to speak, and the expression emerges as a result of ecstatic, ejaculating activity with dripping paint and sharp phallic objects. It is difficult to picture Pollock's paintings today without taking into account Hans Namuth's film and photographs of him at work. These images of Pollock standing in, around and on top of the canvas fueled a powerful myth that was to affect much of the most important art produced in subsequent decades in America, Japan and Europe. "Jack the Dripper" captured in the throes of the creative process: Absorbed by the canvas and the materials, he throws, pours and splashes his paint energetically across the outstretched canvas on the floor. As documentation, it is built on the myth of the revered, genial artist at work. Yet these images refute the myth of this figure as well, in that the séance appears as a staged and performative act⁸. More than anything else, Pollock acts out and performs his creativity for a camera, that is, for a public. In contrast to the insistence on a direct exchange and a subjective presence in painting, the creative act was unveiled as a kind of construction or masquerade. The aesthetic views on Pollock and Abstract Expressionism at the time were based on the premise that the artist's self-identity and inner being were represented or immediately expressed in the strokes, gestures and abstract structures in the works. It was a formal vocabulary developed from within, where image seemingly emanated directly from its creator. However, Namuth's documentation of Pollock at work emphasizes the relationship between artist subject and painting as staging: a performative act. Accounts of the totally subjective presence were destabilized, as the underlying gender, physical and the psychosexual connotations became apparent. From this perspective, then, Namuth's Pollock works anticipated the movement towards the more performative and discursive aspects of the artist subject that characterized much art from the 1960s. Most of the new American and west European art of the 1960s may be understood as a reaction to and rebellion against the heroic individualism and subjek

tive metaphysics of Abstract Expressionist painting, subsequently rousing interest in sexual identity and modernism's masculine aesthetics.

The Virile Brush

Although the sexual and masculine aspects of Pollock's work are usually included to some extent in most discussions of his production today, such observations are lacking in arguments put forth by his first theoreticians, Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg.⁹ This demonstrates the extent to which the aesthetic concepts of Abstract Expressionist painting were built on a naturalized masculine aesthetic; an aesthetic whose sexual connotations and tacit implications were part of the time's prevailing mindset, requiring neither comment nor questioning. This was possible because the images seemed to echo a concept of creativity and the relationship between genders stemming from a larger aesthetic tradition, with roots dating back to the 1800s. The idea that creative acts are man's domain may be traced back to the Biblical account of creation, and Western history is paved with writings linking man to the cultural aspect of creative development and woman to nature, to giving life, nourishing and fostering. However, it was during the 1800s¹⁰ that this understanding of the relationship between gender and creativity became institutionalized in art theory practices. The woman of genius does not exist, but when she does she is a man, an account from the 1800s reads. The most positive remark that Charles Baudelaire could bestow upon a female artist was that she painted like a man (Eugenie Gautier in 1846).¹¹ As British art theoretician John Ruskin writes:

*The man's power is active, progressive and defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, and the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation but sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise.*¹²

Man is the one who takes action, the creator, the discoverer and the defender - the doer. As creative man, then, artist is first of all a man. In the beginning of the 1900s, Sigmund Freud's theories about libido furnished this perception with a stronger foundation, in that creativity and the will to create were directly associated with man's sexual energy. Freud considers the Oedipus Complex as the central matrix for human maturation, and combined with his theories of man's castration angst and woman's penis envy, the male identity and sexuality assumes the status of norm. Man's visible endowments, in other words, allow him to successfully experience the Oedipus Complex and emerge from the process in a heightened state of creative energy, productivity and maturity. Freud operates with one kind of libido, and it is described as "invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature."¹³ When Freud discusses the work of art as a projection of sublimation and sexual desire, it is thus primarily in terms of male desire. As art historian Carol Duncan has pointed out, Freud's theories about libido were shaped at a time when a number of younger artists placed a similar emphasis on male drives as the basis and source of creativity.¹⁴ She refers to the large number of passive female nudes rendered by leading young male artists of the times: the formal choices of Fauvists, Cubists and Expressionists exhibit a violent, almost uncontrolled display of energy. In both style and subject, these works convey a sense of male virility and dominance, where the painter's response to his own sexual reactions is seemingly visualized

through raw and spontaneous painterly gestures and intense colors. Vlaininck describes the method: "I try to paint with my heart and my loins, not bothering with style."¹⁵ Perhaps more than other theoreticians, Duncan considers art since modernism's breakthrough from a gender-related perspective, and explores the tendency of male artists and critics to naturalize or conceal power relations having to do with gender. Most importantly for our purposes, she makes connections between male sexuality and artistic development:

From this decade dates the notion that the wellsprings of authentic art are fed by the streams of male libidinous energy. Certainly artists and critics did not consciously expound this idea. But there was no need to argue an assumption so deeply felt, so little questioned and so frequently demonstrated in art. I refer not merely to the assumption that erotic art is oriented to the male sexual appetite, but to the expectation that significant and vital content in all art presupposes the presence of male erotic energy.¹⁶

Duncan thus describes a structure that is manifest - but not necessarily apparent - in individual art works. Accordingly, we may say that expressionism builds on the notion that male potency and sexuality serve as the driving force and true source of the creative act. Privilege, creativity and precedence are thus associated with having a male organ, and this is clearly expressed in an implicit and naturalized way. This conforms to psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan's description of the main characteristic of phallic structure in general; that it operates in a hidden, naturalized and covered manner.¹⁷

Exposing

This common belief that culture's creative forces were determined by gender and linked to the male libido prevailed as a naturalized and unproblematic truth until the 1960s. The new feminist movement's critique of patriarchal structures also included scrutiny of notions of a fundamental female "deficiency" or "weakness" by art and literature theorists such as Linda Nochlin, Lucy Lippard and Mary Ellmann. In the book by the latter, *Thinking about Woman* (1968), cultural stereotypes and sexual analogies were viewed as having evolved from a Western phallocentric approach to literary criticism. In this regard, we must acknowledge the astuteness of feminist critics when they spoke of modernism's masculine aesthetics and of how the artist in modern Western culture is conceived in terms of a phallic figure: an art practice with norms and structure that were part of a culture that favored a (white, heterosexual) male artist type. This does not mean that women artists were not valued or recognized during this period, but rather that they, as with many of their male colleagues, have operated within this prevailing narrative of creative development. There is little sense in considering themes dealing with maleness in newer art without acknowledging the role of this phallic artist figure.

Pollock-versus-Duchamp

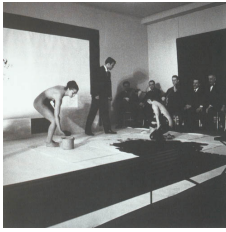
A common characteristic of leading tendencies in art from around 1960 was a turn away from or a rebellion against the heroic gesture and the transcendental aspirations of Pollock's generation. It was at this time that a renewed interest in Marcel Duchamp is seen among younger artists and art historians.¹⁸ This 'father figure' shift is interesting in this context, as Duchamp is one of the few male artists who worked with a kind of meta-masculine subject matter prior to 1960.¹⁹ With his sense of irony and wordplay, his play on gender and his dandy persona, Duchamp was basically working with a de-essentializing of sexual identity. His de-naturalizing of the concept of a whole and stable artistic subject as the fundamental, authoritative reference in art obviously challenges the Pollock-generation painters. Duchamp's own relationship to Abstract Expressionist painting is also telling, revealed in the small painting *Paysage fautif* (*Wayward Landscape*) 1946.²⁰ The amorphous splash-form against a black background seems in keeping with avant-garde abstract painting of the times (the 1940s were the formative period for Abstract Expressionism), but deviates from what characterized Duchamp's work. However, subsequent analysis has shown that sperm, not paint was used, the image thus testifying to his critical and ironic stance toward gender, sexuality and creativity. As ironic commentary on the relationship between male sex drives and artistic creativity, he mocks contemporaneous avant-garde painting and its mustering of large, emphatically masculine gestures as in Pollock's "drip" paintings. Masculinity is shown to be a self-construction, a form of masquerade. The swipe at Abstract Expressionism's grand rhetoric is typical for Duchamp's anti-aesthetic attitude, which anticipates both the essence of the 1960s rebellion against expressionist painting and body-related performance art. His impact on younger artists may be seen in Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings* (1978), for example, where large paintings à la Pollock were covered with monochrome metal paint and expressive stripes, drips and marks made by his and his friends' urine.²¹

Performance



The most obvious treatment of issues related to the masculine aspect of modernism's aesthetics in general, and Abstract Expressionist painting in particular, is found in performance art and site-specific events by female artists from the 1960s. Niki De Saint Phalle's pointed "shot paintings" (1960) are an early example of how the macho element in the Pollock-generation paintings was scorned, and Shigeko Kubota's famous "vagina painting" makes direct reference to Pollock's ejaculatory method. The latter performance was held at Perpetual Fluxusfest in 1965, where Kubota applied a series of deep red strokes onto the paper beneath her with a brush fastened to her groin. A similar address to modernism's masculine aesthetic is found in works by artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Lynda Benglis, Yoko Ono, Joan Jonas and Yayoi Kusama. Not surprisingly, we also find a greater interest among male artists in exploring their own masculinity as a theme in body-related performance art. New feminist thinking encouraged critique of established gender and power structures, and the element of self-staging involved a stronger focus on identity and gender related to art production. This approach also coincides with a turn toward a more performative aspect of artistic activity, to borrow a phrase from art historian Amelia Jones, a "Pollockian performative."²²

Hyper-Masculinity

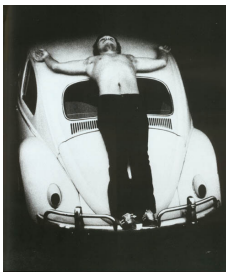


As one of the initiators of performance art, French Yves Klein developed a specific interest in staging himself as (male) artist. An ambiguous mix of tribute and ironic critique, he presented masculinity as a construed role. The obvious 'male chauvinism' in his *Anthropometries* series - images made with nude women as a set of 'living brushes' - is a good example for discussion. As Jones demonstrates, it is possible to consider these in light of the performative aspect of Pollock's production. In *Anthropometries of the Blue Period*, executed in *Galerie Internationale d'Arte Contemporaine* in Paris in 1960, Klein instructed three nude women to cover their upper bodies with paint and to then lie down on the large sheets of paper unfurled on the floor. The performance was accompanied by a string quartet performing his "Monotone Symphony," and resulted in a series of paintings with physical impressions made in Klein's own color, International Klein Blue. This was a site-specific performance known to us through descriptions and photographic documentation. In contrast to Pollock, Klein executed this work before an audience, and in the photographs we see Klein posed as a retiring, aristocratic dandy, modestly dressed in a dark suit and tie and maintaining a safe distance from the messy activity of the women. He stands as a kind of mediator between his cultured public and his living brushes, but there is no doubt about whom the artist is, who makes the decisions and who has control.²³ His play on gender stereotypes and the creative act, a clothed male artist subject versus naked, female objects, makes Klein's performance an archetype of patriarchal art practice. Klein's intentional staging of himself, and the way that the public participates in the scene as a group of onlookers that are both clothed and overwhelmingly male, renders the entire performance theatrical and pointed - bordering on ironic exaggeration. The understanding of the male artist figure as a genial and divine mover is dramatized while gender relations are caricatured. Klein's performances thus create uncertainty in respect to the cultural gender codes that they expose. In that he participates in the performance as a staged figure, we may also say that he dramatizes his own phallic identity as a male artist. This may also be read in his famous *Leap into the Void* made the same year, a photographed performance that shows a simple, yet extremely risky leap into mid-air. By means of photographic manipulation, Klein appears to propel himself into the air from a dangerously high position. The work is often viewed in context with Klein's stated spiritualist and metaphysical views, yet it also dramatizes this same masculine/modernist artist figure. The theatrical quality is again apparent, as an ironic commentary on the modern artist figure's heroic and risky battle for creativity and self-realization. The body's leaping form connotes male potency and the idea of man as one who takes action, the doer, here exaggerated with absurd consequences.

Chris Burden's performances from the period 1971-1975 share Klein's hyper-masculine emphasis. These often involved quite simple, but risky situations or acts in threatening surroundings, with an attacker or aggressor and Burden in the role of exposed victim. In *Shoot* (1971), he had a colleague shoot at him in a gallery space with a rifle from a distance of 4.5 meters. The result was a bullet in the arm, and the group of onlookers was later accused of being involved in the attack since no one had intervened or done anything to stop it.²⁴ In *Deadman* (1972), he lay in a heavily trafficked street outside the gallery clad only in full-length canvas cover, while in *BC. Mexico* (1973) he survived an eleven-day journey in a kayak on the ocean, alone and without contact with the rest of the world. The masochistic aspect of these heroic, brave and potentially suicidal acts play on traditional notions of masculine heroic activity and avantgarde art's emphasis on art making as precarious, groundbreaking and hard won business. Burden's way of translating such actions into art works also exposes the masochistic element inherent in exhibitionism. As time and site-specific performances, these works are available to us in the form of documentation: a photograph, a descriptive text and a set of objects from the event itself, such as the bullet from *Shoot*. These are presented in small vitrines, almost as relics, and the combination of text, image and objects signifies the acts as ritual seances charged with magical significance. The documentation material assumes the character of fetish objects and Burden's

performances that of magical, pseudo-religious acts. The masochistic performer requires a public or at least authentic proof of his suffering. In this sense, a parallel may be drawn between Burden's work and the exhibitionist display of persecution and suffering in the traditions surrounding Christian martyrdom.

This is apparent in his projects *Trans-Fixed* and *Icarus* (both 1973), for example, in that the situations make allusions to Christian and classical mythology, and historical motives are called to mind in a surprising and sometimes shocking manner. The latter work is based on the classical mythological figure's ambition to fly. In front of a few invited guests, Burden enters the gallery nude, lies down on the floor and has the end of a long sheet of glass placed on each shoulder, angling down to the floor like a pair of wings. Two assistants pour gasoline on the glass, step back and set them on fire. After several seconds surrounded by flames, he rises and leaves the room. Based on a classical, phallic figure, male pride and hubris are dramatized, and this is developed further in the piece *Trans Fixed*, where he stages himself as a modern Christ figure:



Inside a small garage on Speedway Avenue, I stood on the rear bumper of a Volkswagen. I lay on my back over the rear section of the car, stretching my arms onto the roof. Nails were driven through my palms into the roof of the car. The garage door was opened and the car was pushed halfway out into the Speedway. Screaming for me, the engine was run at full speed for two minutes. After two minutes, the engine was turned off and the car pushed back into the garage. The door was closed.²⁵

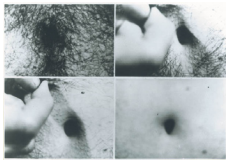
The text is accompanied by a photograph showing Burden laying "crucified" on the back of a Volkswagen, and a small box with the two nails that fastened him to the roof. The nature of the work and the wordplay in the title emphasize the (melo) dramatic, ritual and quasi-holy aspects of extreme situations and religious-spiritual experiences. The nailing sets the scene for Burden as a suffering victim, and by means of noisy, macho-culture affects, he becomes metaphorically linked with other canonized male martyrs and saints in art history. The artist's identification with Christ is a well known phenomenon in cultural history; from Albrecht Dürer's famous self-portrait and depictions of Rembrandt's late *Passion of Christ*, to Van Gogh's suicide and Paul Gauguin's explicit understanding of the artistic act as one of martyrdom. In a mix of celebration and irony, Burden dramatizes the notion of the divine, male artist figure that the phenomenon Jackson Pollock in many ways personifies. By assuming various martyr roles, Burden also reveals masochistic aspects of masculine norms and the problem of his own identity as a masculine artist. Both Klein and Burden stage and dramatize an artistic identity whose gender provides access to symbolic, phallic power. The mix of emphatic tribute and ironic critique also dramatizes the predominance of the masculine in modernism's aesthetics, thus directing our attention to the duality within conventional concepts that favor man - as an artist and in the art world.

Matthew Barney also works with hyper-masculine portrayals, but the gender aspect assumes a different character. Muscles may be said to play an as important role for Barney as fat did for Joseph Beuys. Body building and athletics are apparent in early works such as *Field Dressing* (1990) and *Transsexualis (Decline)* (1991), where Barney makes his way, nude and with great effort, through small, confined rooms using advanced climbing equipment. There is an element of self-irony in the act, which in this context is directed toward the creative process and its corresponding forces of resistance, strength and self-discipline. The artist must tolerate exertion and pressure, transgress borders and exercise restraint, but foremost he must demonstrate mastery and control. Master escape artist Harry Houdini and the American football player Jimi Otto make appearances as hero figures, and together with Tarzan, Batman and Spiderman, their feats serve as a parallel to Barney's own performative acts.



Most of Barney's works are strongly charged with physical and sexual references. Machines and apparatuses are covered in Vaseline and abstract forms are made of a white, sperm-like salve substance. His films and videos are often peopled with satyr-like creatures, male hero figures and feminized drag personas. However, the actual gender of the identities often seems pre-genital, undifferentiated or at least ambiguous, and the distinction between physical and machine elements is also obscure. This may be seen in *Cremaster I-V*, a series of five films, the last of which is still in production. The title reveals Barney's background as a medical student, and refers to the muscle in a man's testicles that insures optimal temperature. The cremaster muscle reacts to outer stimuli such as cold, and cannot be directed or controlled. Barney embarks on a journey through an enigmatic universe in five acts, where elements of myths and sagas from the actual film locations are intermixed with self-staged scenes and assorted hero figures. *Isle of Man*, for example, is known for its annual motorcycle race and *Cremaster 4* unfolds in the form of a race between two teams that invade this man's - or humanity's - island with deafening force. Barney plays a prancing satyr figure, dressed as a dandy and surrounded by mirrors and elf-like creatures. Towards the end, the Loughton goat turns up as a third element in the story, with a double set of horns in its forehead. The film begins with the satyr figure - the 'Loughton Candidate' - carefully combing around four horn sockets in his scalp. A mixture of sores and budding nubs, they suggest the potential of transformation, as the pre-genital creature's sexual disposition is yet undetermined. The motorcycles are shaped like male genitalia, and the action builds on a series of penetrating motives and events. This macho theme is contrasted by the dandy identity, perhaps signifying a kind of melancholy over the loss of the traditional masculine role image. Although there is no clear narrative in the film, the sequences are arranged in a loose allegorical relationship. On the whole, it conveys the impression of a sexual Rite de Passage or a mystically convened test of manhood. The Loughton candidate leaves a state distinguished by sexual hierarchy and contradictions, and as 'candidate' he fights his way beyond and toward something else, gradually initiated into a world of morphological indeterminacy. As with the satyr figures in earlier works, the Loughton goat thus represents the potential inherent in a hybridized, composed body. Sexual identity is emphasized as a hybrid: constructed, made and assembled. Such a hybridization of the body undermines the significance of separation and difference in forming individual identity. *Cremaster 4* also ends with one of the series' strangest and most disquieting individual sequences, as we see up into the crotch of the Loughton candidate where a pouch surrounded by Vaseline is secured by threads that slowly dissolve - as on an operating table. The next scene shows the candidate as a castrated, sexless figure with cables connected from its groin to two of the motorcycles. Accompanied by screeching bagpipes, this is the film's finale. The sequence suggests a pre-genital universe in that the figure appears related to the sexually undifferentiated embryo, in the stage before ovaries or testicles develop. Barney, then, is not as interested in critique and discussion of masculinity and traditional gender categories as a proponent of alternative forms of identity and sexual myths. As such, he works with an identity that is more fluid, construed and undifferentiated, and a concept of gender that falls in neither masculine nor feminine categories.

Compromised Masculinity



In works by Vito Acconci and Paul McCarthy from around 1970, their own masculinity is presented in a more self-critical, comprising and pathetic manner. Instead of dramatizing masculine characteristics, they deal with 'otherness' in the sense of everything that conventional masculinity borders against, is defined in relationship to and seeks to exclude. This may be seen in early films by Acconci, such as *Openings* (1970) and *Conversations I-III* (1970-71). The former consists of fifteen minutes of close-up filming of the artist's navel while he gradually tweezes and cleans the surrounding outgrowth of pubic hair.²⁶ The navel opening reappears later, smooth, hairless and feminized. A sealed body opening, it is presented as something exposed and vulnerable by means of the camera and the viewer's 'penetrating' gaze, in a manner that recalls depictions of a female's erotic openings. In contrast to cycles, penetrability and metamorphose, however, man's body has traditionally been considered as closed, static and impenetrable. By focusing on the male body's most vulnerable and marginalized border, this body is nonetheless portrayed as exposed and mutable. As a pseudo-vaginal opening and the end of the umbilical cord, it recalls everything that traditional masculinity fears or has sought to shut out - the infantile, feminized, dependent and helpless.

McCarthy works to a greater extent with taboo-laden acts linked to self-desecration, castration angst and infantile behavior. Despite his splatter aesthetics and constant dwelling on phenomena such as inadequacy, the infantile, buffoonery and helplessness, McCarthy is also perhaps the most articulate in expressing in his works a problematic and ambivalent relationship to Abstract Expressionism's heroic painting and masculine aesthetics. In a later work, *Bossy Burger* (1991), he plays a masked, autistic 'cook' railing with masturbating gestures and movements, and as a pathetic, masked buffoon in *Painter* (1995), he makes infantile, expressionistic kinds of paintings while repeating sayings such as "I can't do it; I think I will...I can't do it; I think I will." McCarthy, then, may also be considered as expressing a kind of mocking and a compromising of masculinity's traditional characteristics and structures. In this context, it is natural to include video works from the 1990s by Peter Land. His early works are made using simple settings and amateurish recording equipment. In *Peter Land May 5*, we see him dancing, scantily clothed and later nude, in front of the camera. Perhaps he is drunk and letting himself go after a night on the town? The straightforward amateurishness of the recording suggests a voyeur perspective, as though we are peeping at something personal, private and intimate. Other works consist of an individual sequence that is repeated using slight variations and joined in an unending loop. He appears in different awkward or helpless situations, constantly falling off a barstool (*Pink Space*, 1995) or through a trapdoor. In traditional slapstick style, he stages himself in embarrassing situations and calls attention to himself as a phallic figure. This is seen in *Step Ladder Blues* (1996), which plays to a certain extent on Pollock's masculine artist type. Dressed as a house painter in white overalls, Land attempts to begin his work via a painting ladder that is constantly falling over. The scene is recorded in a gallery or studio setting, and the accompanying stills recall Namuth's photographs of Pollock at work. The connection to Pollock is understood primarily in that Pollock, as one of the first artists in painting's history, used everyday, synthetic house paint in his paintings. The scenes are shown in slow motion, and Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* on the soundtrack emphasizes the metaphorical and melodramatic aspects of the task. Pollock thus represents the antithesis of Land's male artist's position, an identity construction that may no longer be appropriated, assumed or performed.

Patriarchal Relations

Acconci, McCarthy and Land have all worked explicitly with patriarchal power and masculine dominance. In *Broadjump* (1971), Acconci challenged his viewers to a long jump competition, and announced a possible date with one of his girlfriends as a prize for the winner. In *Remote Control* (1971), he placed himself and his partner Kathy Dillon in two separate rooms, each sitting in a tight box and communicating with each other via a monitor. In an insistent manner, he attempts to gain psychological leverage and control by persuading Dillon to accept that he captures her, binds her, etc. In contrast to Klein and Burden's hyper-masculine performances, the treatment of the masculine here appears pathetic, tragic and comic. This theme is particularly apparent in several of McCarthy's later sculptures inspired by the idyllic and harmonic pseudo-reality of amusement parks and Disneyland. Infantile scenes and perverse acts penetrate this innocent facade. *The Garden* (1991-92) consists of a realistic forest scene with an older male figure standing with his pants down and "fucking" a tree, while a younger figure may be made out some distance away engaged in similar activity with the ground. The respective vertical and horizontal positions of the figures emphasize the hierarchy of a social system in which man acts and expresses himself uninhibitedly in relation to his surroundings, over which he has full and complete control. Man's will to rule nature and his surroundings are similarly caricatured in *Cultural Gothic*, where the patriarch appears as a middle class father figure. His hands placed authoritatively on his son's shoulders, he explains how one goes about "fucking" the goat standing dutifully before them. The work caricatures established power structures that are interwoven in our social reality. As a satirical image of the relationship between master and servant, the scene appears as a sexual initiation rite, during which the son is guided into a patriarchal system of mastery, control and dominance. In juxtaposing the average family with one of our culture's strictest taboos, McCarthy demonstrates how power relations are introduced into an individual's development as social being. This strategic ravaging of our revered concepts of nuclear family life and the innocence of childhood is also apparent in his stuffed animals and comic strip figures with oversized sexual organs.

Posing and Transgressing Gender



Both Acconci, McCarthy and somewhat later, John Coplans have worked with posing and staging themselves and their naked bodies in front of an audience or a camera. Their narcissism involves making their bodies available to the viewer's objectifying gaze; a position traditionally occupied by women or 'the other'. In *Conversations*, a series of three performances recorded on Super 8 film, Acconci openly plays on transsexualism and the desire to be feminine. The series begins with a sequence in which he burns hair off his chest using votive candles, and begins to caress himself as though attempting to develop erotic female breasts. In the next series, we see him completely nude, full figure, walking, running and hopping back and forth with his penis hidden in between his legs, a transformed sexual identity. In the last, a woman kneels behind him while he continually attempts to push his penis backwards, into her mouth. McCarthy often exposes his own nude body in situations with food, triggering a chain of metonym associations between food, body and pseudo-religious rituals. In acts loosely related allegorically to social conditions and psychosexual repression mechanisms, a kitchen table appears as an altar, ketchup as blood and sausages and meat as sex organs. In the video *Rocky* (1976), he stands nude before the camera with headgear and boxing gloves. He beats himself repeatedly in turn, consuming diverse food products in between, the obviously caricatured and tragic-comic element again anchored in masculinity's aggressiveness. In making their own bodies objects for the subjective gaze of the viewer, Acconci and McCarthy investigate their male identity in relation to what has traditionally been a woman's realm, where identity is formed through objectification, staging and (passive) posing. The works emphasize that their selves are dependent upon being seen, thus stressing the frailty and performative element in sexual identity. One's own masculinity is precariously positioned, in other words, when its borders and normative function are destabilized. Although he works with photography, Coplans' production may also be discussed in terms of self-objectification. In large photos organized into series, he exposes his naked body to the viewer. Although the reproduction of the body is sculptural in form, this is not a hero's idealized male body. Coplans began working as an artist later in life, and the typical and common features of an elderly male body are displayed in all their complex vanity. More explicit than Acconci and McCarthy, Coplans works within a specific genre that in modern times has generally been reserved for depictions of the female body. The male nude became insignificant as a category during the 1800s, and the genre 'nude' is generally analogous with depictions of naked women for most authors today.²⁷ This is different from earlier times, when the male nude played a more dominating role in the arts. This historical retreat of the nude male body from the prevailing representation system has been a central characteristic of middle class visual economy. That masculinity has been excluded from the subjective, desirous gaze is also an important aspect of modernism's sexual ideology. In Coplans' images, the traditional dichotomy between male viewer and female object is displaced, and his choice of pose, the play of lines and the cropping of the motive indicates an intentional mixing of traditional male and female categories. Coplans thus captures aspects of the masculine identity that modern ideology has sought to exclude.

Laura Mulvey was one of the first art theorists to consider the consequences of this gender ideology in relation to visual representation. In her text, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, she employs psychoanalytical theory to demonstrate how patriarchal society has unconsciously structured cinematic narrative and how the male gaze has served as a structuring principle for the representation of women. Voyeurism is linked to subconscious fantasies about power and control, and Mulvey shows how established film structures build on the concept of men as bearers of the gaze and women as this gaze's passive objects. Mulvey also indirectly touches on the absence of male sex figures.

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the physical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle.²⁸

Although Mulvey may be criticized for single-minded reductionism in her emphasis on an essentially 'male' gaze, her theories cast light on the relative absence of naked male bodies in art from the past century: "man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like." This does not only mean fewer depictions of man's body in general, but a distancing or stifling of aspects of masculine identity that a modern and overwhelmingly patriarchal society has sought to exclude. Acconci, McCarthy and Coplans' explicit work with self-objectification breaks with this repression and covering of the male body. By posing and staging their own bodies before a public, they expose body and sex as objects for the viewer's objectifying gaze, in a position traditionally occupied by women or 'the other.'

Penis Fixation



This interest in working with one's own phallic maleness as a theme inevitably involves a certain penis fixation. Freud's focus on man's libido drive has already been mentioned, and even though Jaques Lacuna's analysis of the relationship between phallic power and the male sex organ supports a different conclusion, it agrees that there is close connection between them. In *Self-Portrait (Frontal, Holding Hands)* from 1985, Coplans holds his flaccid penis forth for viewing. However, this is done without any form of sexual mystification. The image conveys a desire to be exposed as a person of sex, and to be disarmed as a phallic figure. This theme was perhaps most intimately explored in Vito Acconci's performance *Seedbed* held in Sonnabend Gallery in New York in 1972. Lying concealed within a custom built ramp under the gallery floor, he masturbated in reaction to the sound of visitors in the room. He conveyed his masturbation thoughts and fantasies about the visitors wandering above by means of microphone and speakers. The work built on interaction between artist and public: "You're on my left... you're moving away but I'm pushing my body against you, into the corner... you're bending your head down, over me... I'm pressing my eyes into your hair..."²⁹ The relationship between art, male sexuality and creativity is reinforced by the title in a quite direct manner — to implant, inseminate, spread semen over, initiate, create. As Mira Schor, among others, has pointed out, Acconci transforms the gallery into an arena for the production, show and display of male sexuality. She understands the work as strongly masculine and discusses it as a typical example of how male artists from the early 1970s worked with investigations into their own masculinity, only to then validate and reinforce concepts of male dominance and privilege.³⁰ Although explicit references are made to the artist and his gender, these qualities remain hidden in art as an integrated, phallic structure. From another perspective, Amelia Jones argues that the work may be understood as masculine in that the male subject sets the terms for desire, but feminine as well, since Acconci becomes object for the viewer, the one who "wants to be desired."³¹ Yet Schor and Jones both stress the display and flaunting of sexuality in art and art production, and in this sense the work may be interpreted as a theatrical dramatization of Lacan's statement that phallic power is effective only when covert and concealed.

Ambiguous

Klein, Burden, Acconci, McCarthy, Coplans, Barney and Land are not the only male artists who have worked extensively with self-staging. Yet a meta-masculine character distinguishes their production. Through their respective approaches, they consider and expose maleness and masculine identity as a shifting role, as something that is constructed, acted out and displayed.

This is most apparent in their strategic self-stagings. There is a more vulnerable and exposed identity. For man, exposing and revealing also involves a threat, a risk of castration. As a whole, their work testifies to a fundamental distrust of traditional forms of depicting male subjectivity. In the words of Kaja Silvermann, their work is representative of a time when notions of a given and naturalized connection between phallic power and the male sexual organ could no longer be maintained.³² Clearly, this is related to changes in society's dominant narratives about subjectivity, gender and power. On the other hand, works such as *Seedbed* refer to a pervasive duality inherent in their approach to their own masculinity. While mocking, ironicizing and criticizing traditional sexual dichotomies and concepts of man as a revered artistic figure, their work, paradoxically, also serves to confirm such notions. In exposing themselves to the world and staging themselves in either a masochistic framework or some form of eccentric physical activity, they reinforce an image of themselves as male artist — the doer. This echoes art historian Marina Warner's assertion that in our culture the male identity is primarily defined in terms of visible, physical and sexualized signs of potency, rather than verbal and intellectual abilities. Accordingly, one may speak of a more pronounced and reformulated kind of male posing in art, as a practice that responds to challenges in recent decades from new feminist critique of patriarchal structures and phallic domination, but does not necessarily seek to undermine these forces.

F O O T N O T E S

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), pp. XXXVIII-XXXIX. First published in 1949.
2. Michael Elmgren and Ingar Dragset, "De binære oppositioners karusell" (Carousel of Binary Oppositions) *Øjeblikket* (Danish periodical) Nr. 42, Vol. 10, p. 27.
3. Ibid. (Introduction, Part Two)
4. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 33. First published in 1990.
5. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 17: "...the assumption of 'sex', the assumption of a certain contoured materiality, is itself a giving form to that body, a morphogenesis that take place through a set of identificatory projection. That the body which one 'is' is to some degree a body which gains its sexed contours in part under specular and exteriorizing conditions suggests that identificatory processes are crucial to the forming of sexed materiality."
6. Amelia Jones, "Dis/playing the Phallus: Male Artists Perform Their Masculinities," *Art History*, Vol. 17 (December 1994), pp. 546-584.
7. "Possibilities I" (Winter 1947-48) in *Abstract Expressionism*, edited by Shapiro, p. 356
8. The highlight of Namuth's film Jackson Pollock is the director's intense attempt to capture the artist's method. In order to get a close-up view, he persuaded Pollock to work outdoors on a glass sheet in order to film from beneath and follow the 'image.' Pollock paints directly above the camera lens, enabling Namuth to capture the mystery of Pollock's mythical creative act. However, this unusual work situation mixed mystery with what was an apparently construed, staged event. The outdoor setting and the camera angle reveal that the creative act is being executed for an audience, with all the posing and rehearsed positions this entails. Pollock's 'self-identity' sees and knows that it is acting, performing and being watched. For a more in-depth discussion, see Andrew Perchuk, "Pollock and Postwar Masculinity," *The Masculine Masquerade* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 31-42.
9. In the 1950s, Thomas Craven and Thomas Hart Benton, among others, accused Pollock of having made his paintings by consuming paint and then urinating it back onto the canvas. The anecdote about Pollock wandering around nude and drunk while at Peggy Guggenheim's and then urinating into the fireplace undoubtedly fueled such accounts. The physical and sexual aspects of Pollock's work did not enter into discussions of his work until a later point in time, however, as a contrast to Rosenberg's existential understanding and Greenberg's formalism. Rosalind Krauss provides a more nuanced interpretation in her book *The Optical Unconsciousness*, (Cambridge, 1993), s. 243-320.
10. In the article "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," Thomas Laqueur provides a thorough account of how our understanding of the relationship between the sexes as contrasting opposites builds on a worldview dating from Victorian times and the Age of Enlightenment. While the female body had previously been considered a lower developmental stage and/or an inward version of man's body, the dawn of biological-empirical science gave rise to a new understanding of the sexes as fundamentally different. See Gallagher/Laqueur (eds.), *The Making of the Modern Body. Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), p. 3 (1-41).

11. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock have conducted extensive research into how the rigid definition of the sexes during the Victorian age formed the basis for the repression and undervaluing of women artists in modern times. While women artists were credited, discussed and valued well into the 1800s, the authors maintain it was not until modern times that they were first seriously marginalized and ignored, paradoxically because they had become defined as a specific gender category unto itself, as "women artists": Curiously the works on woman artists dwindle away precisely at the moment when women's social emancipation and increasing education should, in theory, have prompted greater awareness of women's participation in all walks of life. With the twentieth century there has been a virtual silence on the subject of the artistic activities of women in the past. See Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Woman, Art and Ideology*, 1992, p. 3. First published in 1981.

12. John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: Everyman's Library, 1938), pp. 58-59. First published in 1865.

13. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), p. 219. Freud also discusses this in "The Passing of the Oedipus-Complex" (1924) in *Outline of PsychoAnalysis, Introductory Lectures and New Introductory Lectures*. See also Philip Rieff, *Freud. The Mind of a Moralizer* (University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 174-180.

14. Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting" in *Feminism and Art History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 294. First published in *Artforum* (December 1973).

15. Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 144.

16. Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

17. Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus" in *Ecrit. A Selection* (Routledge, 1989), pp. 281-291. First published in 1977. For further discussion see pp. 25-27.

18. Duchamp, having giving up being an artist in 1923 and assuming the role of underground figure in avant-garde art circles, became the subject of renewed interest for younger artists and critics in America and Europe in the late 1950s. MoMA's exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* in 1961 is often cited as marking the new aesthetic changes and directions taking place; a time when Picasso's influence had less impact on younger artists than Duchamp and Joseph Cornell.

19. The sexual aspect of Duchamp's work has been interested a number of art historians in recent decades. See for example, Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (University of California Press, 1995); David Hopkins, "Men Before the Mirror: Duchamp, Man Ray and Masculinity," *Art History*, Nr. 3 (September 1998), pp. 303-323. Hopkins also discusses this in the survey work *After Modern Art* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 37-64.

20. The image belongs to his work *Boite-en-Valises* (1941-1949), a small travel case that was produced in a limited series. Each case contains 69 miniature versions of his works, many of which contain apparent sexual references.

21. Warhol experimented with his own version of "action painting" as early as the mid-60s, by urinating directly onto a small canvas. These were later destroyed and the method was not fully implemented until the series *Oxidation Paintings* from 1978.

22. Amelia Jones, "The Pollockian Performative" in *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 53-102.

23. Only rarely did Klein use his own body in the *Anthropometries*. 24. Paul Schimmel, "Just the Fact" in *Chris Burden: A Twenty-Year Survey*, exhibition catalogue (California: Newport Harbour Art Museum, 1988), p. 17.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

26. For documentation and descriptions of Acconci's projects, see Kate Lineker, *Vito Acconci* (New York, 1994).

27. Notably, a distinction is usually made between "the nude" and "the male nude." See Abigail (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (University of California Press, 1995); David Hopkins, "Men Before the Mirror: Duchamp, Man Ray and Masculinity," *Art History*, Nr. 3 (September 1998), pp. 303-323. Hopkins also discusses this in the survey work *After Modern Art* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 37-64.

28. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, 1989), p. 20. The article was first published in 1975.

29. Lineker, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

30. Mira Shor, "Representation of the Penis," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, Nr. 4 (November 1988).

31. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 564-565.

32. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Silverman discusses "aberrant" forms of depicting male subjectivity using different sources as reference; from Henry James and Marcel Proust, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films and a number of Hollywood films made since WWII.

33. Marina Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time* (1995, p. 37); "I'm observing a trend towards defining male identity and gender through visible, physical, sexualised signs of potency, rather than verbal, mental agility."

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10. Vito Acconci
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