

Challenging Postfeminism in Britain with Three Exhibitions,  
1990-1999

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A Thesis in the Field of Visual Arts  
for the Degree of DPhil Contemporary Art History and Theory

The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford  
April 2023 / 2324954

96,087 words (including footnotes and bibliography)

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses three exhibitions to challenge the discourse of postfeminist aesthetics in Britain during the 1990s. Interpreted using Clare Hemmings' notions of loss, progress and return in feminist storytelling, these aesthetics are challenged by 'experimenting with how we might *tell* stories differently rather than telling different stories'.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 1, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* (Castlemilk Estate, Glasgow, 1990) will be considered an example of a return narrative, given that it opposed postfeminism by upholding and ameliorating the material conditions of women involved. In Chapter 2, the notion of the impolitical will be tested as a means of recognising and speaking about a politics of refusal in art, nuancing narratives of both feminist progress and loss in *Bad Girls* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1993; Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 1994). Finally, Chapter 3 will consider the exhibition *Private Views* (Estonian Art Museum, Tallinn, 1998; Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaújváros, 1999), where it is argued that the impolitical can function relative to specific political narratives, for example in the former East, potentially inflecting narratives of both loss and progress. Overall, this study argues that by recognising the interrelationship between social reproduction, political undecidability, and the feminist histories in these case studies, it is possible to unfix and reinterpret stories of art that imply the loss of feminism.

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<sup>1</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16. Emphasis my own.

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## INTRODUCTION

Stories shape how we understand, interpret, and connect with the world. Whether we take feminism to be a continuing struggle, or a debate that has been won or lost, attending to its construction through stories of art is a crucial task in resisting gender inequality.<sup>2</sup> In the book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011) Clare Hemmings proposes the notion of feminism as “storytelling”.<sup>3</sup> She considers the interlacing narratives that exist at any given moment in feminist history, identifying three key tendencies of “progress”, “loss”, and “return”. Her writing offers a lens for unpicking narrative glosses in art history, allowing for the deconstruction, and transformation, of how we remember the past.

Hemmings articulates her theory using a number of textual sources including academic journals. Firstly, she articulates the progress narrative as dividing feminist history into decades. The 1970s are represented as a narrow and essentialist perspective, then through key shifts in politics, theory, and subjectivity underpinned by difference in the 1980s, a multiplicitous, intersectional feminism emerged in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> The problem with these accounts for Hemmings, however, is that ‘...Western feminist progress narratives uncomfortably reinforce postfeminist accounts of “an earlier generation” as inattentive to the complexities of contemporary social, political, and interpersonal life, as dated, as nothing to do with the present’.<sup>5</sup> These narratives imagine feminism as outdated

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<sup>2</sup> The persistence of gender inequality is meant here in the material and cultural sense articulated by Mary Evans, considered in more detail later in the Introduction; Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); see also: Katy Deepwell, ‘Why Feminist Stories Matter: Katy Deepwell Interviews Clare Hemmings’, *n.paradoxa*, 40 (July 2017): 60-68.

<sup>4</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 44; Hemmings offers the following excerpts as examples of how these kinds of narratives can be identified: ‘Perhaps the most important legacy of 1980s feminism is the crucial concern with difference: differences between women in race, class, sexuality, and nation; and differences within particular women, with gender conceived as one of a number of social categories that are coarticulated in female subjects’ from Susan Lurie, Ann Cvetkovich, Jane Gallop, Tania Modleski, Hortense Spillers and Carla Kaplan, ‘Roundtable: Restoring Feminist Politics to Poststructuralist Critique’, *Feminist Studies*, 27, 3 (2001): 681; quoted in Hemmings, 42; ‘Since the early 1980s, lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, as well as postfeminist and antifeminist women, have exposed the ethnocentric conceits and consequences of the foundational categories of Western feminist thought - women, gender and sex’, from Judith Stacey, ‘Is Academic Feminism an Oxymoron?’, *Signs*, 25, 4 (2000): 1192-1193; quoted in Hemmings, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 54.

and singular, a position that problematically resonates with postfeminist or antifeminist accounts of history (about which more soon). Inverting this, Hemmings uses the narrative of loss: ‘where feminist subjects of the political past are naïve or exclusionary in progress narratives, in loss narratives it is feminist theoretical subjects of the present who fail in their feminist radicalism’.<sup>6</sup> For example, the 1990s are represented as an exhausted aftermath of a lost radical feminism, as here in this excerpt from *Australian Feminist Studies* in 1998 stating ‘[a]gainst two decades of an incredibly rich multiplicity of theorising, feminist theory is now increasingly becoming a singular entity’.<sup>7</sup> In loss narratives, feminist theorising is lamented as having become overladen with multiple academic positions, melting down the possibility for collective thinking.

In the article ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ (1998) Amelia Jones reframed the history of art through the lens of feminist practices unfolding in late twentieth-century Britain.<sup>8</sup> Hemmings’ writing allows us to reinterpret Jones’ argument not as a historical summary but as an example of feminist storytelling.<sup>9</sup> According to Jones’ summary, feminist theory came to prominence in the arts during the early 1970s with the study of visual culture by London-based feminists such as Griselda Pollock, Laura Mulvey, and Mary Kelly.<sup>10</sup> These thinkers understood gender to be constructed through a patriarchal visual culture, which could be resisted by avant-garde distancing and the disruption of cultural categories like masculinity and femininity. Jones positioned journals such as *Screen* and *Women’s Art Magazine*, along with physical venues like the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, as key spaces for developing these critical practices.<sup>11</sup> Following on from this, she noted how

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<sup>6</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Megan Jones, ‘Historicising Feminist Knowledge: Notes Toward a Genealogy of Academic Feminism of the 1970s’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 13, 27 (1999), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Amelia Jones, ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 168-177.

<sup>9</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Amelia Jones, ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 168; see for example: Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16, 3 (1975): 6-18; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013 [1982]); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (London: Pandora, 1987); Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79).

<sup>11</sup> Amelia Jones, ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 168.

during the 1980s these debates, which had been heavily influenced by Marxist theory, were formalised into institutional discourses inflected by psychoanalysis and semiotics.<sup>12</sup> She argued,

Come the late 1980s, the dominance of psychoanalytic, avant-gardist feminist models of critique came under scrutiny (or were simply ignored) with the rise of a younger generation of women artists born mostly in the 1960s. Transformations in British politics and economic structures (including London's renewed ascendancy as global capital of finance, an increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of the art world, and the increasing power of influential art schools such as Goldsmiths' College) combined with generational shifts to encourage the development of a new mode of feminist practice and theory. By the early 1990s, curators could mount an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, entitled *Bad Girls*, which celebrated the more raucous and explicitly embodied work of younger women artists such as British feminists Helen Chadwick and Rachel Evans, Irish feminist Dorothy Cross, and Americans Nicole Eisenman, Nan Goldin, and Sue Williams, who were (the catalogue claimed) rebelling "against the Puritanism and high moral ground claimed by 1970s and 1980s feminism in order to reconcile politics with pleasure". The celebration of "bad girl" artists was linked to the rise of a particular brand of feminism based on sexualised, supposedly self-empowered exhibitionism in popular culture (with the emergence of celebrities such as Madonna) and to the professionalisation of the art market, in turn linked to the increasing solidification of ties between the marketplace and art schools in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985* (London: Pandora, 1987); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (Routledge Classics. London: Routledge, 2003 [1988]); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013 [1982]).

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 2 considers the exhibition *Bad Girls* (ICA, London, 1993) in greater detail; Amelia Jones 'An "Other" History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970' in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 172.

But at the same time, Jones articulated a story that ran parallel to this, showing how attention placed on these artists obscured other voices offering more constructive responses in the visual arts at the time:

Working alongside these recognised feminist artists since the 1970s, a number of artists who break rules about what feminist art “should” be have fallen beneath most accounts of feminist and/or contemporary art practice. Queering and Race-ing feminist art, these artists often laboured on the sidelines, founding institutions and exhibiting work, but rarely recognised by mainstream venues or institutions such as the Tate or the Turner Prize committees, or even (until recently) by feminist art history. For example, Sonia Boyce (b. 1962 in the UK), Sutapa Biswas (b. 1962 in India), Zenib Sedira (b. 1963 in France of Algerian parents), Rachel Garfield (b. 1963 in the UK), and Oreet Ashery (b. 1966 in Israel), are all feminist artists working in Britain who have produced major work addressing gender identification as intersectionally related to questions of national, sexual, faith-based, class, ethnic, and/or racial identifications. As such their work challenges the assumptions built into 1970s-1990s models of feminist critique in the visual arts.<sup>14</sup>

Jones considered the 1990s in Britain (though arguably she was speaking just about London), detailing what she saw as a new artistic approach characterised by a ‘funny abjection and, in some cases, confessional tone at the centre of... practice’.<sup>15</sup> She noted that a naïve view of this period might locate factors such as the 1997 Turner Prize nominees all being women or the rise of several prominent female gallerists and curators such as Sadie Coles, Maureen Paley, Victoria Miro, Iwona Blazwick, and Gilane Tawadroshad as suggesting that institutional sexism

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<sup>14</sup> ‘...[continued] From Boyce’s project documenting volunteers (mostly white women) wearing an afro wig in the mid-1990s, to Biswas’ lyrical explorations of diasporic subjectivity and the history of Empire in Britain in video works such as *Birdsong*, 2004, to Sedira’s rigorous video installations examining her relationship over four generations of family history (living in Algeria, then France, and now - with her children - in the UK), to Oreet Ashery’s *Marcus Fisher’s Wake*, a 2000 mock documentary of her alter-ego, an orthodox Jewish man, younger generations of feminist artists have profoundly opened out what a rigorous feminist politics can achieve in the visual arts, even as it broadens and complexifies what is thought of as “feminist” concerns and strategies’; Amelia Jones ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 174-175.

<sup>15</sup> Amelia Jones, ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 168.

was slowly eroding.<sup>16</sup> However, she was quick to point out that the prominence of rigorously articulated feminism in the visual arts was declining during this period, perhaps due to the models of visibility that began to appear unsuitable for the transforming models of identity and subjectivity in a globalising landscape.<sup>17</sup>

Jones pinpointed certain psychoanalytic notions of feminist art-making as unintentionally erasing artists such as Paula Rego, Margaret Harrison, Cosey Fanni Tutti and Lubaina Himid, despite their work being implicitly or explicitly feminist. She was one of the first writers to compare artists such as Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas with the identity of the “bad girl” artist. For Jones, this aesthetic in art both reacted to what artists saw as the constraints of essentialism, as well as the professionalisation of the art market, which demanded constant reinvention. Jones arguably positions the bad girls grouping of artists as best read using a “loss narrative” given that they are presented as speaking to critiques of feminism from the 1970s and 1980s yet produce a response of ‘supposedly self-empowered exhibitionism’ and an ‘increasing solidification of ties between the marketplace and art schools in the 1980s and 1990s’.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Jones’ grouping of artists including Boyce, Biswas, Zenib Sedira, Garfield, and Ashery, is positioned within the “progress narrative”, whose ‘work challenges the assumptions built into 1970s-1990s models of feminist critique in the visual arts’ where a ‘new variety of feminism is articulated, as identification (especially in the visual and aural realms)’ and are ‘shown to be complex, resolutely intersectional and expressed interrelationally through engagements with others’.<sup>19</sup> For Jones, this strand of feminist art-making in Britain was

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<sup>16</sup> The Turner Prize 1997 nominees were Christine Borland, Angela Bulloch, Cornelia Parker and Gillian Wearing.

<sup>17</sup> Jones states: ‘In reaction against the fetishisation of women’s bodies pinpointed by [John] Berger as central to the objectification of women in Western visual culture, these arguments often pivoted around an implicit or explicit prohibition against representing or performing the female body. This model, heavily indebted to semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxist theory, was effective in legitimating feminist art and art theory as “serious” and rigorously articulated. In retrospect, it was also narrow and became somewhat prescriptive - though it is important to stress that such narrowness is often necessary in constructing a focused critical model opposing what is experienced as a singular hegemonic cultural force (in this case, patriarchy in the artworld and beyond). Because of the emphasis on psychoanalytic theory (itself tending to sidestep as intersectional aspects of identification) the model implicitly focussed on gender (or “sexual difference” as it was most often called) as an implicitly separable category of experience. This problem was endemic to dominant feminisms across activist groups and intellectual formations broadly speaking (beyond the art world and beyond the UK) in the 1970s and 1980s’; Amelia Jones, ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 169-170.

<sup>18</sup> Amelia Jones ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 172.

<sup>19</sup> Amelia Jones ‘An“Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 175.

successful in situating itself as a response to an ostensibly singular mode of second-wave feminist thinking in visual art practice.

Jones' helpful summary is of interest because when read as an example of storytelling vis-à-vis Hemmings, it allows for the identification of multiple timelines of feminism existing at any given moment. While Jones pursued the important task of writing examples of race and sexuality back into the overarching narrative of feminist art history in Britain, my study is concerned with returning to artworks that are in danger of being depoliticised when constructed as “postfeminist”.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, I argue that the case studies in this thesis complicate loss and progress narratives of feminist storytelling, including: *Castlemilk Womanhouse* (Castlemilk Estate, Glasgow, 1990); *Bad Girls* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1993; Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 1994); and *Private Views* (Estonian Art Museum, Tallinn, 1998; Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaújváros, 1999). In *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (2014), Victoria Browne argues for historical time to be understood as a kind of polytemporal “lived time”, one which is ‘...internally complex, “composite” time, generated through the interweaving of different temporal layers and strands’ and it is with this in mind that each case study in this thesis is positioned as engaging a different narrative of feminist time.<sup>21</sup> Though these exhibition projects occur in the same decade, they do not offer a homogenous story of feminist/postfeminist history. This analysis is not therefore proposing a period study; rather, the case studies represent the polytemporal nature of history. Recognising this is important given that this study seeks, in Hemmings’ words, to show how we might ‘*tell* stories differently rather than telling different stories’.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hemmings deals with this in an interview with Deepwell, ‘I was interested in how both lesbian feminism and black feminism are written out or written over by being contained in a very specific moment in history (1980s), because they don’t resonate with other parts of the archive. So I began with what it would be like to start from a historical absence not as a way to recover the truth of lesbian history particularly but as a way to think about historical narratives and how certain subjects are marginalised by their time and space-specific inclusion’; Katy Deepwell, ‘Why Feminist Stories Matter: Katy Deepwell Interviews Clare Hemmings’, *n.paradoxa*, 40 (July 2017): 61.

<sup>21</sup> Browne argues against teleological approaches to history, such as those developed by Kant or Hegel, given their histories engender a “last and best attitude” given they treat divergent histories as instances of a more general unified history; Victoria Browne, *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16.

## Progress: The Wave Model

In the essay ‘Women’s Time [Le temps des femmes]’ (1979) Julia Kristeva proposed an understanding of time, characterised by a multiplicity of temporalities or “signifying spaces” existing at once.<sup>23</sup> Kristeva locates ‘the time of history’ as being a ‘teleology, linear and prospective unfolding’; in contrast, she sketches three theorisations of “women’s time” as separate from this linear history.<sup>24</sup> ‘Women’s Time’ was one of the first texts to interpret feminist history as a succession of phases. While she did not set out to create a linear notion of time (in fact the opposite) Kristeva can be interpreted as creating what Hemmings would term a progress narrative, given that her narrative is constructed from feminist groups that succeed one another.

Kristeva’s text arguably laid the foundation of what would later become known as the feminist wave model. In Britain at least, the “first-wave” was dominated by the campaign for female suffrage, demanding the same legal and political rights as men under social contract.<sup>25</sup> The “second-wave” follows that in the 1960s the feminist movement was reinvigorated to fight what Betty Friedan recognised as ‘the problem with no name’ - encompassing the difficulty women faced in gaining equal opportunities in education and employment, reproductive rights, the legalisation of abortion and access to contraception.<sup>26</sup> The division between public and private life came to underpin this wave, during which the Women’s Liberation Movement demanded a more comprehensive approach to female liberation, reaching into the psychological and sexual aspects of female experience through art, labour, the family, and healthcare among others. As identified by Alison Jaggar, different cadences of feminism crystallised into groups

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<sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, *Signs*, 7, 1 (Autumn 1981 [1979]): 13-35.

<sup>24</sup> Her first phase is based on acceptance into the social contract and a commitment to a progressive concept of historical time, including liberal, Marxist and socialist feminisms. While this first category is concerned with the desire to be incorporated into linear time as equal to men, Kristeva’s second category is based on theoretical developments following 1968, where the irreducible differences between sexes were acknowledged through the relationship of the subject to power, meaning and language, identified using Freudian devices. This narrative follows from ‘insertion into history’ toward ‘the radical *refusal* of the subjective limitations imposed by this history’s time’. In the third phase, these two positions are held together using the deconstruction of identity from a gendered perspective, but still allowing for essential gendered differences to exist; Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, *Signs*, 7, 1 (Autumn 1981 [1979]): 17, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Suffrage was first introduced in New Zealand in 1893 but not in the UK until 1928. While the franchise was extended in 1918, it was only opened to women over 30 with a property qualification. It was not until 1928 that the right was passed to all women over 21; Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds.), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: NYU Press, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1963]).

during this period, noting that ‘organized feminism has not spoken with a single voice’.<sup>27</sup> This movement expanded out into the art world, where writers and curators began to consider the absence of female artists in large museums, or the structural inequalities between male and female artists, such as income.<sup>28</sup>

The wave model follows that by the 1980s, third-wave feminists made calls for the discourse to be thought of ‘in the plural, which signifies difference among feminists - not a consensus, but a multiplicity of points of view’.<sup>29</sup> Writers such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Chandra Mohanty, and Cherríe Moraga, called for feminism to consider the ways that race, class and sexuality impacted female experience.<sup>30</sup> In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (1984), bell hooks rejected the relevance of Friedan’s problem with no name’ given:

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<sup>27</sup> Jaggar offers four conceptions of feminism as systematic political theories - liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist. Emerging most rigorously during the 1960s and 1970s, Jaggar proposes that the defining characteristic of human nature in liberal feminism is rationality, arguing that women hold equal powers of reason to men but that this has not historically been recognised in access to education and financial autonomy. Jaggar positions radical feminism instead as arguing that the definition of female biology is the key cause of women’s oppression, advocating for a separatist culture. Jaggar positioned Marxist feminism as reducing gendered division to an economic question, putting *praxis* at the centre of human nature, attributing oppression to the class-based division of society. Marxist feminists propose that once private ownership of the means of production is abolished it will be possible to reorganise society equally. Specific to gender, this means casual domestic or familial labour ought to join the waged economy. Jaggar upholds socialist feminism as the most transformative mode of feminist politics, entailing reproductive freedom, equal involvement of men in family life, the degendering of wage levels, and the continuation of some separate women’s organisations as interim, experimental institutions. The premise of the book is that feminist political theory must have a vision of what a “good” society looks like and the ability to stipulate how this might be achieved, even if this vision is continually transforming; Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 4, 83, 52, 123.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: Dutton Press, 1976); Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Double X, 1977); Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, 16, 3 (1975): 6-18; Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, *ARTnews*, 69 (January 1971): 22-39; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013 [1982]); a small cross-section of exhibitions representative of the second-wave are listed here, but this list is by no means exhaustive: *Womanhouse* (Los Angeles, 1972); *The Dinner Party* (New York, Brooklyn Museum, 1974-79); *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), *Woman’s Building* (Los Angeles, 1973-1991); *Kvinnor Som Malat [Women Who Painted]* (Stockholm, National Museum Stockholm, 1975); *Kunstlerinnen International, 1877-1977 [Female Artists International 1877-1977]* (Berlin, Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1977); *What is Feminist Art* (Los Angeles, Woman’s Building, 1977); *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists* (London, ICA, 1980); *Magma: Rassegna internazionale di donne artiste [Magma: International Exhibition of Women Artists]* (Rome, Castello Oldofredi, 1976).

<sup>29</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 141.

<sup>30</sup> This critique existed as early as 1851, when Sojourner Truth famously asked ‘ain’t I a woman too?’ in a speech about civil rights and women’s liberation, see also: Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984); Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1981); Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Toni Cade Bambara (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (London: Penguin, 2019 [1981]); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*:

[r]ace and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status and life style that take precedence over the common experience women share - differences which are rarely transcended.<sup>31</sup>

Third-wave arguments therefore fed into artistic production and influenced curatorial strategy by recognising the significance of identity in gendered experience.<sup>32</sup> For example, in the UK, artists such as Himid organised and contributed works to the exhibitions *Five Black Women* (African Centre, London, 1983), *Black Women Time Now* (Battersea Arts Centre, London, 1983) and *The Thin Black Line* (ICA, London, 1985), which also included the work of Marlene Smith, Boyce, and Biswas.

While a feminist “wave” can represent both a push forward and a pull back, I interpret the wave model as an example of what Hemmings would term a progress narrative, given that the second-wave is largely implied to be an improvement on the first, and the third-wave an improvement on the second, and so on. Astrid Henry recognises that feminist waves can create binaries between “generations” of feminist mothers and daughters.<sup>33</sup> For example, in her well-known essay ‘Becoming the Third Wave’ (1992), Rebecca Walker refers to herself as a third-wave daughter dissenting from second-wave mothers, using the generational metaphor as a way of separating

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*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990); Kimberlé Crenshaw et. al., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Boston; New York: South End Press, 1984), 4; for hooks, Friedan’s problem with no name was not one that often applied to black women, who have long navigated the pressure of both formal employment and domestic responsibility. This is also corroborated in the introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983) by Anzaldúa and Moraga who note: ‘How do you concentrate on a project when you’re worried about paying the rent? We have sorely learned why so few women of color attempt this kind of project’ they continue, ‘in compiling this book we both maintained two or more jobs just to keep the book and ourselves alive’; Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, ‘Introduction: 1981’ in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983), xxv.

<sup>32</sup> Two instructive readers tracking feminist essays and manifestos across third-wave visual arts are: Hilary Robinson ed., *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001 [2014]); Amelia Jones ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003; 2010); for other examples of exhibition-making, but by no means an exhaustive list, see: *Our Bodies, Ourselves: An Exhibition By Women Photographers on the Subject of Health* (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Nottingham, 1993); *Decade Show* (The New Museum, New York, 1990); *The Whitney Biennial* (Whitney Museum, New York, 1993); *Division of Labour: “Women’s Work” in Contemporary Art* (Bronx Museum Of The Arts, New York; Museum of Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles, 1995); *Intimate Lives: Work by Ten Contemporary Women Latina Artists* (Guadalupe Cultural Art Center, San Antonio, 1993); *Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art in the 1970s* (White Columns, New York, 2002); *Art/Women/California, 1950-2000* (San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, 2002); *Coast to Coast: Women of Color National Artists Book Project* (Flossie Martin Gallery, Radford, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother’s Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); see also Astrid Henry, ‘Waves’ in *Rethinking Women and Gender Studies*, ed. Catherine Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein (New York: Routledge, 2011), 102–118.

strands of feminism that came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, from those of the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> Henry points out that by always basing new iterations of feminism against what came before, the wave model implies linear progress.

Recognising this helps unpack the narratives at play in feminist storytelling. Maura Reilly suggests that the ‘new agenda of diversity and difference that emerged in the late 1980s Western feminism was greatly informed by ideas put forth by post-colonial, anti-racist and lesbian feminist writers’.<sup>35</sup> While it was in the late 1980s and 1990s that these arguments gained visibility, the academic gloss in Reilly’s mode of storytelling does not recognise that these critiques of feminism had existed in the 1970s, too.<sup>36</sup> For example, Lola Olufemi reminds us that texts like *Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain* (1985) mapped Black British feminist organising right across the seventies and eighties.<sup>37</sup>

Hemmings argues that progress narratives are overly simplistic because they engender a time when feminist theorising is no longer needed and fail to recognise the contradictions inherent in all timelines of historical progress. The actual politics of feminism continued throughout the 1990s in Britain and can be found in a rich panoply of examples: the inauguration of The New Hall collection at Cambridge University; exhibitions including *Fantasy. An Exhibition of the Work of 15 Contemporary British Women Artists* (Women’s Art Library, London, 1994) and *Our Bodies, Ourselves: An Exhibition By Women Photographers on the Subject of Health* (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, 1993); books like *Passion: Discourses on Black Women’s Creativity* (1990); or conferences such as

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<sup>34</sup> Rebecca Walker, ‘Becoming the Third Wave’, *Ms.*, 2, 3 (Jan 1992): 39-41.

<sup>35</sup> Maura Reilly (ed.), ‘Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms’ in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ex. cat. (New York: Merrell, 2007), 29.

<sup>36</sup> Another example is Frances Beale, who in 1970 labelled the second-wave as ‘white women’s feminism’ recognising that the mainstream narratives of feminism were blind to issues of race; Frances M. Beale, ‘Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female’ in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 340-353; see also: ‘Where We At: Black Women Artists at the Acts of Art Galleries’ (Acts of Art Gallery, New York, 1971); Kay Brown ‘The Emergence of Black Women Artists: The Founding of Where We At’, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 29 (2011): 118.

<sup>37</sup> Olufemi discusses the Brixton Black Women’s Group (BBWG) established between 1973 and 1974. The group was led by Olive Morris, Gail Lewis, Melba Wilson and Olive Gallimore, who worked to lobby for education that acknowledged histories of colonial violence, in addition to countering laws such as the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which gave police the permission to stop, search and arrest; Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 13-14; see also Stella Dadzie, Suzanne Scafe, and Beverly Bryan, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985).

the Women Artists Slide Library (WASL)'s 'Feminist Art Criticism' (Morley College, London 1992).<sup>38</sup> The founding of journals such as *MAKE Magazine* (formerly the Women's Art Library), *Women's Art Magazine* (formerly the Women Artists Slide Library Newsletter) and *n.paradoxa*, or the continuation of *Feminist Review* and *Feminist Art News*, are also reminders of the continuation of feminist organising across British art history at the time.<sup>39</sup>

In retrospect, these narratives have been acknowledged as incredibly significant to art history, and without denying the importance of these instances of art-making, this thesis seeks to interrogate the notion of feminist loss and the strategies that directly engaged with this to understand why examples like those above were pushed to the margins by a louder postfeminist art. As Katy Deepwell notes, between 1988 and 1995 there were only three books on feminist art practice published in the UK.<sup>40</sup> In order to understand the composite nature of feminist histories during the period, it is important to recognise how the examples of feminist progress above have been rebutted by narratives of feminist loss. When read through Hemmings we are reminded of how the simplicity of *both* narratives construct a political grammar that is easily adapted by postfeminism, given progress narratives imply we are moving toward a time when feminism is no longer needed.

### **Loss: What is Postfeminism?**

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<sup>38</sup> For a collection of responses to the question 'What is your most memorable experience of a feminist/women's art exhibition in the past 10 years and why?' from artists, curators and writers in 2000 highlighting many examples from the 1990s, see: Katy Deepwell (ed.), 'Defining Experiences: Feminist Exhibitions in the 1990s', *n.paradoxa*, 13 (Sept. 2000), accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021, at [https://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaisue13\\_Katy-Deepwell\\_4-21.pdf?](https://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaisue13_Katy-Deepwell_4-21.pdf?); for other examples, which is by no means an exhaustive list, see: *Our Bodies, Ourselves: An Exhibition By Women Photographers on the Subject of Health* (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, 1993); The New Hall Collection became the largest collection of artworks by women in Europe, see: 'About the Collection', *Murray Edwards College*, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021, at <https://womensart.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/about-the-collection/>; Pauline Barrie and Fran Lloyd (eds.), *Fantasy. An Exhibition of the Work of 15 Contemporary British Women Artists* (London: Women's Art Library), 1994; Maud Sulter (ed.), *Passion: Discourses on Black Women's Creativity* (London: Urban Fox Press, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> For an instructive history of *n.paradoxa* see: Katy Deepwell, 'On the Beginnings and End of *n.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal*', *n.paradoxa*, 40 (July 2017): 5-13.

<sup>40</sup> Katy Deepwell (ed.), 'Introduction' in *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 3. The three books published were Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences* (London: Routledge, 1990); Wendy Beckett, *Contemporary Women Artists* (London: Phaidon, 1988); Maud Sulter (ed.), *Passions: Discourses on Black Women's Creativity* (London: Urban Fox Press, 1990).

Hemmings notes that '[b]etween 1989 and 2001... a Lexis-Nexis search of English-language newspapers turned up eighty-six articles referring to the death of feminism and an additional seventy-four referring to the postfeminist era'.<sup>41</sup> "Post" can mean an event absolutely terminated or a chronological break. But it can also be epistemological, implying the ending of a period that never had a defined start or end, but was rather constituted by a shift in prevailing mood. By attaching the prefix to terms such as postfeminist or postsocialist, the discourses maintain some of the ideological tensions from within each category, but at the same time, signify an ambiguous space after or beyond an event, which make them particularly difficult to challenge.

While the use of the prefix "post" has not always been used to mean a complete break with the past, it has often been used to imply a betrayal or appropriation of an event. It has come to stand in as a reactionary anticlimax after a once thriving movement as in the case of postfeminism, or a way of dealing with the ghostly existence or "afterlives" of residual trauma, as is often true of postcolonial studies.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the actual politics of feminism articulated by scholars such as Jaggar, in the early 1990s postfeminism emerged as a media culture.<sup>43</sup> Lisa Yaszek notes that 'at best literary postfeminism seems to be apolitical and afeminist. At worst, it places creative writers in an adversarial relation to the entire history of feminism'.<sup>44</sup> Postfeminist media culture was strengthened through pseudo-academic writers including Camille Paglia, Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe, who attempted to justify the irrelevance of feminism to the lives of young women.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>42</sup> The term postcolonial does not necessarily mean the implication of being "after" colonisation, but signifies a way of dealing with the wake of colonisation instead: Stuart Hall stated '[s]o, postcolonial is not the end of colonisation. It is after a certain kind of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation—in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it—it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new'. While Hall's interpretation of the multiplicitous nature of postcolonialism is correct, I feel that Ella Shohat's critique of the concept's theoretical and political ambiguity as a 'dizzying multiplicity of positionalities' and 'a-historical and universalizing displacements' that dissolve the politics of resistance is also true, because it 'posits no clear domination and calls for no clear opposition'; Stuart Hall interviewed by Julie Drew in 'Cultural Composition: Stuart Hall on Ethnicity and the Discursive Turn', in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 230; Ella Shohat, 'Notes On the Postcolonial', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 99.

<sup>43</sup> Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983).

<sup>44</sup> Lisa Yaszek, 'I'll be a Postfeminist in a Postpatriarchy, or, Can We Really Imagine Life after Feminism?', *EBR* (January 2005), unpagged.

<sup>45</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994); Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1993).

In 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility' (2007) Rosalind Gill provides a valuable model for identifying postfeminist sensibility.<sup>46</sup> Gill claims a text is postfeminist if it contains any combination of these factors: it implies that gender equality has been achieved and feminist activism is no longer necessary; it encourages the sexualisation of culture aimed at an increasingly younger audience; defines femininity as a bodily property reviving notions of natural sexual difference; marks a shift toward claiming sexual agency; incites a "makeover" paradigm premised on self-surveillance and self-discipline; emphasises individualism, choice, and empowerment as the primary routes to women's liberation; or, it promotes consumerism and the commodification of difference.<sup>47</sup> Postfeminism can therefore be understood using Hemmings' loss narrative, given that it dissolved the potential for intergenerational solidarities between women by presenting older versions of feminism as unnecessary.<sup>48</sup>

The revival of notions such as femininity as a bodily property, natural sexual difference and the sexualisation of culture were advocated by Paglia.<sup>49</sup> In *Sex, Art and American Culture* (1993), published just a year before *Bad Girls*, Paglia argues: 'Madonna embodies the eternal values of beauty and pleasure. Feminism says, "No more masks." Madonna says we are nothing but masks'.<sup>50</sup> She proposed that mythology's historical association of women with nature was true, undoing the feminist movement's attempts to render the stereotype as a construct,

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<sup>46</sup> Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, 2 (2007): 147-166.

<sup>47</sup> Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, 2 (2007): 150.

<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere Chris Holmlund has also attempted to categorise three different kinds of postfeminists: "academic", "chick" and "grrrl". The categories denote versions of postfeminism that simultaneously overlap and oppose each other, highlighting the term's contradictions. The academic branch follows postmodern theory from France, Britain and the USA: having absorbed elements of poststructural, postcolonial and queer theory, they use the deconstruction of subjectivity to render fixed gender binaries like woman/man unnecessary, meaning that feminism becomes redundant. "Chick" postfeminists following a conservative backlash culture against the gains made by second-wave feminism and are either openly hostile to the Women's Liberation Movement or take its gains for granted. The last branch Holmlund identifies is "grrrl" postfeminists, who occupy a position between "academic" and "chick" following the riotgrrrl phenomenon that originated in the USA. They continue the struggle of second-wave feminism but are wild and playful in tactics; Chris Holmlund, 'Postfeminism from A to G', *Cinema Journal*, 44, 2 (Winter, 2005): 116-121.

<sup>49</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>50</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art and American Culture* (London: Viking, 1993), 5.

claiming that ‘by such techniques of demystification, feminism has painted itself into a corner’ carving her prosex and propornography stance against feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin.<sup>51</sup>

Paglia has rightly been dismissed as antifeminist and biologically deterministic.<sup>52</sup> Still, her writing does exemplify a growing interest in this period in how ‘amorality, aggression, sadism, voyeurism, and pornography in great art [had] been ignored or glossed over by most academic critics’.<sup>53</sup> To Hemmings, postfeminism of the kind proposed by Paglia frames the return of feminism as threatening young women’s sexual and social capital. Hemmings has argued that vilifying feminists as ‘angry and humourless and blamed for creating a generation of fearful, unsuccessful, metaphorically castrated men’ is typical of postfeminism in which ‘[s]he is masculine, unattractive to men, prudish, humourless, and badly dressed: in short, she is a lesbian. And lesbianism itself is marked as anachronistic, unless combined with a palatable mainstream femininity...’.<sup>54</sup>

Postfeminism notionally represents a multiplicity of feminisms, but rather than freeing itself from what it sees as the “limits” of feminism, it actually reinscribes women as depoliticised subjects. The cultural rhetoric of “empowerment” and “choice” that had been critical to the women’s liberation movement are co-opted by postfeminism to enforce a consumer culture that invokes ‘feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved’ but overall, emphasises ‘it is no longer needed, it is a spent force’.<sup>55</sup> The postfeminist subject therefore emerges as apolitical, capitulating to consumer trends and refusing involvement in collective political organisation for fear of relinquishing the freedoms associated with modern womanhood,

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<sup>51</sup> Paglia uses the Nietzschean forces of Apollo and Dionysus to argue that the ultimate tension in Western culture is between order and chaos, aligning men with the former, and women with the latter. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 13; in 1983 MacKinnon and Dworkin attempted to pass legislation that would remove pornography from public consumption (more on this in Chapter 2); Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, *In Harm’s Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> Robin Ann Sheets, ‘Book Reviews: Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson by Camille Paglia’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (October 1991), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xiii; see also Marianne Noble (ed.), *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 225–226.

<sup>54</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

<sup>55</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Post-Feminism and Popular Culture’, *Feminist Media Studies* 4, 3 (2004): 255-64; Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008); for a nuanced guide to the feminism(s) informed by the notions of empowerment and choice see Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983).

corroborating Angela McRobbie's statement that 'the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom'.<sup>56</sup> For McRobbie, the mixture of progressive and reactionary messages espoused by postfeminist media are a 'double entanglement' that reestablish new forms of gender division based on consumerism and self-surveillance.<sup>57</sup> As a result, the actual scale of women's material conditions are obfuscated and it is essential to recognise this as the context in which the bad girl phenomenon in art emerged in the 1990s.

It might seem somewhat dated to be challenging postfeminism today, during what is arguably the fourth-wave of feminism.<sup>58</sup> Yet, in *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* (2017), Nicola Rivers argues that the recent revival in feminist thinking has a complex relationship with postfeminism.<sup>59</sup> While there is a growing trend for those in the public eye - everybody from politicians to musicians - to identify as feminist today, Rivers proposes that their identifications are made with distinctly postfeminist sentiment and that those '...seeking to celebrate the emergence of this "new" wave of feminism, particularly in seeing it as signalling the death knell of postfeminism... should perhaps proceed with caution'.<sup>60</sup>

One reason for this misrecognition is perhaps the lack of research and writing on postfeminism itself, even of writers who were at one point interested in the subject. For example, Jones once published eagerly on postfeminism but has in recent years stopped producing work on the subject. Hence, in the reader *Feminism-Art-*

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<sup>56</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, 3 (2004): 260.

<sup>57</sup> This double entanglement is reflected in the way neoconservative politicians such as George Bush and John Major had for example celebrated chastity and nuclear family structures, whilst on the other, upholding a liberalism that encouraged freedom and choice. Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008), 12.

<sup>58</sup> The fourth-wave has often been characterised by challenging abuses of power, intersectionality, decentralisation, collaboration and mobilisation (particularly through technological developments such as the internet and social media). See also Cinzia Arruzza et. al., *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019); bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 25; as an example, the fashion brand Dior recently sold a t-shirt bearing the slogan "We Should All Be Feminists" but what the online listing of the t-shirt failed to mention was that the slogan was borrowed from a 2014 manifesto by Nigerian feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, erasing her labour and leaving feminism as a kind of surface gloss for the clothing collection. During the catwalk show for the collection, a copy of Linda Nochlin's seminal text 'Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?' (1971) was placed on each guest's seat yet the show failed to sincerely engage with the text's calls for systemic change in the cultural sphere; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014); Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', *ARTnews*, 69 (January 1971): 22-39.

*Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, Jones' essay 'Post-Feminism: a Remasculinization of Culture' (1990) is reprinted in the 2001 edition, but not the 2014 one.<sup>61</sup> In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, Jones' essay 'Feminism Incorporated' (1992) is included in the first edition in 2003 but not in the second edition in 2010.<sup>62</sup> When asked about this turn in her work, Jones said that her interest in postfeminism had been eclipsed by far more urgent questions at stake for feminism, such as the incorporation of broader frameworks of sexuality, queer theory and intersectional identifications:

The term postfeminism (as with post-black, post-queer, etc.) has definitely dropped out of discourse. It seemed crucial to argue against the ways in which it was being wielded, sometimes with good intentions (on the left), but always in ways that were both historically wrong and also potentially dovetailed with right-wing dismissals of feminism. By the late 1990s those debates had faded away. Much more important at that time for me was my shift to performance studies questions and the necessary broadening of feminist frameworks to address sexuality (queer theory) and other intersectional identifications (critical race theory, post- and then decolonial theory; transnational feminism; etc.). I was no longer interested in debating a question that had assumed a form of heteronormative white feminism as its starting point.<sup>63</sup>

What is important about Jones' statement is her desire to move away from focusing on postfeminism, given that she rightly felt there were more significant debates to engage with art historically. But by siloing postfeminism, I argue that art history has allowed for its covert return, as recognised by Rivers above. The artists and exhibitions selected for this thesis were therefore chosen predominantly for the ways they negotiate narratives of feminist loss (but which I argue are tangled with progress narratives as both emboldening postfeminism). What is therefore at

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<sup>61</sup> Amelia Jones, "'Post-Feminism': A ReMasculinization of Culture' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2014 [2001]), 496-506.

<sup>62</sup> Amelia Jones, ed. *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003; 2010); moreover, in *The Art of Art History* (1998), it is noticeable that her contributions to the 2009 edition focus on embodied pleasure and the philosophy of aesthetics, rather than postfeminism specifically; Donald Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1998]).

<sup>63</sup> Email exchange between Amelia Jones and Bea Cartwright, 3rd June 2020.

stake in this thesis is how art history might more rigorously challenge postfeminism. With an improved understanding of how postfeminism operates, it is, I argue, possible to better resist the persistence of gender inequality today.

### **Return: The Persistence of Gender Inequality**

Postfeminist media culture encourages us to interpret the present moment as being one “beyond” feminist politics. According to Hemmings, both progress and loss stories refute the possibility of one another, presenting their own narrative as foregrounding complexity over singularity and offering the best version of the future of feminist theory. Yet, she argues that neither of these stories are sufficient in articulating the complexity of feminist time; rather, we need to conceptualise it as a series of ongoing contests and relationships. In addition to loss and progress narratives, Hemmings offers a third conceptualisation in “return” narratives, which synthesise progress and loss narratives.<sup>64</sup> Return narratives take a materialist approach, necessitating a shift in focus from representation to materiality. Hemmings offers an example of a return narrative gloss in a statement by Wendy Brown: ‘women as a group are still poorer . . . [and] more subject to performing the lion’s share of emotional and janitorial labour’.<sup>65</sup>

In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991) Susan Faludi argued that postfeminism was a media backlash against feminism’s progress.<sup>66</sup> Faludi proposed that across the 1980s, the media increasingly portrayed women as unable to cope with the growing pressures of balancing domestic responsibilities and professional careers, resulting in burnout that worsened their quality of life. This neo-conservative media message blamed discourses such as feminism for enfranchising women toward unrealistic aims, but to Faludi this was inaccurate.<sup>67</sup> As she claimed, the material conditions of women in the USA had improved across the latter half of the twentieth century, thanks to the progress made by feminism. While Faludi was correct to question the media’s

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<sup>64</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 95-127.

<sup>65</sup> Wendy Brown, ‘Gender in Counterpoint’, *Feminist Theory*, 42 (2003): 365; quoted in Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 2011, 121; return narratives therefore justify the resurrection of materialist feminism, often referred to as new materialism. For more on new materialism, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds.), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

<sup>66</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006 [1991]).

<sup>67</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006 [1991]), 12.

quick dismissal of feminism, I propose that it is worth revisiting the material conditions she articulated using Hemmings' return narrative.

First in 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture' (2004) and later in *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2008), McRobbie considered postfeminism to be a product of economic context.<sup>68</sup> But unlike Faludi, McRobbie argued that women in Britain had seen no significant improvement in their material conditions in the 1990s. McRobbie noted that increased individualism across late-twentieth-century economies had reinstated hierarchies of gender, spanning from Thatcherite reforms (discussed below) to the "Third Way" politics that underpinned New Labour policies from 1997.<sup>69</sup> Simultaneously, postfeminist media discourse prevented women from developing a political subjectivity that might help them resist declining material conditions.<sup>70</sup>

To understand how return narratives operate as ways of unpicking progress and loss narratives in my later analysis, it is essential to consider the broader global economic context. In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall cemented the end of the Cold War. In this period, the burgeoning free-market economy oozed into new geographies, circulating its logic through ideas and consumer products. The collapse of the Soviet Union, alongside dramatic reforms in Asia, Africa and Latin America, led many to believe the world was rushing toward a universal system of liberal democracy, smoothing over the rough political terrain of the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> This emboldening of the

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<sup>68</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, 3 (2004): 255-64; Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008).

<sup>69</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies* 4, 3 (2004): 255-56; following Stuart Hall's observation that New Labour smoothed over the conflicts crucial to political life, McRobbie proposed that the actual scale of women's material conditions and marginal place in the labour market went unaddressed; Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988); Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> For McRobbie, it was not simply the conservative backlash that called for a retraditionalisation of women's roles that led to the eschewal of feminism, but the flimsy existence of feminism in popular culture - found in examples such as Bridget Jones, or the Spice Girls (more on this in Chapter 2); Angela McRobbie, 'Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and The New Gender Regime' in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 27-39; this is corroborated by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra in a collection of essays critiquing the political and social dimensions of postfeminism across popular culture, including film, magazines, popular music and reality TV; Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (eds.), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Liberal democracy can be defined as '...a form of political rule that balances the principle of limited government against the ideal of popular consent. Its "liberal" features are reflected in a network of internal and external checks on government that are designed to guarantee liberty and afford citizens protection against the state. These goals are essentially achieved through constitutional government

free market created a decade crowded with “posts”: postideological, postmodern, postpolitical, postsocialist, postfeminist, posthistorical, and postrace were all terms that permeated cultural discourse.<sup>72</sup> For instance, Frederic Jameson observed in 1991 that: ‘[t]he last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that...’.<sup>73</sup> Postfeminism could therefore be interpreted as an outcome of this postpolitical ennui, during which narratives proclaiming “the end of history” created the critical mood of being “after” or “beyond” political action.<sup>74</sup>

How we imagine and talk about time is deeply engrained in how we interpret both the past and future.<sup>75</sup> In *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (2017) Mary Evans interprets the requirements of feminism as continually transforming and her writing can be positioned as an example of Hemmings’ return narrative.<sup>76</sup> Evans’ argument can be used to counter postpolitical narratives (as well as those of loss and progress) given that in her account

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[...] The “democratic character” of liberal democracy is based on a system of regular and competitive elections, conforming to the principles of universal suffrage and political equality’. Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 40.

<sup>72</sup> Lola Olufemi argues against using the prefix “post” with political discourses given it blocks the possibility for futurity. Her writing on speculative philosophy has been instructive in my interpretation of the postpolitical; Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 1; Lola Olufemi, ‘Feminism, Imaginative Thinking and the Limits of the Institution’, The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford (5<sup>th</sup> March 2021); in his 1988 edition of *The End of Ideology*, Daniel Bell supposed that the newly emerging information age would bring an “end” to ideology; Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>74</sup> The rapid introduction of electoral democracy and economic liberalisation led Francis Fukuyama to rejoice that ‘[w]hat we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history’. By this Fukuyama did not mean the end of time per se, but the culmination of human progress toward liberal democracy; Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, *The National Interest*, 16 (July 1989): 4; see also Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012 [1992]).

<sup>75</sup> In *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (2004) Elizabeth Grosz argues that theories of time can impact ontologies of being given, ‘[t]he more clearly we understand our temporal location as beings who straddle the past and future without the security of a stable and abiding present, the more mobile our possibilities are, and the more transformation becomes conceivable’. In theorising time as an entity that has bodily affect, Grosz shows how our relationship with time can be used to unpick seemingly static notions of the present, enlivening possibilities for future political and social change. Grosz’s writing provides an apt counterpoint to postfeminist narratives, given she reconceptualises the present as something unstable, a kind of non-teleological state of flux. Elsewhere, Rita Felski argues that multiple conceptions of time exist at any given moment and the way we interpret and relate to time has the power to reach far beyond the simple mechanics of clock time: ‘How we imagine time is not just a matter for speculation and abstract debate; it is tied to the flux of feeling, the heft and weight of the body, aching prescience of our own morality. Time knits together the subjective and the social, the personal and the public; we forge links between our own lifetime and the larger historical patterns that transcend us’; Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2004), 14; Rita Felski, ‘Telling Time in Feminist Theory’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 21, 1 (2002): 42.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

feminism has been neither lost nor achieved, but rather exists in a continuum of struggle against the structural inequalities underpinning contemporary society in the context of capitalism writ large. Evans proposes:

The question of what is to be done has to start with the abandonment of fantasies about emancipation and progress. We have to refuse to accept dramatic or sensational accounts of the achievement of gender equality, particularly those which focus on the achievements of individual women, accounts which are in their own way often more supportive of existing social relations than critical of them.<sup>77</sup>

Evans traces the history of feminism through events such as the 1928 Act of Parliament in the UK, giving the vote to all men and women over the age of 21, through to the 1976 Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act and 1985 Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act.<sup>78</sup> Despite these achievements, she contends that far from achieving the goals of gender equality, feminism has been held back by the social conditions of women, for whom the social and political value of their care work is continually undervalued. She notes that ‘...any form of politics which wishes to engage with long-term, consistent, gender inequality has to engage with social inequality’ but the changes hoped for by both the suffrage movement and campaigns for the education of women have in practice been relatively limited given ‘the past hundred years have suggested that legislative change about the incorporation of women into institutional politics does not automatically achieve greater gender equality’.<sup>79</sup>

While focusing on the UK, Evans also speaks to a global context. Evans’ understanding of neoliberalism follows that inequality manifests in the conditions of women’s low pay, minimal presence in cooperate boardrooms, and absence in hierarchies of power (whether legal, religious, military or otherwise). These conditions are exacerbated today by the globalisation of a system based on free markets, flexible labour and privatised health and social care, which have come to replace universal high-quality publicly funded education and health care systems.

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 138.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 123, 121.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 131.

Evans' writing can be interpreted as a rebuttal to feminist progress narratives that ignore the ways economic and social equality has not been achieved in the twenty-first century, '[i]n doing so they have become a hugely significant part of the way in which inequalities, not just between women and men but also between classes and continents, are furthered and maintained'.<sup>80</sup>

Since at least the 1970s, neoliberal economic policy has centred on outsourcing and privatising public resources, reinforcing private property rights and upholding the logic of the free market by scaling back trade unions, deregulation and the privatisation of state resources.<sup>81</sup> Not only have countries shifting from centrally planned economies such as China and Russia made significant changes to practice and policy, but also welfare states such as the UK, too.<sup>82</sup> By placing greater responsibility onto individuals and personal choice, prosperity is promised to those who work the hardest, having 'pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world'.<sup>83</sup>

William Davies identifies the period between 1989 and 2008 as "normative neoliberalism".<sup>84</sup> Bracketed between the demise of European state socialism and the global financial crisis, he recognises this as the moment in which enterprise and competitiveness are asserted over social justice.<sup>85</sup> This followed the UK labour-market reforms

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<sup>80</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 22.

<sup>81</sup> The role of the neoliberal state was to guarantee the functioning of the markets, '...and if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture'; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [2005]), 2.

<sup>82</sup> For David Harvey, this economic rationale 'proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade'. Between 1978 and 1980, Deng Xiaoping liberalised China's communist economy, opening it to capitalist forces by shifting toward market socialism over central planning. In the USA, Paul Volcker altered US monetary policy at the US Federal reserve to curb inflation in 1979, which was later supported by Ronald Reagan who came to power in 1980 further deregulating industry, agriculture, and resources, as well as denigrating trade union powers. In the UK, Margaret Thatcher attempted to halt trade union power and stagnation caused by inflation; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [2005]), 1.

<sup>83</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [2005]), 3.

<sup>84</sup> William Davies, 'The New Neoliberalism', *New Left Review*, 101 (September-October 2016), unpagged, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018, at <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8184/II/101/william-davies-the-new-neoliberalism>.

<sup>85</sup> 'The expansion of neoclassical economics and auditing into all walks of social and political life was a disheartening phenomenon, which stripped non-market domains of their autonomous logics. It achieved what I have described as neoliberalism's disenchantment of politics by economics. Yet it is important also to recognize the normative procedures and constraints that this constructs around the exercise of political power. Under such conditions, neoclassical economics becomes a soft constitution for government, or "governance" in its

that took place from 1979, summed up by Thatcher's famous statement 'there is no such thing as society' made during an interview with *Woman's Own* in 1987.<sup>86</sup> The process of privatisation across the later twentieth century manifested in the policies of denationalising the public sector and disbanding unions, as recommended by the Conservative Party's Ridley Report in 1977.<sup>87</sup> This began with the privatisation of parts of British Aerospace and Cable & Wireless, running right through to British Rail, British Gas, and continuing (though more covertly) in the public-private partnerships of New Labour from 1997.<sup>88</sup>

These changes impacted models of arts support, too. Sandy Nairne remembers rifts emerging within the Arts Council during his tenure from 1988-1992.<sup>89</sup> Public sector reforms introduced by the government from 1979 onward cut funding for the arts in real terms and urged arts organisations to seek alternative sources of income.<sup>90</sup> Across the 1980s, market principles were applied to public management through the Financial Management

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devolved forms. Normative questions of fairness, reward and recognition become channelled into economic tests of efficiency and comparisons of "excellence". Coupled to markets and quasi-market contests, the ideal is that of meritocracy, of reward being legitimately earned, rather than arbitrarily inherited'; William Davies, 'The New Neoliberalism', *New Left Review*, 101 (September-October 2016), unpagged, accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018, at <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:8184/II/101/william-davies-the-new-neoliberalism>.

<sup>86</sup> Douglas Keay, interview with Margaret Thatcher in *Woman's Own* (Sept. 1987): 30. For an essay on the detrimental impact this had on the possibilities for collective thinking, see: Nina Power, "'Great' Britain in the Former West' in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2016), 591-98.

<sup>87</sup> 'Report of the Nationalised Industries Policy Group 1978', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online* (8<sup>th</sup> July 1977), accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2021, at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110795>.

<sup>88</sup> Following the recession in the early 1980s companies and main utilities were privatised. This included Jaguar, British Telecom, the remainder of Cable & Wireless, British Aerospace, Britoil and British Gas. Between 1987 and 1991, following the Conservative Government's third election, companies such as British Steel, British Petroleum, Rolls Royce, British Airways, water and electricity were brought into the market but to great opposition. In 1990 Margaret Thatcher resigned and John Major then led the party until 1996. His period in office was marked by the question of the European monetary union. In this period antagonism with the mining industry was reignited after the government sold off the last of British Coal, electricity companies Powergen and National Power, and British Rail. In 1997, New Labour built their image by opposing privatisation but in reality were able to do very little stop the process; the government also went to great lengths to stimulate private investment, entrepreneurialism, and a culture of market-driven meritocracy. The policies introduced in this period combined managerial leadership and Private Finance Initiatives (PFI). These policies applied to the London Underground, the NHS and schools, which raised money without the need for higher taxes.

<sup>89</sup> Sandy Nairne worked at the ICA as Director of Exhibitions until 1984 and, in 1988, was appointed as the director of the Visual Arts Department at the Arts Council until 1992. Nairne was heavily involved in the regeneration of the British Art Show; the establishment of the Institute of International Visual Arts (InIVA); the development of Percent for Art; and the Curating Contemporary Art Course at the Royal College of Art; 'Defining Excellence at the Arts Council', *The Arts Council at 70: A History in the Spotlight* (Kings College London, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016). Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022, at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/the-arts-council-at-70-report.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> For more on the scaling back of public arts funding in Britain during this period see Neil Mulholland, *The Cultural Devolution: Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Initiative and rolled out in the arts after the National Audit Office review of Art Council Great Britain in 1990.<sup>91</sup> The recession in the early 1990s also buoyed this shift toward private sponsorship.<sup>92</sup> Between 1985 and 1990 average annual growth of GDP was 3.3%, falling to -1.4% between 1990 and 1992.<sup>93</sup> In this context, scholars such as Evans propose that women see the impact of the reduction of public sector services first. As an example, discussing the specific case of single mothers, in 1997 Jane Hirst argued:

The biggest losers in the child care lottery are lone mothers and their families. One in three children living in poverty is from a lone-parent household, and those children face a much higher risk of coming into the care system. But the chances of escaping the poverty trap are virtually ruled out by the lack of pre- and after-school child care. Only the most menial, low-paid jobs, that can be fitted around school hours, are generally available to single mothers on low incomes. And, despite their clear duty under the Children Act 1989 to provide child care for children in need as an essential form of family support, in practice few local authorities do this in a systematic and non-stigmatizing way.<sup>94</sup>

This backs Evans' proposition that the actual politics of feminism must be renewed in order to contest an economic and political context premised on social inequality. In the 1990s, the bulk of domestic and social care continued to be conducted by women and the agency women wielded in formal political spheres also remained low.<sup>95</sup> Although

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<sup>91</sup> In 1994 the National Lottery Heritage fund was established, and in 1997 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). All bodies in receipt of public funds such as Arts Councils, were set targets subject to greater scrutiny. The importance of arts education was also later pushed via the development of Creative Partnerships in the early 2000s.

<sup>92</sup> In these years art publications such as *Artscribe* collapsed and were replaced by publications such as *Frieze*, which had popular market appeal but less theoretical rigour. The reduction of critical positioning in specific artworks will be explored in Chapter 2 using the impolitical (defined in the next section of the Introduction).

<sup>93</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 147.

<sup>94</sup> Jane Hirst, 'Guilty Parties', *Community Care*, 20-26 (Feb. 1997): 10-11, quoted in Gail Lewis (ed.), *Forming Nation: Framing Welfare* (London: Routledge, 2017 [1998]), 255.

<sup>95</sup> For example, an analysis of trends between 1961 and 1992 suggested that women spent 60 minutes cooking per day versus 20 minutes spent by men, showing no significant reduction in social reproduction labour conducted by women; United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 106-108; by 1994 less than 15% of ministers were women; UK Division for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations Secretariat, *Worldwide Government Directory, 1994* (Washington D.C.: Belmont, 1994), unpaginated, quoted in United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 153.

women have been systematically cut off from traditional routes into political leadership, projects such as *Castlemilk Womanhouse* provide examples of community organising that have been used as a means to power, and in Chapter 1, I argue that this exhibition is an example of what Hemmings would identify as a return narrative.

## **The Impolitical**

Having considered the nature of progress, loss and return narratives, this section will propose an alternative inflection on the apolitical dimensions of the loss narrative, which I will return to in Chapters 2 and 3 (summarised below). In *On the Political* (2005) Chantal Mouffe argues that a truly democratic society must have the potential to sustain political conflict and debate. Without antagonism, she argued, the state is in danger of capitulating to authoritarianism, where consensus suppresses the potential to object to its order. Mouffe reimagines antagonism (a conflict between enemies) as “agonism” (conflict between mutually respectful adversaries).<sup>96</sup> For Mouffe, one of the consequences of the ‘negation of the ineradicable character of antagonism’ is a lack of choice between a wide range of differentiated democratic identities, which could have been avoided by representing a greater number of adversarial positions.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Mouffe first collaborated with Ernesto Laclau to consider Marx and democracy through the Lacanian theory of the decentred subject and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 20; Mouffe revisits the controversial opponent of liberalism, Carl Schmitt, known for his sympathy with fascism in mid-twentieth-century Germany. His writing has become a paradoxical touchstone for many left-wing opponents of postpolitical consensus. Schmitt critiqued the inherent contradictions of liberal democracy. The political arena, he argued, is premised on the division between “friend” and “enemy”. Mouffe reinterprets Schmitt’s notion of enemies as “adversaries” who have mutual respect for each other’s legitimate differences. Whereas Schmitt’s theory proposed war as a logical end to the division between friend and enemy, Mouffe argues that this conflict must be negotiated in parliamentary debate, as so to avoid the existential threat of the political descending into violence; Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of The Political*, trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2007 [1932]), 26; for more recent uses of Schmitt’s theory, see: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Scene and Obscene: Another Hotly Contested Opposition’, *Third Text*, 14, 51 (2000): 5-15; Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018);

<sup>97</sup> Mouffe argues that this flattening of political antagonism was a key facet of Third Way theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, whose writing came to underpin much of New Labour’s policy. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 64; Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

The impolitical emerges from the ennui of this postpolitical context but it is not intended as a period term, given that there were many examples of explicitly political artistic production at the time.<sup>98</sup> Rather, the word holds relevance to specific artworks and curatorial projects selected for this study, predominantly the output of female-identifying artists who had often been underrepresented in formal decision-making positions but overrepresented as informal labourers, particularly when earning a living from their art in conditions characterised by low pay, long hours and lack of social protection. Following Evans' writing, we can interpret the impolitical as intersecting with postfeminism given that both represent a capitulation to a social system that structurally disregards gender inequality. As such, the impolitical in art is offered as an analytical tool to be tested against observations made about several artworks (but certainly not *all*) from the 1990s in Britain.

Hannah Arendt defined political power as 'acting in concert'.<sup>99</sup> Political power is created through the collective movement toward a common goal, implying that politics is always a social activity played out through conflict and cooperation between groups and individuals. It can be taken to mean a reasoning process, or a power struggle, to distribute resources and value. To describe something as political means it mobilises support for a particular programme of ideas - whether in the formal arena of party politics, the government or the state, or in an expanded sense in the case of decisions about lifestyle or culture that take place in less formal arenas like the home.

Whilst most businesses, schools, community groups, trade unions or families exist and function outside of formal "political" spaces, they are by no means apolitical, or non-political. The traditional division of public/private rests on the separation between the state (in the UK, publicly funded resources such as the police, civil service, army, courts, etc.) and civil society (family, kinship groups, businesses, trade unions, community groups etc). The non-public realms of civil society might therefore be positioned as external to the formal arena of politics. Yet, many feminist thinkers have pointed out the problems with this division, mapping the issue further by expanding their consideration of how "the personal is political" into the home, the family, domestic life and labour, and

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<sup>98</sup> For example, the 1993 Whitney Biennial curated by Elisabeth Sussman provided a rebuttal to the focus on opticality in art using social theory; Elisabeth Sussman, ed. *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, ex. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 244.

personal relationships.<sup>100</sup> Politics could therefore be associated with an arena or location where behaviour becomes “political” because of where it takes place. But in the conception of politics in an informal arena, politics is viewed as a process or mechanism in which political behaviour exhibits distinctive characteristics or qualities and so can take place in any, and arguably all, social contexts.

To try and neatly fit all artworks into a binary of political/apolitical is too reductive and in this thesis I propose the notion of the impolitical as a way to approach artworks that engage with a politics of refusal, interpreted using Hemmings’ loss narrative. While in Chapter 1 the collective actions of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* are explored through their conscious political *attachment* to past instances of feminist organising, in Chapter 2 a number of examples of feminist *detachment* are considered, which have been labelled postfeminist in their claim to being “beyond” feminist politics. The term impolitical is used as a way of speaking about and unpacking undeterminable elements of an artwork, when, for example, one is confronted with an artwork that seems to be refusing political attachment. In a 2006 interview Tracey Emin claimed of her art:

I use myself in my work. And part of me is my body. There again, I’m not flag waving. It doesn’t have to be feminist driven, because lots of really good women have fought on my behalf and have already done that. That battle has already been won.<sup>101</sup>

Emin’s artworks are inevitably embroiled in political debates around gender given their subject matter. Yet by rendering feminist politics as a battle already won Emin refuses a political position. This has led Julian Stallabrass to label her artworks as apolitical.<sup>102</sup> The problem with his interpretation of these works as apolitical, however, is

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<sup>100</sup> For example, Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>101</sup> Carl Freedman, ‘Quite a Performance’ in *Tracey Emin: Works 1963-2006*, eds. Tracey Emin, Jeanette Winterson, Carl Freedman and Rudi Fuchs (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 166.

<sup>102</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999).

that it forecloses the many political dimensions an artwork can have regardless of artist's intention (more on this in Chapter 2).

My conceptualisation of the impolitical in this study synthesises Roberto Esposito's use of the impolitic as a way of *perceiving* that illuminates the limits of politics, together with Emily Apter's understanding of the impolitical as a mode of action outside of the political's formal arena.<sup>103</sup> Esposito uses the term impolitical in *Categories of the Impolitical* (1988) where he argues that it does not mean antipolitical, or indeed apolitical, depolitical or unpolitical, because in renouncing politics these terms reproduce politics: instead 'the impolitical coincides with the political precisely because it does *not* renounce it'.<sup>104</sup> The term allows Esposito to explore the discords suppressed in modernity's orderly and consensus-based politics. The impolitical is not therefore the simple negation of the political, or even a category with defined limits, but rather:

[t]he impolitical *is* the political, as seen from its outermost limit. It is the *determination* of the political, in the literal sense that it makes visible its *terms* [*termini*] – which coincide with the entire reality of relations between people.<sup>105</sup>

The impolitical in Esposito's opinion is a way of looking, or 'a mode of seeing politics' rather than a category, 'because the latter already gives the idea of something complete and definite'.<sup>106</sup> Apter has recently used the term impolitical in *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (2018).<sup>107</sup> The book explores

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<sup>103</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]); Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]), 18.

<sup>105</sup> Esposito identifies authors such as Schmitt, Georges Bataille, Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, as impolitical given that they sustain conflict, in his opinion, in productive ways. Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]), 13.

<sup>106</sup> Published in 1988, Esposito's text could also be seen as a response to the postpolitical. Esposito was trying to work through the rigid concepts of modernist politics, which had failed to produce any new radical perspectives, at the same time as resisting end of history narratives that concluded with the depoliticising claim that modernity was "complete"; Roberto Esposito quoted in Bruno Bosteels, 'Politics, Infrapolitics, and the Impolitical: Notes on the Thought of Roberto Esposito and Alberto Moreiras', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 10, 2 (2010): 207.

<sup>107</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018).

politics in its ‘messier, everyday guises’, considering how actions outside of classical political theory can profoundly impact political institutions - such as fallible human desire, handshake agreements or community organising on a micro-level.<sup>108</sup> The often concealed operation of “politics with a small P” highlights that ‘...we really do not know what politics *is*, where it begins and ends, or how its micro-events should be called’.<sup>109</sup> Apter’s notion of the impolitic constitutes a tactlessness, or refusal of obedience:

A strongly impolitic way of doing politics connotes gestures of refusal, non-cooperation and civil disobedience. It mobilizes a tactics of tactlessness that encompasses the right to offend and the rude-boy maneuvers of rogues and *voyous*. It assaults conventions of *bienséance*, good taste, and liberal tolerance with obscene gestures and nasty retorts. It points to instances of violent *disaffiliation* or disidentification with a community, a *habitus* of citizenship, a select political estate, a given set of identitarian affiliations.<sup>110</sup>

While Esposito and Apter both use the impolitical as a way of dislodging the limits of the political, Apter’s understanding of the impolitical means ‘contrary to, or wanting in policy; unwise; imprudent; indiscreet; inexpedient; undiplomatic, as in, an impolitic ruler, law, or measure’.<sup>111</sup> She presents a language for speaking about political moves that are resistant to theorisation given ‘it also describes procedures of disentanglement that open up places of entry for inhabitable modes of thinking politically’.<sup>112</sup> In Chapters 2 and 3, Esposito’s use of the impolitical to reveal the limits of politics is combined with Apter’s understanding of the impolitic as a distancing/refusing of politics relating the impolite.

### Three Case Studies

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<sup>108</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 10.

<sup>109</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 1.

<sup>110</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 90.

<sup>111</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 84-8.

<sup>112</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 96.

This research project is a response to the virtual archives created by historical concepts (or stories) created by terms such as “postfeminism” or “wave model” but is by no means the last word on these topics. Set within the specificity of three exhibitions, the articulation of gendered labour is considered - from the fight for basic demands such as adequate housing, childcare, education, and healthcare down to the ways that increasing economic and social precarity have impacted female experience across the mutating familial structure, beauty standards, sexuality, and the media. As I argue, each case study has a complex relationship with feminist politics and provides a point of departure for each chapter, stimulating exploration of individual artists and artworks sited predominantly in Britain (or when in Tallinn they inform the context of art history in Britain). This project considers conceptual art, photography, sculpture and painting alongside digital video converted from 16mm or 32mm film.<sup>113</sup> In addition, several interviews conducted with key participants provide a supplement to the lack of documentation and primary source material from exhibition-making in the 1990s, given that the period was on the cusp of the digital revolution.

Chapter 1 will examine the exhibition project *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, which took place on the Castlemilk Estate in 1990 through photographs, letters and ephemera found in the Glasgow Women’s Library archive.<sup>114</sup> Using recent materialist feminist writing on social reproduction by Angela Dimitrakaki, Nancy Fraser, Kirsten Lloyd and Tithi Bhattacharya, this chapter will show that the community project emerged as a response to “crisis of care” impacting women on the Castlemilk Estate in 1990.<sup>115</sup> I will counter the smooth, linear stories of feminist time encountered in what Hemmings would call loss or progress narratives by positioning Castlemilk as a return narrative. In the context of Glasgow’s rapid regeneration through projects such as the European City of Culture (1990) it is proposed that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* resisted the deteriorating material conditions of women on the

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<sup>113</sup> As with any research project, this study has been limited by space, time and resources. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the research method given that it prevented viewing many objects, texts and ephemera held in physical archives when the project was conceptualised. Instead, the pandemic created the conditions for engaging with digital and personal archives in productive ways that were not anticipated; this shift in research methodology resulted in more direct conversations with individuals such as Claire Barclay, Mare Tralla and Pam Skelton, and these interviews have provided crucial primary source material.

<sup>114</sup> Rachel Harris, Julie Roberts and Cathy Wilkes, *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, ex. cat. (Glasgow: Women in Profile, 1990).

<sup>115</sup> For example, Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 97-117; Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, ‘Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction’, *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017), 1-14.

estate - demanding adequate housing, childcare and local amenities - by returning to strategies introduced by past feminist organising. Artworks such as *Bathroom Installation* (1990) by Claire Barclay or Annie Lovejoy's *A Sense of Purpose* (1990) are considered, among others.

This chapter will also rethink *Castlemilk Womanhouse*'s familial lineage with the CalArts *Womanhouse* (Los Angeles, 1972) by following a historical approach that shifts its genealogy, foregrounding the material conditions of women in Castlemilk. Elizabeth Freeman's notion of temporal drag in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) will allow for a queering of history that positions *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a 'hiccup in sequential time'.<sup>116</sup> I will avoid linear conceptions of history by considering how these two community arts projects might be positioned as speaking back and forth to one another, instead of as a singular trajectory that leads either toward or away from feminism, as in progress and loss narratives. While the impolitical will be developed as a symptom of postpolitical stasis in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 1 will consider how projects like *Castlemilk Womanhouse* might be positioned as the undertow of postfeminist waves, representing the continuation of feminist kinships that endure across generations.<sup>117</sup>

Unlike the affirmative attachments to feminist organising found in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, Chapter 2 examines conscious detachment from the politics of feminism. The exhibition *Bad Girls* is taken as a case study, which opened at the ICA, London, in 1993, and then moved to the CCA, Glasgow, in 1994.<sup>118</sup> While the works in the exhibition explored questions of gender, sexuality and femininity, the curators carved an undecided relationship with feminism. This chapter considers how the impolitical might be a useful analytical tool for interpreting a politics of refusal. Following Jones' delineation of the "bad girls" phenomena in art, this chapter will consider artists such as Gillian Wearing, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Sam Taylor-Johnson alongside the exhibition *Bad Girls*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Castlemilk Womanhouse* is not interpreted as an example of impolitics given its clear context and premise of political struggle (in this case feminist social reproduction).

<sup>118</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White eds., *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993).

<sup>119</sup> Amelia Jones 'An "Other" History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970' in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 172; Amelia Jones, 'Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-Identity' in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-69.

Chapter 2 will recognise the problems associated with conflating artworks from *Bad Girls* under the banner of postfeminism, given the involvement of artists such as Helen Chadwick. Using employment statistics, auction records, and research by the Women's Art Library and UNESCO, this chapter will consider the material context of the late 1980s and early 1990s in London. It will be argued that women were still far behind men in terms of material success in the art world. Yet, the methodology and politics of the bad girls phenomenon differed substantially from that of *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, given that the former discouraged women from thinking critically about their economic conditions. This chapter will allow for the notion of impolitics to fully emerge by applying it to a number of artworks, such as Gillian Wearing's *The Garden* (1997); Sam Taylor-Johnson's *Fuck Suck Spank Wank* (1993); Sarah Lucas' *Shine On* (1991) - which been dismissed as apolitical.<sup>120</sup> Across this chapter the contingency between the postfeminist subject and the rise of "critical" positions like the hedonistic 'proletarian-philistine reflex' in contemporary art are also considered given these modes celebrated ostensible liberation using critical detachment.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, Chapter 3 will map the notion of the impolitical to test its transnational potential following Dimitrakaki's belief that '[u]ltimately what is politically important is not where' histories of art will be written 'but *how*: their projected strangeness can be recast to disrupt the smooth flow of current hegemonic discourses'.<sup>122</sup> The exhibition *Private Views* is taken as a case study, first displayed in the Estonian Art Museum in Tallinn, in 1998, and later travelling to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Dunaújváros, Hungary in 1999.<sup>123</sup> This case study is used because it facilitated collaboration between artists in both Britain and Estonia, bringing together sixteen artists including Mare Tralla, Naomi Dines, Anu Juurak, F.F.F.F., KIWA, Mari Koort, Ene-Liis Semper, Liina Siib, Pam Skelton, Susan Brind and Marit Følstad.<sup>124</sup> A collection of essays about the exhibition was published in 2000 by the

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<sup>120</sup> For example, scholars such as Stallabrass dismiss Emin and Lucas' works as apolitical, but he fails to thoroughly recognise the ways that their work intervened in feminist debate even whilst refusing feminist attachments; Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> Dave Beech and John Roberts, 'Spectres of the Aesthetic', *New Left Review*, 218 (July-Aug. 1996): 102-127.

<sup>122</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, "'Five O'Clock on the Sun" Three Questions on Feminism and the Moving Image in the Visual Arts of Non-Western Europe', *Third Text*, 19, 3 (May, 2005): 272.

<sup>123</sup> Several works from the show were also presented at small conferences in England and The Netherlands. Pam Skelton (ed.), *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia* (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 2.

<sup>124</sup> Marit Følstad was based in Sweden, unlike the other artists based in either the UK or Tallinn.

Women's Art Library, London, which will provide an essential primary source for understanding what impact the exhibition had on art history in Britain.<sup>125</sup> My own recent interviews with Dimitrakaki, Brind, Skelton and Tralla will also represent key primary sources, unearthing previously unacknowledged positions and insights.

While Tralla appeared to be speaking from a postfeminist stance in Britain, Dimitrakaki reminds, '*Private Views* was not a post-feminist show. If anything, it helped some of us at least see the contradictions post-1989 feminism would be facing'.<sup>126</sup> This chapter will unpick historical categories such as postsocialist, former East or postcommunist for how they produce a double bind for art that is both "after" feminism and socialism. Postsocialist space is taken as an extreme example of neoliberal transformation, exploring the ways this might have created a specific context for the resistance of feminism. This chapter will consider how these artists have been shaped by entirely different discursive models but where the value and meaning of feminism and feminist time might have seemed superficially similar. By considering the material, social and historical conditions from which these artworks emerge I seek to understand how the notion of the impolitical helps us to inflect narratives of both loss and progress relative to particular political narratives.

By unravelling these apparent moments of feminist disaffection or refusal, this thesis aims to uncover an array of political positions that are not usefully encapsulated by the term postfeminism. By tracking these case studies through the interrelated stories of loss, progress, and return, the impolitical will emerge as a tool for reassessing these case studies' political capaciousness. As I argue, postfeminism positions itself as being "after" or "beyond" feminism, impressing a way of viewing the world that separates women from a material understanding of their conditions in both the past and future. But by moving past the rhetoric of endings calcified by terms such as postfeminism this study will analyse the ways that different stories have constructed certain feminist subjects throughout history, affirming the importance of experimenting with how feminist storytelling might be used to reinterpret seemingly fixed narratives about objects, exhibitions, and wider histories.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et. al. (London: Women's Art Library, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16.

## CHAPTER 1. When Labour Becomes a Drag: *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990

In 2017, a special issue of *Third Text* called for a reconfiguration of art history using a feminist history of labour.<sup>128</sup> Edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, the issue recognised that ‘...the recent revival of social reproduction debates suggest that a crisis needs to be addressed’.<sup>129</sup> The time was right, they felt, to reassess the relationship between labour and gender in art using social reproduction theory to better understand exploitation in the institutions of art, formulating a feminist art history ‘capable of passing *beyond* the household and the domestic to incorporate public services such as healthcare and the (re)production of social values’.<sup>130</sup> In this chapter, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* (1990) is considered an exhibition “out of time” given that the project consciously reenacted the second-wave exhibition project *Womanhouse* (1972) during a period when the second-wave was being critiqued not only from within art history and theory, but also in popular media culture through postfeminist sentiment.<sup>131</sup> Multiple strands of feminism were reduced to a singular entity by the popular media and degraded using phrases such as the ‘F word’.<sup>132</sup> This chapter delves beneath the surface of this postfeminist rhetoric, conducting significant research into the artworks presented in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* using little-known letters, documentary photographs and ephemera held in the Glasgow Women’s Library archive. Writing on the interpretation of feminist archival material, Kathy Carbone argues that:

[t]he experience of haunting [...] produces several ruptures: it not only changes and heightens our social awareness and psychological state, but transforms our usual perception of time and complexifies the order of things - a feeling of being “out of joint” as it were - a feeling of a present past that draws us

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<sup>128</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, ‘Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction’, *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017): 1-14.

<sup>129</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, ‘Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction’, *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017): 3.

<sup>130</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, ‘Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction’, *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017): 5.

<sup>131</sup> This is considered in greater depth in Chapter 2.

<sup>132</sup> As an example of the way feminism was degraded by tabloid culture, see: Marcela D’Argy Smith, ‘Feminism the “F” word of the Nineties’, *Daily Express* (11th September 1996): 25.

affectively toward “something else, something different from before” that generates a “something-to-be-done”.<sup>133</sup>

I propose that the archival material considered in this chapter reveals the original *Womanhouse* reemerged in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, providing a ‘conduit and locus’ for the Castlemilk collective’s ‘feminist identifications’.<sup>134</sup> *Castlemilk Womanhouse* established social reproduction demands on the housing estate by arguing for the provision of childcare, equal pay and educational opportunities for women. Taking lead from recent writing by materialist feminists such as Nancy Fraser, Tithi Bhattacharya and Dimitrakaki, I will then consider how the artworks and events at *Castlemilk Womanhouse* filtered out into the social fabric of the surrounding housing estate.<sup>135</sup> The original *Womanhouse*’s reappearance here counters the smooth linear stories of feminist time often encountered in loss or progress narratives, reminding us of the continued and consistent (if at times less visible) importance of feminist thought - not as something that ebbs and flows in waves, nor as a project completed.<sup>136</sup>

Archives are key to how we might narrate feminist stories differently given they act as places where ‘knowledge production begins’ rather than presenting inert, predetermined objects and ideas.<sup>137</sup> With this in mind, using Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of temporal drag in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) this chapter will attempt to rethink *Castlemilk Womanhouse*’s familial lineage with *Womanhouse*. By shifting the art historical genealogy, a new line of lineage with the community arts group the Hackney Flashers (1974-1979) is

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<sup>133</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi, quoted in Kathy Carbone, ‘Dear Sister Artist: Activating Feminist Art Letters and Ephemera in the Archive’, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 3 (2020): 10.

<sup>134</sup> Kathy Carbone, ‘Dear Sister Artist: Activating Feminist Art Letters and Ephemera in the Archive’, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 3 (2020): 1-24, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, *New Left Review*, 56 (2009); Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso Books, 2013); Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017); Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>136</sup> As argued by Clare Hemmings, the simplicity of progress and loss narratives lead too easily toward postfeminism; Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> Eichhorn has written at length on North American activist groups in the 1990s, such as Riot Grrrl and feminist zine culture, arguing that the ways these movements are archived is crucial to how we narrate their histories; Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2013), 3.

proposed, based on the material conditions of women involved with *Castlemilk Womanhouse*. Freeman's writing will allow me a queering of history that positions *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a 'hiccup in sequential time' with 'the capacity to connect a group of people beyond monogamous, enduring couplehood'.<sup>138</sup>

By considering the Castlemilk artworks alongside the Hackney Flashers, differences in their mode of critical reference will become clear. Instead of viewing either grassroots project as having more or less potential to circumvent the crisis of care (more on this in the next two sections), the incomplete programme of *both* collectives stipulate the seductive undertow of temporal drag, which is often disavowed, according to Freeman, in the future-oriented performance of linear time. In doing so, this chapter attempts to avoid linear conceptions of history that persist amongst progress or loss narratives of feminist storytelling denoted by Hemmings. Instead, following both Hemmings and Evans, I propose that the untimeliness of the Castlemilk events is representative of a return narrative in so far that it attempted to unpick the persistence of gender inequality. By reminding us of the necessity for a continuously transforming feminist politics of social reproduction, Castlemilk disproves the notion that we could ever be "post" feminism.<sup>139</sup>

### **The Context for *Castlemilk Womanhouse***

In 1990, a marketing campaign designed by Saatchi & Saatchi was launched by Glasgow District Council with the slogan 'There's a lot Glasgow-ing in 1990' (Fig 1.1, 1990).<sup>140</sup> Written in Charles Rennie Mackintosh script, the image represented the city's heritage whilst celebrating its recent cultural revival. In 1987 it was announced that Glasgow was selected as the European City of Culture (ECOC), 1990.<sup>141</sup> The ECOC promoted economic regeneration in a city known for its long-term economic decline since deindustrialisation. The Scottish Development Agency and Glasgow District Council sought to transform the city's reputation for deprivation and slum housing,

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<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

<sup>140</sup> Neil Gray, 'The Tyranny of Rent', *Variant*, 37, (Spring/Summer, 2010): 40.

<sup>141</sup> Beatriz Garcia, 'Deconstructing the City of Culture: The Long-Term Cultural Legacies of Glasgow 1990', *Urban Studies*, 42, 5/6 (May 2005): 841-68.

instead attracting external service sector investment through marketing and cultural prestige.<sup>142</sup> Investment came into the city, growing its international reputation. An evaluation report for Glasgow City Council, Strathclyde Regional Council and Scottish Enterprise calculated that for a public sector investment of £33 million, Glasgow 1990 saw a net economic return to the Glasgow regional economy of between £10.3 and £14.1 million.<sup>143</sup> Yet, these benefits did not reach everyone in the city; an oppositional counter-culture later emerged in fly posters that reappropriated the council's marketing campaign as 'There's a lot of con gowing on in 1990' (Fig 1.2, 1990).<sup>144</sup>

In this context, several community groups such as Workers City and Women in Profile questioned the potential benefits of regeneration programmes such as Glasgow Action and the Merchant City property developments.<sup>145</sup> These grassroots organisations argued that large-scale cultural events brought about more significant inequalities in the city, creating an economy dependent on insecure, low-paid service sector jobs.<sup>146</sup> Sarah Lowndes relates the growth of grassroots culture and artist-led initiatives to the political and economic climate in Glasgow, arguing that collectives such as Women in Profile, Worker's City, and Transmission Gallery formed to

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<sup>142</sup> Gerry Mooney, 'Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', *Local Economy*, 19, 4 (November 2004): 328-29.

<sup>143</sup> John Myerscough, *Monitoring Glasgow 1990* (Glasgow: Glasgow City Council/Strathclyde Regional Council and Scottish Enterprise, 1991), 77.

<sup>144</sup> Eliot Tretter has published a materialist analysis of the conditions of rent monopoly, competition, and fixed capital in Glasgow, arguing that the period between the early 1980s to 1990 constituted the depletion of the cultural commons in the city, the foundations for which were provided by the privatisation of infrastructure in previous years. Monopoly rent emerges due to scarcity and location, meaning a landowner can earn a higher than average rent because of another pre-existing monopoly on the land. Eliot Tretter, 'The Cultures of Capitalism: Glasgow and the Monopoly of Culture', *Antipode*, 41 (2009): 111-132.

<sup>145</sup> Women in Profile was set up to facilitate and publicise women's work in the arts, founded by sociologist Barbara Littlewood and Sam Ainsley, a lecturer at Glasgow School of Art.

<sup>146</sup> Glasgow Action was initiated in 1985 by the Scottish Development Agency (SDA) and was the first public-private partnership in Scotland, partnering with Glasgow District Council meaning that public funds were used in service of private partners. Merchant City was a name introduced by the SDA to refer to an area in central Glasgow that underwent heavy development of office buildings and locations such as the Broomielaw (now home to the International Financial Services District, IFSD), the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, and the site of the 1988 National Garden Festival. The problem with this regeneration was that it brought fast increases in rents, with city centre prices nearly doubling between 1987 and 1989 alone; Eliot Tretter, 'The Cultures of Capitalism: Glasgow and the Monopoly of Culture', *Antipode*, 41 (2009): 120; culture and the arts became a key part of ECOC regeneration, with the creation and funding of arts and cultural venues such as a new concert hall costing almost £30 million. During the 1990 event, 700 cultural organisations and 22,000 people were involved in presenting and running nearly 3,500 events; Gerry Mooney, 'Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', *Local Economy*, 19, 4 (November 2004): 329.

mitigate the collapse of Glasgow's industrial infrastructure, rising unemployment, the poll tax, and the failure of the first referendum on devolution.<sup>147</sup>

These factors meant that the commercial art market in Glasgow was small, and artists relied on DIY culture and artist-led initiatives to fund and display their work.<sup>148</sup> The ECOC motivated these groups to represent alternative narratives of Scottish culture on the world stage. Glasgow's identity as a city itself had long held machismo connotations: known for its shipyards, gruelling weather, working men's clubs and tough industrial past. Just a decade earlier, the neoexpressionist New Glasgow Boys movement had ushered in a revival in the didactic painterly tradition romanticising a principally male image of the city's industrial history.<sup>149</sup> And so by the late 1980s there was a growing sense that women in the arts were being ignored. For example, in 1990, the curator of the People's Palace, Elspeth King, was overlooked in favour of the less qualified Mark O'Neil when she applied to be Keeper of Glasgow's Social History, sparking a petition that garnered nearly 3,000 signatures.<sup>150</sup> Curator Julian Spalding was responsible for the appointment, who at the time declared that there were '[n]o jobs for the girls. We must be democrats and make jobs open to all'.<sup>151</sup> The problem with this statement was that in attempting to justify his committee's decision in the name of equality, Spalding effectively erased the existing conditions that made jobs such as this less accessible for women.

In this context, and as a response to the ECOC, the feminist arts group Women in Profile proposed a community space modelled on the original CalArts' *Womanhouse* (1972) (Fig. 1.3, 1972).<sup>152</sup> In 1990, *Castlemilk*

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<sup>147</sup> Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Ltd., 2010 [2003]), 139.

<sup>148</sup> Neil Mulholland argues that the lack of commercial infrastructure and government support for artists in Glasgow engendered a culture of artist-led initiatives; Neil Mulholland, *Cultural Devolution: Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 45; Malcolm Dickson makes brief mention of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* in 'Another Year of Alienation: On the Mythology of the Artist-Run Initiative', in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 88.

<sup>149</sup> This group included artists such as Peter Howson, Ken Currie, Stephen Conroy and Steven Campbell.

<sup>150</sup> Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2010 [2003]), 140.

<sup>151</sup> Alasdair Gray, 'A Friend Unfairly Treated', *Workers City*, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020, at [http://www.workerscity.org/the\\_reckoning/alasdair\\_gray.html](http://www.workerscity.org/the_reckoning/alasdair_gray.html)

<sup>152</sup> The first *Womanhouse* occurred in an affluent suburban neighbourhood at 533 Mariposa Street, Hollywood, January 30<sup>th</sup> - February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1972. 533 Mariposa Street was a derelict mansion sourced by the students, who had negotiated with the owners to allow them to renovate it. The exhibition attracted between 9,000 and 10,000 visitors; Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, *Womanhouse*, ex. cat. (Unpublished,

*Womanhouse* began with the opening of a two-week exhibition (13<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> September) but the wider project lasted for five years.<sup>153</sup> Women in Profile later developed into the Glasgow Women's Library and LGBTQ+ Collection Archive.<sup>154</sup> Today, the archive houses a small collection of images, documents and letters relating to *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, which provided the primary source material for this chapter.

The idea for a Glaswegian version of *Womanhouse* came from Adele Patrick.<sup>155</sup> *Womanhouse* was a pioneering installation project that became a keystone of the Women's Art Movement in the 1970s. It was a collaborative project initiated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro with the help of 21 students from the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts).<sup>156</sup> The artists collaboratively renovated a derelict mansion in Hollywood, Los Angeles, turning the rooms into a series of surreal, poetic, and at times amusing installations that explored the gendered experience of domestic space.<sup>157</sup> By contrast, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* took place in a derelict tenement block on a housing estate south of Glasgow, far from the newly regenerated Merchant

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1972), 2; see also: Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds.), 'Conversations with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro' in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 67; Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (eds.), *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture* (Los Angeles: OTIS School of Art and Design, 2011), 91.

<sup>153</sup> Given the wealth of photographs and ephemera available in the archives at the Glasgow Women's Library, this chapter will concentrate on the first exhibition of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* in September 1990. But there remains much scope for research upon the following five years of the project. The artists' use of 39 Glenacre Quadrant ended by December 1990 and the project relocated to 390 Ardencraig Road, where it continued until 1995 initially headed by Claire Barclay, Julie Roberts and Ann Quinn; Kate Davis, 'Interview with Claire Barclay, 6 July 2014 at the Studio of Claire Barclay' (unpublished, 2014). Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton; a film by Anne-Marie Copestake documents the workshops that continued beyond the initial 39 Glenacre Quadrant exhibition: Anne-Marie Copestake (dir.) *Castlemilk Womanhouse, 4'10"* (Arts and Cultural Development Office Glasgow City Council, 1995), accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019, at <http://vimeo.com/96899317>.

<sup>154</sup> 'Our History', *Glasgow Women's Library*, accessed 12th August 2020, at <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>.

<sup>155</sup> Rachel Harris, 'Women in Profile', *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished exhibition proposal, c.1990), 7. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton.

<sup>156</sup> Participating artists were: Beth Bachenheimer, Sherry Brody, Judy Chicago, Susan Frazier, Camille Gray, Vicky Hodgett, Kathy Huberland, Judy Huddleston, Janice Johnson, Karen LeCoq, Janice Lester, Paula Longendyke, Ann Mills, Carol Edison Mitchell, Robin Mitchell, Sandra Orgel, Jan Oxenburg, Christine Rush, Marsha Salisbury, Miriam Schapiro, Robin Schiff, Mira Schor, Robin Weltsch, Wanda Westcoast, Faith Wilding, Shawnee Wollenma and Nancy Youdelman; Chicago and Schapiro, *Womanhouse*, 1.

<sup>157</sup> The exhibition catalogue recorded the titles of artworks as *Personal Environment, Leaf Room, Dollhouse Room, Dining Room, The Kitchen* (containing *Eggs to Breasts* and *Aprons in Kitchen*), *Bridal Staircase, Crocheted Environment, Menstruation Bathroom, Garden Jungle, Nursery, Shoe Closet, Red Moon Room, Painted Room, Nightmare Bathroom, Linen Closet, Personal Space, Lea's Room, Lipstick Bathroom* and *Necco Wafers*. Elsewhere Arlene Raven listed the performances, which mainly took place in the living room: *Birth Trilogy, Waiting, Scrubbing* and *Cock and Cunt Play*; Arlene Raven, 'Womanhouse' in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harry Abrams Inc., 1994), 48-65.

City district of the West End. The council identified an empty tenement block, 39 Glenacre Quadrant, for demolition and Women in Profile negotiated temporary use of the space (Fig. 1.4, c.1990).<sup>158</sup> Unlike the first *Womanhouse*, this was not a sun-drenched, affluent suburb of Hollywood, but rather a place where ‘[t]he architecture and street layouts were monotonous in the extreme and the large backland areas between houses were like a wilderness enclosed by brick boxes’ (Figs. 1.4 - 1.5, c.1990).<sup>159</sup>

Patrick, along with artists Rachel Harris, Julie Roberts, and Cathy Wilkes, became the key organisers for the initial exhibition at Castlemilk. The tenement block contained four flats with two bedrooms each. Two flats were taken up to provide office space, a kitchen, a meeting room, and a space for childcare, and the other two flats were used to provide space for artists’ installations and workshops (Figs. 1.4 - 1.13, c.1990). Artists were able to submit installation proposals to the residents of Castlemilk, who then selected the following fifteen: Claire Barclay, Marlene Byers, Aideen Cusack, Sharon Dippity, Rachael Field, Coo Geller, Annie Lovejoy, Val Murray, Julie W. Roberts, Susan Steele, Hazel Walker, Nenagh Watson, Emma Webster, Catrin Williams, Josie Wilkinson and Heather Wilson.<sup>160</sup>

With funding from Glasgow District Council and the Scottish Arts Council, the project provided a chance for local women to socialise, learn skills and build confidence in a friendly environment where childcare was provided. According to the exhibition proposal held in the archive, the project aimed to counter local women’s alienation from contemporary art.<sup>161</sup> The unequal distribution of funding for the ECOC was one of the reasons that Women in Profile were motivated to create *Castlemilk Womanhouse*. It was hoped that by creating a Glaswegian *Womanhouse* they could ensure that the financial benefits brought into the city by the cultural events of 1990 would be invested in long-term projects that would benefit both the city’s residents and women working in the arts in a

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<sup>158</sup> Rachel Harris, ‘Women in Profile’, *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished exhibition proposal, c.1990), 7. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women’s Library, Bridgeton

<sup>159</sup> Charles Johnstone, ‘The Tenants’ Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990’ (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 1992), 316.

<sup>160</sup> It should be noted that one of the key organisers Julie Roberts is different to the painter Julie W. Roberts, who created the piece *Treatment at Home* (1990) for the project.

<sup>161</sup> Rachel Harris, ‘A Womanhouse Project’, *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished exhibition proposal, c.1990), 2. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women’s Library, Bridgeton.

professional capacity. This material context connects Castlemilk with the wider network of activism surrounding the ECOC.

Most of Glasgow's galleries had not traditionally charged for admission to allow the broadest possible access for the city's residents. However, several museums and exhibitions inaugurated at the time of the ECOC introduced admission fees - The McLellan Galleries for example was a publicly funded space but started charging in 1990. The *Glasgow's Glasgow* exhibition organised by the City Council charged an admission fee of £3.40, which was then dropped to £1.00 when curators and activists criticised the show for the fact that it was displaying works that had been taken from admission-free museums spaces across the city and placed in a fee-paying exhibition. The entrepreneurial turn in government had reinterpreted culture as an economic asset, encouraging an explicit growth agenda in partnership with private agencies and non-governmental organisations.<sup>162</sup> These market-oriented "growth coalitions" typically showed a 'deficit with respect to accountability, representation, and the presence of formal rules of inclusion or participation'.<sup>163</sup> The privatisation of the city's cultural infrastructure therefore became both context and incentive for resistance work by groups such as Workers City and Women in Profile against the use of public-private partnerships.<sup>164</sup>

Elsbeth King had been an outspoken critic of the involvement of profit-making corporations in awarding public funds, contending that they had ignored the People's Palace and its historical location on Glasgow Green - an area associated with working-class protest. Her opposition to these new public-private partnerships may have been one of the reasons she was passed over in favour of a less experienced male candidate for the post of Keeper of the City's Social History. Women in Profile were vocal supporters of her cause and in reprisal to Spalding's

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<sup>162</sup> For a record of the shifts in policy by the UK and Scottish governments, see: Robin Boyle, 'Partnership in Practice: An Assessment of Public-Private Collaboration in Urban Regeneration - a Case Study of Glasgow Action', *Local Government Studies*, 15, 2 (1989): 17-28.

<sup>163</sup> For an account of the changing scales of governance in large-scale urban development projects, see: Erik Swyngedou et. al., 'Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large-scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy', in *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 209.

<sup>164</sup> Neil Gray notes: '[Workers City] could provide a model for a form of politics that isn't confined to the workplace, fighting for limited gains at work that are stolen away by inflationary price rises at the level of social reproduction. Urban struggles over social reproduction, social space and everyday life, as Lefebvre and theorists from the autonomist Marxist tradition understood, must come to the fore if social gains in the workplace are to be protected at the level of social totality. The Workers City group, while by no means a perfect model, overcame narrow specialisations - "the artist", "the academic", "the worker", "the activist", "the unemployed" - to form a non-party political, horizontal, place-based movement...'; Neil Gray, 'The Tyranny of Rent', *Variation*, 37 (Spring/Summer 2012): 42.

statement above, they printed “Jobs for the Girls” onto t-shirts and distributed them when the project opened, implying a refusal to erase the material reality of gendered experience (Fig. 1.12, 1990). Although the aims of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* were local and specific to the estate, the project was therefore embedded within the political aims of activist resistance to the ECOC and of increasing the accessibility of art in the city by bringing art to the doorstep of women on the estate, for whom entry fees, childcare, and bus fares may have prevented them from being able to engage in museums in the West End.

### **The Return of Social Reproduction**

In *Capital* (1867) Karl Marx states that ‘as exchange-values, all commodities are merely definite quantities of congealed labour-time’.<sup>165</sup> By this, he meant that labour power is the true value needed for the capitalist to produce commodities and produce value for capitalism. But social reproduction theory identifies an underdeveloped branch in Marx’s thinking: if capitalist value relies on labour power to reproduce itself, then how does labour itself reproduce? Theorists of social reproduction such as Lise Vogel, Silvia Federici, Nancy Fraser and Tithi Bhattacharya have since stepped in to better account for the ways that labour power is actually maintained at no cost to the capitalist system, often in familial structures where women have historically done the majority of unwaged production activities.<sup>166</sup> Understanding how these often invisible and unwaged labours include things such as childcare, the preparation of meals, the cleaning of the home, emotional support, health care, or care for the elderly are imperative to my proposal that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* can be understood as a return narrative. Given that these labours continue to be placed outside the regime of capital in the private sphere, it is difficult for these

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<sup>165</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1., trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990 [1867]), 130; Silvia Federici notes that social reproduction was ‘first conceptualised by the François Quesnay (1694–1774) and other Enlightenment-era Physiocrats who, according to Marx, were the first economists of capitalist society, and also the first theorists to identify the nature of productive labour with agricultural work’; Silvia Federici, ‘Social Reproduction Theory: History Issues and Present Challenges’, *Radical Philosophy*, 2.04 (Spring 2019): 55.

<sup>166</sup> Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013 [1983]); Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975); Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975); Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, *New Left Review*, 56 (2009); Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

“workers” to collectivise and advocate for political demands. Social reproduction therefore encapsulates a range of labours, be it immaterial, physical or affective, which might be defined as maintaining current and future workers.

The two spheres of capitalist production and labour production are not entirely separate, and social reproduction theory makes clear that the ‘production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process’.<sup>167</sup> Bhattacharya argues that reducing wages in the production sphere can lead to unrest in the labour production sphere; for example, mortgage foreclosure has been known to cause spikes in domestic violence.<sup>168</sup> Social reproduction theory therefore holds a particularly close relationship with feminism given its ability to illuminate how capitalist accumulation is structurally reliant on women’s unwaged labour. Lise Vogel’s *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (1983) acknowledges Marx’s theory of labour power as a theoretical framework in which to situate the problems of women’s oppression and women’s liberation but develops his theory to account for social reproduction by refusing to see women’s oppression as being separate to class oppression, instead reading them as unitary.<sup>169</sup> Her book poses three questions to Marx’s class-based theory of oppression: firstly, why are all women (not just working-class women) oppressed in capitalist society? Secondly, what is the relationship between the division of labour and women’s oppression? Thirdly, is oppression based on sex, race and class of an essentially similar kind?

Autonomists such as Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James have proposed that unpaid domestic labour has a tangible exchange value: arguing that it can (and ought to be) bought or sold in the capitalist labour market.<sup>170</sup> This differs to socialist feminists like Vogel, who see social reproduction as only having use value,

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<sup>167</sup> Meg Luxton and Kate Bezanson (eds.), *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2006), 36.

<sup>168</sup> Tithi Bhattacharya, ‘What Is Social Reproduction Theory?’, *Socialist Worker* (September 2013), accessed 30th July 2020, at <https://socialistworker.org/2013/09/10/what-is-social-reproduction-theory>.

<sup>169</sup> This separation of labour spheres is referred to as “dual systems theory”; Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013 [1983]); see the introduction of this volume for an instructive summary of the development of 1970s socialist feminism and its place in the Women’s Movement. Vogel’s work was by no means the first analysis of feminist political economy however, for one of the first critiques of unpaid domestic labour, see: Margaret Gilpin Reid, *Economics of Household Production* (New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1934).

<sup>170</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975); Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

or practical utility. In *Wages Against Housework* (1975) Federici critiques the exploitation of unpaid work disproportionately impacting women:

To demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible [...] The unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it.<sup>171</sup>

Federici therefore argues that emancipation from this kind of exploitation is difficult, given that as unrecognised workers, domestic labourers have no rights to unions or to refuse work.

Recently, Bhattacharya edited *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (2017), which includes contributions by Fraser, Vogel and Cinzia Arruzza among others.<sup>172</sup> The volume seeks to address social reproduction beyond the familial structure by extending its scope into the communities surrounding workers, questioning for instance the kinds of health care and housing available to workers.<sup>173</sup> Writers Isabella Bakker, Stephen Gill, Meg Luxton and Kate Bezanson have considered the specific context of the UK, analysing the ways that state privatisation exacerbates inequalities of gender, class and race given that social reproduction labour is normally done by unpaid workers or is purchased by those who can afford it.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press, 1975), 5, 2-3.

<sup>172</sup> Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

<sup>173</sup> In her contribution to the volume, Carmen Teeple Hopkins social reproduction theory makes it easier to see how race and citizenship status affect the impact of paid and unpaid domestic labour conducted under slavery. She suggests that we need a renewed interpretation of autonomist feminism in light of the increasingly commodified care sold on the market for a price - which is overwhelmingly conducted by migrants in an often precarious labour structure; Carmen Teeple Hopkins, 'Mostly Work, Little Play: Social Reproduction, Migration, and Paid Domestic Work in Montreal' in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 301-35; Hopkins cites several valuable texts informing this debate: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor', *Signs*, 18, 1 (1992): 1-43; Adelle Blackett, 'Introduction: Regulating Decent Work for Domestic Workers', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 23, 1 (2011): 1-45; Hazel V. Carby, 'White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood' in *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference and Women's Lives*, eds. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (New York: Routledge, 1997), 110-28.

<sup>174</sup> For example, see: Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill, *Power, Production, and Social Reproduction: Human in/Security in the Global Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kate Bezanson, *Gender, the State, and Social Reproduction: Household*

Building on this historiography of social reproduction, in *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (2013) Dimitrakaki argues that the 1990s were a pivot point for the acceleration of today's "crisis of care".<sup>175</sup> At the heart of this issue is the erosion of the welfare state and in 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History' (2009) Nancy Fraser argues that neoliberalism's emphasis on flexible working and freedom of choice actually created a system with greater economic precarity by removing the emancipatory content of second-wave feminism.<sup>176</sup> Fraser argues that in this context an unintended consequence of second-wave feminism's demand to move beyond the "family wage" structure was that it created the ideal of the two-earner family, where the reality that 'underlies the new ideal is depressed wage levels, decreased job security, declining living standards, a steep rise in the number of hours worked for wages per household' and the 'exacerbation of the double shift - now often a triple or quadruple shift'.<sup>177</sup> With this in mind, in this chapter *Castlemilk Womanhouse* is interpreted as a grassroots response to this crisis, stepping in where the state withdrew to create a space in which the divisions of work, which disproportionately impacted the lives of single mothers on the estate, could be rebalanced (more on this below). The writers above can therefore be used to evidence why I interpret *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a feminist return narrative, given that the project reminds us that 'when a society simultaneously withdraws public support for social reproduction and conscripts the chief providers of it into long and gruelling hours of paid work, it depletes the very social capacities on which it depends'.<sup>178</sup>

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*Insecurity in Neo-Liberal Times* (Toronto, Ontario; University of Toronto Press, 2006); Meg Luxton and Kate Bezanson (eds.), *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2006).

<sup>175</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); other good examples of recent social reproduction art history are: Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Siona Wilson, *Art Labour, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015).

<sup>176</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 97-117; Nancy Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', *New Left Review*, 100 (2016): 99-117.

<sup>177</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 110. Fraser later consolidated these ideas by tracing second-wave feminism through its decline as neoliberalism emerged, proposing that the financial crash of 2008 provided fertile ground for the renewal of a radical feminist project, see: Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso Books, 2013).

<sup>178</sup> Nancy Fraser interviewed by Sarah Leonard, 'Capitalism's Crisis of Care', *Dissent Magazine* (2016), accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020, at <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care>.

### ***Castlemilk Womanhouse (1990-1995)***

In 1988, a Castlemilk Umbrella Steering Group meeting recorded that ‘...it is strongly felt by the community that the most pressing problem in Castlemilk is poverty and the resulting powerlessness the people have over the things that determine their lives’.<sup>179</sup> Following the Castlemilk Partnership Report of 1988/1989, the *Castlemilk Womanhouse* proposal stated that ‘more women in Castlemilk have small children or are single parents than in Glasgow District as a whole and restrictions placed on their time and freedom by responsibilities at home prevent them from making use of the majority of public facilities to the same extent as men’.<sup>180</sup> A collage advertising the project’s opening in 1990 shows the workshops available in painting, woodcutting, or video, with a “creche available” (Fig. 1.6, 1990). This image suggests that not only the space provided women with respite from the isolation of their daily routines of bathing children, wiping surfaces, and washing dishes, but the project allowed them the time and space to forge collective kinships that could help resist the dreary rhythms of everyday chores.

Like the other three major peripheral housing schemes - Drumchapel, Easterhouse and Pollok - Castlemilk had been erected to rehouse families during the postwar slum clearances in the 1950s. The scheme intended to provide a higher standard of housing with green space and indoor bathrooms. But in reality, the housing was built with cheap materials and was poorly maintained, quickly falling into disrepair (Fig. 1.14, 1989). In 1992, historian Charles Johnstone noted that houses in Castlemilk had ‘never had any major repairs carried out... since they were built’ and that ‘tenants are deeply concerned, to say the least, about dampness, rotten window frames, faulty electrical wiring, etc’.<sup>181</sup> The postwar slum clearances had forced many tight-knit tenement communities to separate. As in Castlemilk, these estates were often built far from the centre without local social and leisure provisions such as pubs, sports facilities, or community centres. Losing long-term friendly support networks had often led to a

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<sup>179</sup> Castlemilk Umbrella Steering Group report (1988) quoted in Charles Johnstone, ‘The Tenants’ Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990’ (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 1992), 362.

<sup>180</sup> Scottish Office, *New Life for Urban Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Office, 1988), 1-24; Rachel Harris, ‘A Womanhouse Project’, *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation*, (Unpublished exhibition proposal, c.1990), 2. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women’s Library, Bridgeton.

<sup>181</sup> Charles Johnstone, ‘The Tenants’ Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990’ (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 1992), 368; see also ‘Housing Everyday Life & Wellbeing Over the Long-Term’, *University of Glasgow*, accessed 11th February 2020, at <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/historyresearch/researchprojects/castlemilk/>.

feeling of disenfranchisement among residents. Growing unemployment due to deindustrialisation added to the increasing crime rates on the estates. Eventually, those who could leave moved away: between 1971 and 1991 Castlemilk's population of 37,000 had dropped by half.<sup>182</sup> Across the 1970s and 1980s in Glasgow, deindustrialisation, workplace closures, and high unemployment rates had weakened connections between industrial action such as trade unions and community mobilisation. But, as Ewan Gibbs argues, a long culture of activism in Clydeside saw community housing as directly connected to industrial struggle.<sup>183</sup> By the 1990s, the Castlemilk Estate had become a key location over the struggle for housing and amenities in Clydeside:

Between 1981 and 1991, Glasgow alone lost 65,000 manufacturing jobs, 10% of its total employment. By 1981, 29% of 16- to 24-year olds in Pollok were out of work and male unemployment was 26.9%, with overall unemployment standing at over 20%. Glasgow's overall unemployment was 16.5% and Strathclyde's 13.4%, which was itself above the national rate of 12.2%. Compounding the severity of these figures was the fact that well over 50% of the jobless in the large peripheral housing schemes of Drumchapel, Pollok and Castlemilk in 1983 were long-term unemployed.<sup>184</sup>

These problems persisted into the 1990s, and in March 1989, 2,547 Castlemilk residents were registered as unemployed.<sup>185</sup> These unemployment rates continued right up to the inception of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* - in 'June 1990, 136 of tenants (70.2 per cent) in Castlemilk were in receipt of housing benefit', moreover '3,528 of these

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<sup>182</sup> 'Castlemilk Housing', *Glasgow City Archives*, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019, at <https://www.theglasgowstory.com/image/?inum=TGSA00795&t=2>.

<sup>183</sup> Gibbs argues that this long history can be traced back to the Rent Strike of 1915; Ewan Gibbs, 'Historical Tradition and Community Mobilisation: Narratives of Red Clydeside in Memories of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement in Scotland, 1988-1990', *Labor History* 57, 4 (2016): 440.

<sup>184</sup> Ewan Gibbs, 'Historical Tradition and Community Mobilisation: Narratives of Red Clydeside in Memories of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement in Scotland, 1988-1990', *Labor History* 57, 4 (2016): 448-49.

<sup>185</sup> This represented an overall unemployment rate of 22.8 per cent, compared with 17.1 per cent in Glasgow District and 12.6 per cent in Strathclyde Region; Charles Johnstone, 'The Tenants' Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 1992), 306.

tenants were on income support, a reliance upon state support which indicates the prevalence of low income levels within the scheme'.<sup>186</sup> When coupled with the poll tax and galvanised by the recession, it is possible to see how renewed interest in the power of community activism outside of the sphere of production came about, and *Castlemilk Womanhouse* flourished as a response to this need.<sup>187</sup> Woven into the social fabric of the Castlemilk Estate was hence a long-fought struggle for the basic pleasures of homeplace, community and solidarity.

The artworks this chapter will focus on are *The House That Jill Built* by Rachel Harris, *Bathroom Installation* by Claire Barclay, *A Sense of Purpose* by Annie Lovejoy and *Cook Dems* by Bobby Baker. In addition to the series of installations throughout the rooms of 39 Glenacre Quadrant, the project held workshops on art, craft, music, drama, writing, and adult education. Seminars on a wide range of topics, for example, on the history of working women, self-portrait and the image, domestic violence and representations of women, took place. They aimed to illuminate the structural inequalities women faced and to build confidence toward recognising and combating these. Moreover, the project gave opportunities for network building, as noted in the exhibition proposal:

The policy making structure [...] and facilities available [...] will at all times or as often as possible revolve around the specific needs of women, who, in their daily lives sacrifice much to the needs of their families and who, due to responsibilities at home, miss out on the confidence-building, creative and social aspects of self-development and training for jobs. Women who have no children or whose children have grown up are often excluded from social contact with other women who tend to meet each other through the activities of their children i.e. school, youth clubs, Jeely Piece Club, etc.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Charles Johnstone, 'The Tenants' Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990' (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 1992), 307.

<sup>187</sup> The poll tax was a Thatcherite policy that replaced a property-based rates charge with a flat tax to be paid by all adults. In Scotland, the tax was especially resented given it was enforced in 1989, a year earlier than in England, but lacked a democratic mandate. In response, communities refused to pay the tax, reviving a long history of community activism that had existed in Scotland since the rent strikes of 1915.

<sup>188</sup> Rachel Harris, 'A Womanhouse Project', *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished exhibition proposal, c.1990), 3. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton.

Those who lived in Castlemilk were put at the forefront of decision making, they took part in discussion groups and held positions on the management committee along with others from Women in Profile.<sup>189</sup> Filmmaker Anne-Marie Copestake interviewed a number of women who had participated in the project over the years and they recalled the impact the project had on their lives, describing it as a ‘...a total life saver’, with one stating ‘I met a lot of different people I would n’ay normally meet, the head of art galleries and things like that’.<sup>190</sup> Another participant noted that for her ‘it was about more than art instruction... it was about getting out into the world and being more than just a mum... people were meeting people who lived in the next tenement but they hadn’t actually met before’.<sup>191</sup>

### **Claire Barclay, *Bathroom Installation* (1990)**

The material conditions of women in Castlemilk are reflected in the works themselves. A survey on housing conditions found that ‘79 per cent of the houses had dampness, 95 per cent had water penetration through windows, 93 per cent of households considered backcourts a health risk and 80 per cent of tenants did not find heating adequate’.<sup>192</sup> In her artwork, Barclay used carbolic soap to cover a small window space, allowing limited natural light to seep in through the cracks between each brick-like piece. The artwork drew attention to the small size of the windows in the buildings, where the grey weather often compounded the lack of light. Barclay remembers this ‘led the flats to feel cramped and dark, and where the height of the windows also restricted children from being able to see through them’.<sup>193</sup> Using an old-fashioned airer on pulleys, Barclay suspended starched aprons above the bath. She unstitched the aprons, then restitched them at the edges. They lost their original utilitarian purpose yet retained a sense of familiarity when displayed amongst other domestic objects.

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<sup>189</sup> Alison Gavine, interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 10th March 2020; see also Rachel Harris and Julie Roberts, ‘Press Release’, *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished press release, 8th June 1990), 7. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women’s Library, Bridgeton.

<sup>190</sup> Anne-Marie Copestake (dir.) *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 4’10” (Arts and Cultural Development Office Glasgow City Council, 1995), accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019, at <http://vimeo.com/96899317>.

<sup>191</sup> Anne-Marie Copestake (dir.) *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 4’10” (Arts and Cultural Development Office Glasgow City Council, 1995), accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019, at <http://vimeo.com/96899317>.

<sup>192</sup> Charles Johnstone, ‘The Tenants’ Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945-1990’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Glasgow, 1992), 368.

<sup>193</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

Barclay included blocks of carbolic soap in the bathroom that produced a familiar smell, but when contrasted with the surreal appearance of the unstitched aprons Barclay intentionally unsettles the familiar. In an interview, Barclay recalled that on the estate:

...families [in Castlemilk] were often led by single mothers, frequently living in isolation from one another even though they lived just a few doors down. There was no way of neighbours connecting with each other due to lack of resources, funding and community infrastructure. It was exciting to be part of a wave of community movements that sprung up to help with this. It felt like really crucial work.<sup>194</sup>

Read through the lens of social reproduction, I interpret Barclay's *Bathroom Installation* as questioning how the poorly designed state housing required a greater amount of domestic labour to maintain it (Figs. 1.15 - 1.16, 1990). Barclay remembered finding it strange that the houses had coal fires installed but no insulation. This, coupled with the tiny windows, created condensation and mould, so there was a constant need to clean to keep the space liveable. Barclay recalled that 'what became apparent was that these women were doing a disproportionately high amount of extra work to keep mould away from the spaces like bathrooms and kitchens'.<sup>195</sup> She found coal in one of the cupboards in the derelict tenement and incorporated it into her artwork. Barclay scrubbed the coal "clean" - a pointless labour in itself - and filled the bath with it, alluding to a never-ending cycle of cleaning and re-cleaning caused by the badly designed housing.<sup>196</sup> The vast number of pieces of coal in the bath become visible reminders of the often concealed process of domestic labour that went into the reproduction of a familial unit in Castlemilk.

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<sup>194</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019; Barclay's observation coincided with what Claire Bishop argues about the 1990s as being a turning point in site-specific art and 'exhibitions that directly addressed site as a socially constituted phenomenon, rather than as a formal or phenomenological entity'; Claire Bishop, 'Former West: Art as Project in the Early 1990s' in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 194-95.

<sup>195</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019; Barclay's observation coincided with what Claire Bishop argues about the 1990s as being a turning point in site specific art and 'exhibitions that directly addressed site as a socially constituted phenomenon, rather than as a formal or phenomenological entity'; Claire Bishop, 'Former West: Art as Project in the Early 1990s' in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 194-95.

<sup>196</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

### **Annie Lovejoy, *A Sense of Purpose* (1990)**

Annie Lovejoy's installation *A Sense of Purpose* (Figs. 1.17 - 1.20, 1990) in the kitchen space used a combination of smashed crockery, cooking utensils, plastic bottles, rubber gloves and other equipment to remind visitors of the labours involved in maintaining a domestic space.<sup>197</sup> She strung broken plates between the cabinets, creating a claustrophobic barrier to the tiny space, and piled plates and utensils across the floor making it impossible to walk past them. Old bottles and pans filled the wall and formed an arc over the head of the viewer: these otherwise ordinary objects took on a menacing afterlife. The scene might have been the aftermath of an argument, earthquake or a visual representation of the endless cycle of domestic labour, where the product of this labour starts to disintegrate as soon as it is completed. Lovejoy's work engaged with domestic labour using a similar register to Barclay; the otherwise heuristic collection of objects and materials take on specific connotations when presented in the context of the old tenement home.

In Barclay and Lovejoy's work the uncanny was present in their use of familiar objects made strange through the way they were presented.<sup>198</sup> By Lovejoy defamiliarising elements such as the plates by piling them into smashed mounds, or Barclay filling the otherwise clean white space of the bathtub with scrubbed coal, they make strange these well-known elements of the homespace and in the process draw out new meanings from the viewer. Alexandra Kokoli writes about the history of the uncanny in feminist art, referencing examples such as *The Woman's Postal Art Event 1975-1977* and its installations *Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* (ICA, London, 1977) suggesting that they '[debunked] domesticity as an oppressive ideal founded on a patriarchal division of labour'.<sup>199</sup> Kokoli argues that these 'treacherous home

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<sup>197</sup> The Women's Library holds a copy of her proposal, which states there was also supposed to be a super 8 film loop of a waterfall over the top. Whether this part was included in the final installation is unrecorded in the photographs. Annie Lovejoy, 'A Womanhouse Project', (Unpublished installation proposal, 1990). Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton.

<sup>198</sup> Sigmund Freud's definition of the uncanny emerges from the word "unheimlich" which translates as "not from the home", or "not familiar". This can create a sense of dread in an individual, but to Freud these fears are an important way of drawing out latent feelings hidden in the subconscious; Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003 [1919]).

<sup>199</sup> For example, Su Richardson's contribution *Burnt Breakfast and Packed Lunch* (1976) presented the familiar scene of a full-English breakfast, made uncanny through the use of crochet, and with the egg presented as burned, igniting a kind of disgust in the viewer that contrasts sharply with the otherwise appealing cartoon-like colours of the breakfast; Alexandra Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory*

installations were not merely anti-domestic but rather brought to light the suppressed discontents, silences, inequalities and even violence on which domesticity is founded'.<sup>200</sup> Barclay and Lovejoy's work can be read in conversation with this history of the domestic uncanny given that they use familiar objects from the home but make them strange through the way they are positioned within the space.

### **Val Murray, *Visibility* (1990)**

Val Murray's work *Visibility* (Fig. 1.21, 1990) was an interactive installation that responded to the site specificity of the room on the Castlemilk Estate. When interviewed about her work, Murray remembers:

This vast overspill estate was an urban priority area in various stages of decrepitude and renovation. It was only 1/2 - 3/4 occupied at the time. Whilst I came from a feminist perspective my work did not start with political ideas as such but with my own experience and my human-sized self looking out on the world with a sense of sadness and hope. The work evolved as I spent time there interacting with the space and the women from the neighbourhood. It was labour intensive. The installation created a space within a space. It was a resolved piece of work which dealt with things which are ambiguous and unresolved! I was, of course, aware of Judy Chicago and LA *Womanhouse* and felt in some ways part of that lineage albeit more local and low key [...] It was an intense experience. I was unsure about a complete outsider landing on the estate to work. Local women, mostly single parents, some of whom had been abused, visited and talked about their lives and their responses to the work. They were all conscious of horizons beyond Castlemilk without knowing how to escape. They felt stuck but retained a sense of themselves, of humour and awareness without taking themselves too seriously. They were

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*and Art Practice* (London; New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 45; see Katy Deepwell's writing about *Feministo* for a comprehensive summary of the network initiated by Kate Walker and Sally Gallop that eventually included Richardson and Monica Ross, along with eight other artists and was shown in venues across Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Coventry in 1976. Kate Walker had also been heavily involved in other feminist installation spaces, for example the South London Art Group's *A Woman's Place* (1974); Katy Deepwell, 'Feminist Collaborative Projects in the UK' in *All Women Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s*, eds. Katy Deepwell and Agata Jakubowska (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 91.

<sup>200</sup> The artworks she discusses are Kate Walker's *Rape Room*, and *Saucer* (a dialogue with Meret Oppenheim's *Fur Cup and Saucer* but dealing with sexual assault); Kate Walker's amputated body parts; Su Richardson's full-English breakfast with a burnt egg and crocheted bread; Alexandra Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (London; New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 76.

aware of dangers around them and feared for their children. They smoked, drank and laughed whilst being aware of people around them being on the edge. Of the work in the house they said it was “mind blowing”, “life-saving”, “they never thought that art could be like that”, “I’m going to take it up as a hobby”, “a place where I can be myself”.<sup>201</sup>

The room Murray selected had two windows that became “destinations” the visitor would be guided toward by a path from the entry door. The path was lined with large paper gauze that showed imprinted images of ‘women doing mundane tasks’ creating ‘layers of insulating care’.<sup>202</sup> As the viewer passed through this space an unsettling ‘floor made of loose tiles... rattled and cracked as they were walked on’.<sup>203</sup> When arriving at the window, the viewer would find their view partly obscured by sheer fabric; Murray wanted to hold tension between ‘rhythms and unpredictability, between definition and transparency. All the materials were fragile (paper, muslin, ceramic etc.)’.<sup>204</sup> We see the act of labour presented to the viewer, at the same time as the ways this labour is often obscured or completely invisible due to the privacy of domestic space. Murray’s work is frank in its presentation of social reproduction labour, compared to the surreal elements of Lovejoy and Barclay’s works, which require the viewer to draw their own meanings from the material.

### **Bobby Baker, *Cook Dems* (1990)**

Bobby Baker’s performance *Cook Dems* (Figs. 1.22 - 1.23, 1990) also represented a nuanced understanding of feminist thought, which continued second-wave demands but responded to the contemporary postfeminist context. Her performance was a satire of cookery demonstration television programmes. The piece arguably opens a conversation with Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen* from 1975 but pushes it further toward the humorous. Dressed as a kitchen maid, Baker’s demonstration became more absurd as the performance unfolded, resulting in

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<sup>201</sup> Val Murray interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 5th December 2019.

<sup>202</sup> Val Murray interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 5th December 2019.

<sup>203</sup> Val Murray interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 5th December 2019.

<sup>204</sup> Val Murray interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 5th December 2019.

her showing audiences how to make a “skirt out of bread”, “breast pizza” and slapping jam onto the body of a man with a toned, highly aestheticised body that might be read as a reversal of the uncomfortable sexual politics in Yves Klein’s *Anthropometries* (1960). In an interview with Baker she discussed finding a ‘bleakness to much of feminism’ in the period leading up to this work’s creation that she felt was actually counterproductive ‘given how important the aims of this project were in giving women the confidence and connections to live in an affirming way’.<sup>205</sup>

Baker’s work represents a strong affinity with the demands of second-wave feminism, but at the same time empathy for why women had begun to find the discourse disaffecting. Whilst maintaining the importance of feminism’s political project, she remembered wanting to create a work that was ‘disarming, joyful, and accessible to audiences who might have found feminist theory alienating’ but ‘without wanting to diminish the equality the project strove for in its collective endeavour (we were a group of women clubbing together to deal with a local problem)’.<sup>206</sup> Baker’s interview revealed not only the ways that the crisis of care impacted women on the estate, but also the artists who travelled from across the UK to Glasgow to take part. Baker was based in England and so needed to travel to Glasgow for a number of days in order to complete her performance. Anecdotally, she remembered she had:

...enormous guilt even at the idea of leaving my own family to travel across the country for this performance series. I felt so bad I baked chocolate cakes and put them in the freezer for my children and husband to eat whilst I was gone. Looking back now it’s quite funny.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Bobby Baker interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

<sup>206</sup> Bobby Baker interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

<sup>207</sup> Bobby Baker interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2020

**Rachel Harris, *The House That Jill Built* (1990)**

Rachel Harris' work *The House That Jill Built* (Figs 1.24 - 1.26, 1990) was a subversion of the children's story "The House That Jack Built" and may also have been a direct response to Miriam Schapiro's painting *The House That Miriam Built* from 1982. The installation required the construction of a large wooden frame inside one of the bedrooms of the tenement block. Harris intended for it to be a collaborative project in which participants learned woodworking and DIY skills. A photograph from the archive shows participants helping put the structure together (Fig. 1.25, 1990). This piece was self-consciously referencing *Womanhouse*, when during the mansion's renovation students on the Feminist Art Programme had stripped and decorated the house's interior to prepare it for exhibition. They learned how to use power tools, plaster, and basic woodworking skills - all gendered skills not generally taught to women at the time.<sup>208</sup>

In Glasgow, Harris' piece was also influenced by a dovecot on the outskirts of the Castlemilk Estate, pictured in her documentation of the project (Fig. 1.263 1990). Dovecots, or "dookits" as they are referred to in Scotland were traditionally used to house doves or pigeons as a food source or for pigeon sporting. Many of these large shed-like structures can still be seen in urban areas, particularly in East Glasgow. When used for pigeon racing, male pigeons would fly into surrounding areas in search of a female pigeon and then coax them back to their own dookit. The cots are designed so that once the birds fly in through the holes in the top, they are unable to leave again; while there is no record of Harris mentioning this extra gendered dimension of pigeon gaming as influencing her work it is interesting to note the parallels with entrapment in domestic space.

Baker and Harris' works focused on teaching and skill building, providing tools for women to think critically about their material conditions and the ways that education might play an important role in producing more egalitarian living conditions. In contrast, Barclay and Lovejoy's works used uncanny and surreal techniques to render bare the inequalities in domestic labour. While social reproduction was not engaged as a core theoretical

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<sup>208</sup> Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, 'Catalogue Essay', *Womanhouse*, accessed 22nd November 2019, at <http://www.womanhouse.net/originalessay>.

premise in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, I argue that the gendered nature of domestic and reproductive labour underpinned the ways the artists approached the space.

### Shifting a Genealogy

Of the limited historiography on *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, most writers use *Womanhouse* as a way of understanding the later Castlemilk project. For example, in Sarah Smith's article 'In Celebration of Grassroots and Grass Widows: Women's Art Collaborations in Glasgow' (2012) Smith places the Castlemilk exhibition in a long lineage of exhibition-making in domestic space, which she suggests began with the CalArts *Womanhouse*.<sup>209</sup> In 2017 Hannah Hamblin authored the first sustained study of the history of *Castlemilk Womanhouse*; she argued that '...its evocation of *Womanhouse* is a form of feminist history production which establishes a connection with fellow feminists across decades (and geo-political locations) as part of its intervention in its own historical moment'.<sup>210</sup> In this section I will begin by taking a linear approach, exploring how far *Castlemilk Womanhouse* can be understood using what Hamblin terms its "elective foremother", *Womanhouse*.<sup>211</sup> Hamblin proposed that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* was more readily based on domestic labour when compared to the focus on the labour of femininity in *Womanhouse*; however, I want to develop her argument by proposing a separation from the iconicity of *Womanhouse* in the re-narration of Castlemilk as an example of feminist storytelling.<sup>212</sup>

Influenced by, but also building on Hamblin's argument, I focus on the moments of "untimeliness" evident in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*. This helps unpick the smooth progressive narratives carved by writers such as Smith,

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<sup>209</sup> She places other Glaswegian curatorial projects in this lineage too, including *Switchspace* (1999-2004) run by Marianne Greated and Sorcha Dallas; The Mary Mary Project Space (2004-2005) run by Hannah Robertson, Harriet Tritton and Sara Barker; *Strowitwe* (2012); Sarah Smith, 'In Celebration of Grassroots and Grass Widows: Women's Art Collaborations in Glasgow', *Map Magazine*, 26 (Autumn 2012), accessed 3rd October 2019, at <https://mapmagazine.co.uk/celebration-grass-roots-and-grass-widows-womens-ar>.

<sup>210</sup> Hannah Hamblin, 'Los Angeles, 1972/Glasgow, 1990: A Report on Castlemilk Womanhouse' in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, eds. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 169.

<sup>211</sup> The term "elective foremother" was likely borrowed from Lisa Tickner; Hannah Hamblin, 'Los Angeles, 1972/Glasgow, 1990: A Report on Castlemilk Womanhouse' in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, eds. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 164-182; see also Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: The Mother-Daughter Plot', *Art History*, 25, 1 (February 2002): 23-46.

<sup>212</sup> Feminist storytelling is meant here in the sense intended by Clare Hemmings in *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

and to an extent Hamblin. In doing so, this chapter argues in favour of opening up a space for a non-linear revision of Castlemilk's kinships using Freeman's notion of "temporal drag".<sup>213</sup> *Womanhouse's* catalogue essay described the aims for the Feminist Art Programme:

Female art students often approach artmaking with a personality structure conditioned by an unwillingness to push themselves beyond their limits; a lack of familiarity with tools and artmaking processes; an inability to see themselves as working people; and a general lack of assertiveness and ambition. The aim of the Feminist Art Program is to help women restructure their personalities to be more consistent with their desires to be artists and to help them build their artmaking out of their experiences as women.<sup>214</sup>

As with *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, Chicago and Schapiro recognise the lack of opportunities and encouragement for women in art pedagogy. Chicago felt the urgency to create a separatist environment for women to work collaboratively whilst developing professional skills. To this end, the students did all of the renovations to the *Womanhouse* building themselves; they learned skills typically coded as masculine, such as how to use power equipment, replace windows, install lights, sand and make furniture, paint and plaster. When the building was ready, the students divided the rooms up and created a mixture of collaborative and individual installations. As described in the *Castlemilk Womanhouse* archival ephemera, the organisers of the Glaswegian exhibition borrowed this earlier CalArts model when renovating the derelict housing block in preparation for the installation of their artworks and workshop space.<sup>215</sup> As mentioned above, Harris' *The House That Jill Built* required participants to physically engage in the process of building a small wooden house from scratch, developing new skills and forming social relationships as they worked together as a team, showing the similarities between both versions of *Womanhouse*.

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<sup>213</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]).

<sup>214</sup> Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (eds.), *Womanhouse*, ex. cat. (Unpublished, 1972), 2; see also Miriam Schapiro, 'The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse', *Art Journal*, 31, 3 (Spring 1972): 25-30.

<sup>215</sup> Rachel Harris, 'A Womanhouse Project', *Castlemilk Womanhouse Documentation* (Unpublished exhibition proposal, 1990). Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton.

In *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975) Chicago recalls the decision making process for the kitchen space in *Womanhouse* (Fig. 1.27, 1972).<sup>216</sup> Struggling to settle on an idea, Schapiro called a consciousness raising session, where the students would gather in a circle and take turns discussing a topic, seeking shared attitudes and experiences. Chicago remembers that many of the students in the consciousness raising session shared the experience of the kitchen as “battleground” and its close associations with the construction of female identity and nurture: ‘the giving and taking of food, what kind of food was fixed, who made food, and when it could and could not be eaten provided the means for power struggle between mother and father, mother and children’.<sup>217</sup> Consciousness raising was therefore a collective dialogic technique for drawing out experiences that could be used as the impetus for art, revealing oppression in various forms.

From the consciousness raising sessions grew the concept for the kitchen installation, which was then created by students Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, Robin Weltsch and Wanda Westcoast. The walls and ceiling were covered with plastic poached egg shapes, which gradually morphed into breasts as they dripped toward the floor, showing the conjunction between the suckling of a baby and the preparation of a meal in the kitchen to feed the wider family. The artists painted everything a dusty pink, which created a low womb-like glow when coupled with Westcoast’s plastic-formed curtains that partially blocked the light. Chicago notes the clarity of message that Westcoast’s curtains took on in the context of the kitchen space, as opposed to a clean white gallery space which was popular with minimalists at the time; she felt by presenting the artworks in the context of a *real* kitchen they did a better job at communicating female experience as subject matter.<sup>218</sup>

Domestic space was therefore an important aspect of the *Womanhouse* exhibition structure, not only because the rooms of the house provided a preliminary site and contextual stimuli for each installation but because

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<sup>216</sup> Judy Chicago, ‘Womanhouse/Performances’ in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: iUniverse, 2006 [1975]), 113.

<sup>217</sup> Judy Chicago, ‘Womanhouse/Performances’ in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: iUniverse, 2006 [1975]), 113; in a documentary about her later work *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), Chicago is filmed in a meeting saying that she was influenced by the Marxist consciousness raising techniques used in Mao’s China, intended to reveal the citizen’s individual oppression and rouse collective action; Johanna Demetrakas, (dir.), *Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party*, 53’00” (BBC1: London, 1981).

<sup>218</sup> Judy Chicago, ‘Womanhouse/Performances’ in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: iUniverse, 2006 [1975]), 113.

of the way that the house provided a space for imagination and play outside of societal norms. Reflecting the physical building of *Womanhouse* itself, Schapiro and Sherry Brody's piece *Dollhouse* (Fig. 1.28, 1972) presented six rooms mirroring the different roles women take on and how they can become constricting. Each room had a different theme: a children's playroom, an actress' bedroom, an art studio, or a parlour, among others. Schapiro and Brody sourced the textiles from different craftswomen across the country, paying tribute to the time and skill involved in these mediums often overlooked by "high art".<sup>219</sup> The doll's house rooms make subtle references to contemporary art, for example the repeated grid structure of male-dominated modernist painting or the life model clutching bananas, perhaps a reference to Nochlin's photograph *Buy My Bananas* (1972), a parody of a nineteenth-century photograph that flipped the use of the female body as object of consumption by displaying a nude male.<sup>220</sup>

A doll's house presents the possibility for removing and rearranging the pieces, opening out into a metaphor for the narrative of the *Womanhouse* project. Taking lead from contemporary literature that included Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the CalArts exhibition unpicked the image of the housewife as compliant and satiated, questioning the ways that identity was constructed and normalised through the domestic environment.<sup>221</sup> Karen LeCoq's performance *Lea's Room* occurred in one of the bedrooms (Fig. 1.29, 1972). The room was decorated by Nancy Youdelman who stereotyped the feminine boudoir interior to the point of the comedic or vulgar: lace dripped from the walls, a pink silken spread hung across the bed, and the cushions were plump and velvet. Performing at the dressing table, LeCoq repeatedly covered her face with makeup and then, dissatisfied, she removed it again.<sup>222</sup> The character was based on an ageing courtesan Léa from Colette's *Cheri*. As he sees her age, Léa's lover leaves her for a younger woman. In LeCoq's performance she meditates on Léa's desperation to return to the beauty of youth through makeup. The piece arguably links the economic consequences that Cheri's departure

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<sup>219</sup> 'Dollhouse', *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, accessed 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020, at <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/dollhouse-35885>.

<sup>220</sup> While Temma Balducci has made this connection, it ought to be noted that Nochlin's photograph is dated 1972, whereas Schapiro and Brody's *Dollhouse* would have been exhibited in January 1972, thus the connection may not be accurate: 'Revisiting "Womanhouse": Welcome to the (Deconstructed) "Dollhouse"', *Woman's Art Journal*, 27, 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 17-23.

<sup>221</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1963]).

<sup>222</sup> Arlene Raven, 'Womanhouse' in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harry Abrams Inc., 1994), 48-65.

had on Léa's life after she lost her beauty, forging links with the modern housewife's economic reliance on their partner.

Hamblin has argued for a transhistorical approach to *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, to better grasp the exhibition's place within feminist art histories. Her unpublished dissertation 'Castlemilk Womanhouse: History, Labour and Feminism' (2014) and her essay 'Los Angeles, 1972/Glasgow, 1990: A Report on Castlemilk Womanhouse' (2017) are essential contributions to the limited historiography on the exhibition, and constitute the first attempt to compile an evaluation of the project based on the archival material available at the Glasgow Women's Library.<sup>223</sup> Hamblin also conducted a small number of oral histories, which she analysed alongside oral histories produced by the artist Kate Davis for the research project *House Work Castle Milk Woman House* (2014) at the Glasgow Women's Library.<sup>224</sup> This small research project was part of *Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland* (2014).<sup>225</sup> Hamblin argued that in its geopolitical framing of Scottish art, *Generation* syphoned *Castlemilk Womanhouse* from its crucial roots in the transnational history of feminist art. Indeed, the works from *Castlemilk Womanhouse* necessitate a reading based on historical lineage given that they self-consciously assert the 1970s *Womanhouse* as guiding their structure and artistic output.

Hamblin carved her argument along the lines of class; while the CalArts' *Womanhouse* was put together by a predominantly middle-class group of artists seeking professional education and viewed by an audience who were largely familiar with contemporary art, the project at *Castlemilk Womanhouse* was instead aimed toward fostering community relations in a working-class locality, creating a space for people with little experience of

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<sup>223</sup> Hannah Hamblin, 'Castlemilk Womanhouse: History, Labour and Feminism' (Unpublished thesis: University of Edinburgh, 2014); Hannah Hamblin, 'Los Angeles, 1972/Glasgow, 1990: A Report on Castlemilk Womanhouse' in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, eds. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 164-182.

<sup>224</sup> Adele Patrick, who had also been heavily involved with Women in Profile during *Castlemilk Womanhouse* in 1990, was taken on as project manager for this recent exhibition. Artist Kate Davis was employed to produce an artistic response to her engagement with the *Castlemilk Womanhouse* archive, during which she recorded the oral histories with original participants. Alice Andrews was the researcher and co-curator of *House Work Castle Milk Woman House*. Hamblin was involved as a student researcher; Adele Patrick, 'House Work Castle Milk Woman House', *Glasgow Women's Library*, unpaginated, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, at <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/house-work-castle-milk-woman-house/house-work-castle-milk-woman-house-dr-adele-patrick/>.

<sup>225</sup> *Generation* (2014) was an exhibition project that took place across Scotland to showcase the most significant artists to have emerged there since 1989. National Galleries of Scotland and Glasgow Life, *Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland*, ed. Moira Jeffrey, ex. cat., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: 2014).

contemporary art. Hamblin argues that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* reactivated and reassessed *Womanhouse*'s demands, attending to the socio-political specificity of the Castlemilk community. She positions the later exhibition as a more successful model for its contemporary context, given that the CalArts *Womanhouse* had no engagement with the suburban community around the Hollywood mansion, unlike the Castlemilk artists who put social issues on the estate at the forefront of their programme.

Taking up the gauntlet from Hamblin, *Castlemilk Womanhouse*'s history can be further complicated through the notion of "temporal drag".<sup>226</sup> This will allow for the substantial consideration of Castlemilk's place within feminist art history that is not beholden to its roots in the Los Angeles *Womanhouse*, enabling me to make sense of the ways that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* 'arouses, kindles, whets' a desire to connect with *Womanhouse*.<sup>227</sup> The notion of temporal drag invokes Judith Butler's writing on performativity and identity transgression alongside the 'associations that the word "drag" has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present'.<sup>228</sup> If, as Freeman positions it, "chrononormative" time is a clear division between past and present that funnels bodies toward maximum productivity, then Freeman advocates instead for an "erotohistoriography" as a way of using the body to make sense and access the past, without ceding to teleological progress narratives as -

...distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 59-94.

<sup>227</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 117.

<sup>228</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), quoted in Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 62.

<sup>229</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 95-96.

In pursuing affective connections across time, erotohistoriography allows us to recast the past as a ‘vibrant and heterogeneous source of self-fashioning as well as community building’.<sup>230</sup> For many feminists, the generational metaphor implies a heteronormative approach to social relations, or as privileging certain feminist identities as property passed on through inheritance. However, Freeman seeks to rethink the wave model without abandoning it, by asking what can be generated from a wave’s undertow:

Even the “waves” that periodize feminism are not the still, enveloping waters dear to maternalist rhetoric but are rather forces affected by gravity, which pull backward even as they seem to follow on one another [...] It may be crucial, then, to complicate the idea of horizontal political generations or waves succeeding each other in progressive time with a notion of “temporal drag” thought less in the psychic time of the individual than in the movement time of collective political fantasy.<sup>231</sup>

This is particularly useful as an optic for *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, when we consider the ways Castlemilk performed a partially disavowed second-wave exhibition model. The wave model can still be helpful because it links political work and art’s capacity as cultural work to produce shared collective subjectivities that go beyond the family, connecting bodies across time. If temporal drag is ‘[e]xteriorized as a mode of bodily adornment or even habitus [it] may offer a way of connecting queer performativity to disavowed political histories’.<sup>232</sup> Rather than Hamblin’s interpretation of *Womanhouse* as a foremother borrowed and improved upon by the Castlemilk project, it might be useful to look for the moments in which the predecessor becomes quite literally a “drag” upon the later project. For example, the moments borrowed from *Womanhouse* by *Castlemilk Womanhouse* that appear outdated or derivative.

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<sup>230</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>231</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 65.

<sup>232</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 65.

Schapiro and Chicago's Feminist Art Programme wanted to bring otherwise negated or excluded elements of female experience into art as valid subjects, partly as a reaction to the rigidity of minimalism. Subject matter stemming from female experience had often been dismissed as trivial or inappropriate to fine art. In 1972 Schapiro justified their use of unconventional materials:

There are some interesting unwritten laws about what is considered appropriate subject matter for art making. The content of our first class project *Womanhouse* reversed these laws. What formerly was considered trivial was heightened to the level of serious art-making: dolls, pillows, cosmetics, sanitary napkins, silk stockings, underwear, children's toys, washbasins, toasters, frying pans, refrigerator doors handles, shower caps, quilts, and satin bedspreads.<sup>233</sup>

This experimentation with form and content can be seen in *The Dining Room* (Fig. 1.30, 1972), a collaboration involving Bachenheimer, Brody, Wilding, Mitchell, LeCoq and Schapiro. The artists laid the table with a lavish dinner made from painted bread dough. They painted a mural of a still life by the nineteenth-century artist Anna Peale on the wall and the imagery could be interpreted as referencing the historical denigration of still life as associated with the feminine.<sup>234</sup> Transgressing these boundaries further was Chicago's well-known *Menstruation Bathroom* (Fig. 1.31, 1972), in which she painted the space a pristine white, bringing to mind the sanitised white walls of a minimalist gallery space that intended to rid the art object of unnecessary context, or the hygienic use of the white interior by male modernists like Le Corbusier, which would quickly reveal dirt or disease.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Miriam Schapiro, 'The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse', *Art Journal*, 31, 3 (Spring 1972): 25.

<sup>234</sup> Nochlin discussed this in her iconic essay just months before the *Womanhouse* collaboration began, and it was likely that this had provided theoretical momentum for the artists. The essay argued that the arbitrary qualitative division in subject matter (between the life model coded as high art/masculine and still life coded as low art/feminine) was due to the lack of opportunities to paint from a life model given to women historically; Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', *ARTnews*, 69 (Jan, 1971): 22-39.

<sup>235</sup> Tuberculosis cases proliferated with the growth of industrialisation and lack of education about sanitation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modernist architects were influenced by the emphasis on hygiene in sanatoria and asylums, often incorporating elements of this functional design, such as the white wall, into their buildings. Margaret Campbell, 'What Tuberculosis Did for Modernism: The Influence of a Curative Environment on Modernist Design and Architecture', *Medical History*, 49, 4 (October 2005): 463-88.

Chicago purposefully muddied the clean white interior by installing a waste bin overflowing with bloodied tampons and filled the bathroom shelves with hygiene products prompting one viewer to exclaim: ‘That’s a big mess... is it supposed to be funny?’.<sup>236</sup> Chicago forced the viewer to confront the reality of everyday female experience, often kept out of sight as embarrassing and inappropriate. While this was transgressive for its time, arguably by 1990 the use of “unconventional” material as form and content of contemporary art was no longer considered to be unusual, one might even go as far as to suggest that audiences came to *expect* contemporary art to question convention in this way.

*Womanhouse* was one of the first projects to forge the possibility for a feminist art pedagogy, yet questions quickly emerged around the efficacy of its method. In 1985 Paula Harper wrote an article for *Signs* entitled ‘The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s’ reflecting on *Womanhouse*.<sup>237</sup> While she still recognised the exhibition as a pivotal moment in feminist art and pedagogy, what also emerged from the article were the critical perspectives that had begun to problematise second-wave feminism. Chicago stated that she did not have anything to do with the subject matter of the art produced by her students, but Robin Mitchell recalled in an interview with Harper that Chicago was often overbearing in the way she dictated the content of their art:

The students were not supposed to make abstract art. Making images like mainstream art was a terrible no-no. Judy was so doctrinaire about what art was: it had a hole in the middle. That was okay for her but not for me.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Johanna Demetrakas (dir.), *Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party*, 53’00” (BBC1: London, 1981).

<sup>237</sup> Paula Harper, ‘The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s’, *Signs* 10, 4 (Summer 1985): 773. Harper was an art historian based at CalArts during the 1970s and is often credited with first suggesting the idea of putting on the female separatist exhibition. She fully supported the *Womanhouse* project and experienced it through all stages of development; Eva Zetterman, ‘Curatorial Strategies on the Art Scene During the Feminist Movement: Los Angeles in the 1970s’ in *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces*, ed. Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 2.

<sup>238</sup> Judy Chicago, ‘Womanhouse/Performances’ in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: iUniverse, 2006 [1975]), 112; Robin Mitchell interviewed by Paula Harper in Los Angeles, July 1982, quoted in Paul Harper, ‘The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s’, *Signs*, 10, 4 (Summer 1985): 777.

The interview between Harper and Mitchell might be expanded to encompass the perceived impasse that the Women's Art Movement itself had reached by the 1980s. While on the one hand, the movement attempted to draw previously ignored life experiences into art; on the other, it had very specific ideas and standards for doing so. In stating 'that was okay for her but not for me', Mitchell revealed little room for diversion from Chicago's vision.<sup>239</sup> Harper's article touched on another impasse left unresolved by *Womanhouse*. She recalled the perception that the programme was successful when the separatism was most complete but that participants also recognised that this model was not true to life and would be irreconcilable with life outside of the project. Some felt that the hard-line approach had instilled a demonisation of men that created new psychological problems for women on the course that leaders were not trained to deal with.

Interviewing Chicago and Schapiro separately in the 1980s, Harper revealed the ways that their approaches had diverged since 1972. Chicago maintained her belief in the importance of female community, even if not tied to a specific place, and saw the inclusion of men as a reactionary position. Schapiro however struggled to reconcile the separatist politics of *Womanhouse* with the fact that she was in a committed relationship with a man and had since given birth to a son. While Schapiro still supported the overall aims of a feminist art practice, she had by the 1980s arguably relinquished a radical position:

One of the disadvantages with such a program is that you fall so in love with the community that you don't realize that in order to survive in the real world you have to play a different kind of role...<sup>240</sup>

For Harper, artists like Schapiro had capitulated to the old art institution out of pragmatism. While they returned with a practice informed by the benefits of feminist separatism, they resigned to the compromising position of

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<sup>239</sup> Judy Chicago, 'Womanhouse/Performances' in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: iUniverse, 2006 [1975]), 112; Robin Mitchell interviewed by Paula Harper, quoted in Paula Harper, 'The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s', *Signs*, 10, 4 (Summer 1985): 777.

<sup>240</sup> Miriam Schapiro interviewed by Paula Harper quoted in Paula Harper 'The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s', *Signs* 10, 4 (Summer 1985): 762.

accepting ‘small gains’.<sup>241</sup> Harper’s position in 1985 arguably demonstrated a normative understanding of the history of feminist waves, which follows that by the 1980s many feminists in the Anglo-American context had turned away from the radical politics of the 1970s. What becomes clear from Harper’s interviews was the shift away from a hard-line approach toward trying to find a feminist politics that bypassed the unrealistic ideal of total separatism. Indeed, this is certainly something that we could argue *Castlemilk Womanhouse* incorporated, given the evidence of male participants from the archival photos suggested incomplete separatism.

With this in mind, how do we make sense of the fact that *Castlemilk* was emulating a disavowed feminist model, at the same time that it seemingly failed to transgress certain borders that *Womanhouse* had been successful in? Returning to Freeman’s writing, she discusses Elisabeth Subrin’s short film *Shulie* (Fig. 1.32, 1997). In the film Subrin reenacted an unreleased documentary film about the radical feminist Shulamith Firestone, created in 1967.<sup>242</sup> In the film Subrin follows Firestone’s early years as an art student just before she reached the “peak” of her feminist trajectory with the manifesto *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970).<sup>243</sup> Subrin reenacted each shot from the 1967 documentary as faithfully as possible, down to each camera-angle, movement and script-line. Subrin looks at the moment of Firestone’s prefeminist consciousness from the perspective of the postfeminist 1990s, of which B. Ruby Rich notes ‘Subrin has created a document within a document: she makes us feel what used to be, makes us remember what we actually never knew, and then makes us realize all over again how much we’ve lost’.<sup>244</sup> Given its performative quality, combined with the simultaneous denial and affirmation of itself as historical document, *Shulie*, to Freeman, refused the notion that ‘an intact political program has been handed down from older women to younger ones’ and at the same time, ‘is also infused with the vicariousness and self-conscious theatricality that are so often the hallmarks of queer cultural texts’.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Paula Harper ‘The First Feminist Art Program: A View from the 1980s’, *Signs*, 10, 4 (Summer 1985): 781.

<sup>242</sup> Elisabeth Subrin (dir.), *Shulie*, 36’00” (Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1997).

<sup>243</sup> Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Cape, 1971).

<sup>244</sup> B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 384.

<sup>245</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, ‘Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism’ in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 66.

*Shulie* was important for Freeman because the film illustrated how queer approaches to history might reconfigure our understanding of linear progress while maintaining the potential for collective feminist intergenerationality. Twenty years later, the awkwardness of Shubrin's reenactment rendered its figurative "drag" as a 'productive obstacle to progress, a usefully distorting pull backwards, and a necessary pressure on the present tense'.<sup>246</sup> This, for Freeman, forced viewers to:

...confront the fact that the prehistory of feminism is very much like its aftermath, that we have a certain postmodern problem that no longer has a name - or rather, whose names are under increasing erasure as today's women improvise individual solutions to lower wages, housework, childcare, unwanted pregnancy, and other "personal" problems.<sup>247</sup>

Like *Shulie*, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* arguably 'redeploys radical feminism as a failed and yet also incomplete political project' while summoning that 'these 1990s reappropriations of 1970s culture were more than mere nostalgia on the part of a cohort born after 1965'.<sup>248</sup> *Castlemilk Womanhouse* appears somewhat out of time, given it openly attached itself to the second-wave concerns of social reproduction, as well as modelling itself on *Womanhouse*. This attachment is further complicated by a letter from Chicago to Harris in the *Castlemilk Womanhouse* archive, which reveals that the generational exchange between the two exhibitions was far from affirmative (Fig. 1.33, 1990). The letter was written in May 1990, before the Glasgow exhibition's opening. In it, Chicago reproached Harris for not giving the original *Womanhouse* enough recognition: 'Womanhouse is a copyrighted work of art and you need to give proper credit [...] It is bad enough that women's art and achievement

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<sup>246</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 64.

<sup>247</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 67.

<sup>248</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 68, 83.

are omitted from art history – we don't have to do it to each other!'.<sup>249</sup> After receiving the letter, Harris and the group decided to add "Castlemilk" to the title of the exhibition to make the distinction between the two clear. The letter blocks us from being able to position *Castlemilk Womanhouse* and the CalArts *Womanhouse* as simply two instances in a smooth feminist lineage. Similarly, Freeman noted that Firestone refused to take part in or comment on Subrin's film, again suggesting a non-affirmative generational model.<sup>250</sup>

In the essay 'Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art' (2011) Catherine Grant has argued that the figure of the fan is more useful for interpreting the past than we might expect.<sup>251</sup> Grant proposes that it is the imaginative and passionate quality of fandom that allows us to reinvent feminist histories for the present, with the potential for an active dialogue:

...the figure of the fan, then, combines the reader with the writer, and sees the fan object as a key component in the formation of the fan's own identity. The passionate attachment to the object of interest is one that is not passive, but instead alters the object to suit the fan's needs, taking a fascination for something as a starting point, which can then also start a process of negotiation and transformation of the object.<sup>252</sup>

This kind of attachment to art from the past allows the present-day artist to become a kind of "producer" of meaning, but also allows them to renegotiate their own identity in relation to the artworks. One problem with Grant's argument, however, is that it acts counter to her actual readings of the works in the article. By not highlighting the

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<sup>249</sup> Letter from Judy Chicago to Rachel Harris, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1990. Folder held in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive at the Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton. On the importance of feminist networking through letter-writing, see Margaretta Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>250</sup> Elisabeth Subrin interviewed by Elizabeth Freeman, quoted in Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 67.

<sup>251</sup> Grant uses queer theory and nonlinear time as a way of taking seriously topics such as postfeminist images of girlhood or the popular culture phenomenon of the "fan". In this essay Grant argues later artists' attachment to cultural objects allows them to rewrite these artworks' histories through active dialogue; Catherine Grant, 'Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art', *Oxford Art Journal* 34, 2 (2011): 265-86.

<sup>252</sup> Catherine Grant, 'Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art', *Oxford Art Journal* 34, 2 (2011): 271.

tension that might arise between the idol and their fan, Grant's article seems to suggest that the voice of the second-wave artist is absent in passing to the next generation, which was certainly untrue in the case of Chicago's letter.

Freeman's reading of *Shulie* instead allows for a connection with the past that retains the complexities in attachments across time. In both *Shulie* and *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, the artists perform the role of the fan, attaching themselves to a second-wave feminist event. For Freeman, this sense of being out of time can actually be useful given 'Subrin resists the rehabilitative gesture that would position the former as a heroic figure on whom a better future feminism might simply cathect'.<sup>253</sup> When an artwork or exhibition appears untimely, this entails considering how and why it appears so. *Shulie* reperforms a scene from a post office, in which Firestone speaks about the black women she works with, her 'patronizing, naive, cringe-inducing attitude and the outdated term "Negro" do feel, at first, like an anachronism of a different sort from the sly 1990s touches'.<sup>254</sup> By refusing to change the language of the script, Subrin's 1997 version illuminates to the contemporary viewer the ways that antiracist discourse had been omitted by white feminists such as Firestone:

Subrin's intervention offers a corrective to the idea that we can ever be genuinely postfeminist - unless 'post' signifies an unlocking of *Shulie*'s post box, an endless dispatch between past and present social and subjective formations including those that seem to have been disjoined somewhere along the way, as with various antiracist and feminist movements.<sup>255</sup>

By allowing for an interpretation of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* that speaks back and forth to past instances of feminist art-making, it is possible to unpick progress and loss narratives, which give the false impression of history as either moving toward or away from feminism on a linear trajectory. This is certainly the case when we consider Hamblin's interpretation of *Castlemilk* - in which she positions it as influenced by the *Womanhouse* model but reappropriating

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<sup>253</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 79.

<sup>254</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 80.

<sup>255</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Deep Lez: Temporal Drag and the Specters of Feminism' in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 84.

the focus on the labour of femininity toward a focus on domestic labour. Temporal drag, therefore, provides the tools for reapproaching material in archives as places where ‘knowledge production begins’ rather than presenting inert, predetermined objects or ideas.<sup>256</sup>

### **New Lines of Lineage**

In Griselda Pollock’s *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (1996) she warned against casting American “foremothers” and British “daughters” through lines of art historical lineage, arguing that this oversimplifies generations of feminists.<sup>257</sup> The letter from Chicago to Harris in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive arguably evidences Pollock’s claim as to the complications of generational division. With this in mind, this section will consider what might be gained from uprooting *Castlemilk Womanhouse* from the temporal drag of its North American predecessor. Freeman’s writing has allowed me to position *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a ‘hiccup in sequential time’ with ‘the capacity to connect a group of people beyond monogamous, enduring couplehood’ and in this section I will consider what can be gained from tracing an alternative kinship with the separatist community arts group the Hackney Flashers (1974-1979) given their shared focus on social reproduction.<sup>258</sup> While Hamblin questioned the CalArts *Womanhouse* as elective foremother of the Castlemilk project, her writing does not completely detach from the original exhibition’s iconicity given her analysis is focused on the relationship between the two. Picking up where Hamblin leaves off, this chapter will suggest a new line of lineage that foregrounds Castlemilk’s emphasis on social reproduction and reveals how fruitful, as Freeman proposes, non-familial kinships across time can be.

The Hackney Flashers were a women’s art collective based in London who responded to the demands of both the International Women’s Movement and the critique of representation, at a time when photography was

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<sup>256</sup> Eichhorn has written at length on North American activist groups in the 1990s, such as Riot Grrrl and feminist zine culture, arguing that the ways these movements are archived is crucial to how we narrate their histories; Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>257</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Psychology Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>258</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 3.

becoming seen as a deeply social and political tool.<sup>259</sup> One of their core aims was to raise consciousness about the difficulties women face in managing childcare expectations and gainful employment. They felt that images of women at work were not prevalent enough, and so using photography and agitprop, the group sought to enact a critique of the way that women's labour was often invisible. Like *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, the Hackney Flashers began by exhibiting outside of art institutions and to audiences that did not typically visit galleries and museums.<sup>260</sup> The group used cartoon, collage, graphic design and text with photography for display in community centres, trade unions, schools, other public spaces.

### **The Hackney Flashers, *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978)**

Images from their second major exhibition at the Centreprise Community Centre in London titled *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978) (Figs. 1.34 - 1.36, c.1978) combine photography and statistics to combat the gap between childcare provided by the state and the childcare required to allow women to seek employment.<sup>261</sup> While their *Women and Work* (1973-1975) project could have also been selected for this chapter given its links with union campaigning and agit-prop, *Who's Holding the Baby?* is more relevant in the case of Castlemilk, given the high percentage of single unemployed women who were not unionised.<sup>262</sup> The primary concern for this group was often domestic childcare,

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<sup>259</sup> The core members were: Jo Spence, An Dekker, Sally Greenhill, Liz Heron, Gerda Jager, Michael Ann Mullen, Maggie Murray, Christine Roche, Sue Treweek, and Julia Vellacott; Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography* (London: Camden Press, 1986); 'Work of a Women's Collective 1974-1980', *Hackney Flashers*, accessed 18th December 2019, at <https://hackneyflashers.com/home/>.

<sup>260</sup> Na'ama Klorman-Eraqui has argued it was upon entering the art institution with the exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* (Hayward Gallery, 1979) that led to the group's eventual separation; Na'ama Klorman-Eraqui, 'The Hackney Flashers: Photography as a Socialist Feminist Endeavour', *Photography and Culture*, 10 (March 2017): 53-71, 64.

<sup>261</sup> Hackney Flashers Collective, 'Who's Holding the Baby', *Heresies*, 3, 9, (Spring, 1980): 88-89.

<sup>262</sup> Katy Deepwell provides an instructive summary of feminist art collectives in the UK during the 1970s, where she contrasts the approaches to political activism taken in the projects *Women and Work* (1975) and *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973-1975* (1975). The Hackney Flashers' *Women and Work* was first shown in Hackney Town Hall as part of the Hackney Trade Union Council's *75 Years of Brotherhood: 1900-1975 Trade Unions Exhibition* (1975) and focused on displaying photographs of women in formal labour roles - whether in schools, laundries, factories, administration, or otherwise. The photographs also captured women's involvement in the protests of the Trade Union Council. The display included photographs by Jo Spence, Ann Dekker, Liz Heron and Maggie Murray among others. Deepwell contrasts *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973-1975* by Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly and Kay Hunt, first displayed at South London Gallery, as 'a gendered analysis of men's vs women's labour in the factory' showing images of workers in a metal box factory. The images show the ways that tasks were allocated to workers depending on gender, including ephemera such as payslips, timesheets and medical records showing the double burden women had as lead domestic labourers. Deepwell positions the show as a direct example of how the Equal Pay Act of 1970 failed. Katy Deepwell,

but for whom an organised ecosystem for representation, such as a union, did not exist. The images in *Who's Holding the Baby?* borrow from advertising in their economy of form and message, distilling complex political issues down to punchy slogans. The Hackney Flashers' work analysed the contradictions between the freedom afforded by the acceptance of women into the workplace and the real conditions of that employment, which had to balance the expectation of domestic duties that were picked up neither by other family members nor the state: in effect, working mothers then had *two* jobs.

*Who's Holding the Baby?* was exhibited at the Centreprise Community Centre in collaboration with the under-fives campaign for state funded nurseries.<sup>263</sup> The campaign was a reaction to the unmet requests of the International Women's Conference in 1970 that laid out the first four demands of the Women's Liberation Movement: equal pay, equal educational and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion, and free 24-hour nurseries.<sup>264</sup> By 1978 there was still no significant progress toward attaining the latter. The image *The State Provides...* combines images and text advertising a march for '1000 extra nursery places for Hackney under 5s' in addition to statistics on the current number available: 471, versus the 16,700 under 5s actually living in Hackney (Fig. 1.35, c.1978). The collage *Who's Still Holding the Baby* reveals a woman conducting domestic labour behind the brick wall of a house. Underneath a graffitied message reads 'Where's my FREE nursery! ... Stand up for your right!' (Fig. 1.36, c.1978). *Don't Take Drugs Take Action* uses statements from medical papers revealing the link between adverse circumstances such as stress caused by poverty and childcare, and the uptake of medication for neurosis and anxiety (Fig. 1.35, c.1978). The top photograph illustrates the toll on women that the lack of childcare assistance was taking, while the bottom image presents a positive image of solidarity and activism as a way of

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'Feminist Collaborative Projects in the UK' in *All Women Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s*, eds. Katy Deepwell and Agata Jakubowska (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 85-89.

<sup>263</sup> This policy advocated for a return to the state policy that made nursery care available so that women could work in factories during World War II; Na'ama Klorman-Eraqui, 'The Hackney Flashers: Photography as a Socialist Feminist Endeavour', *Photography and Culture*, 10 (March 2017): 57.

<sup>264</sup> The first conference took place at Ruskin College, Oxford, between 27<sup>th</sup> February and 1<sup>st</sup> March 1970, and the second (where the four demands were agreed) took place in Skegness between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1971. Later at the Edinburgh Conference in July 1974 the fifth and sixth demands were added: the right to a self-defined sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians. At the Birmingham Conference in 1978 the seventh demand was added: freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women.

bringing change through protest. The image's banners show slogans like "nursery is my right", acting as a call to arms. By presenting the protesters as peaceful and with children in tow the image would have encouraged other parents to join future marches.

Work by the Hackney Flashers reveals a continued critique of the conditions of social reproduction across feminist exhibition histories in the late twentieth century. In the article 'House Work and Art Work' (2000) Helen Molesworth recognises the need to reconsider the framing of feminist art around political economy and maintenance labour, rather than through the essentialist versus constructivist debate that had previously dominated feminist art theory.<sup>265</sup> She notes that the reengagement with 1970s feminist practice during the 1990s was long overdue and that 'for many it has emerged as either a mysteriously forgotten moment or a return of the repressed'.<sup>266</sup> While Molesworth does not reference social reproduction theory directly, she situates artworks that have often been positioned as different in their approach - such as Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974–1979), Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973), Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) or Mierle Ukeles' *Maintenance Art* and *Hartford Wash* (1973) - binding them instead through their presentation of domestic or "private" labour. This approach might be applied to *Castlemilk Womanhouse*: by reconsidering the lineage of the Castlemilk exhibition as based on a feminist history of domestic labour, it becomes possible to see the stymieing potential for only using Chicago and Shapiro's *Womanhouse* as an interpretative frame.

Today, the recent revival of interest in social reproduction theory has dovetailed with renewed interest in work by the Hackney Flashers. In 'The Art of Social Reproduction' (2016) Victoria Horne notes that the group 'speaks to current crises in social reproduction and care labour, in which the gains of second-wave feminism appear insecure'.<sup>267</sup> Horne maps the development of *Who's Holding the Baby* from its beginnings in 1976, to its exhibition in 1978, observing that this was a period of rapid progress for the International Women's Movement but simultaneously a period of decline in welfare provision. For Horne, this moment parallels the present day:

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<sup>265</sup> Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', *October*, 92 (Spring, 2000): 71-97.

<sup>266</sup> Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', *October*, 92 (Spring, 2000): 71.

<sup>267</sup> Victoria Horne, 'The Art of Social Reproduction', *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, 2 (August 2016): 179-202, 189.

‘neoliberalism’s assault on social reproduction in our current “age of austerity” - which sees responsibility displaced from the state onto individuals - has sparked a reengagement with earlier socialist-feminist discourse’.<sup>268</sup>

The Hackney Flashers provide a contemporary model for knowledge exchange and how this exchange might expand out from the arts and into collective action from within local community. Horne builds on this in the article ‘Losing Ground? A Note on Feminism, Cultural Activism and Urban Space’ (2017) in which she argued that the Hackney Flashers agitprop tactics are relevant today more than ever, ‘the fact that this agitprop project has powerfully resurfaced into institutional contexts - into the collection of a national museum in Madrid, and exhibitions in New York and London’ are indicative of the urgent need to ‘insist on understanding housing, property and care, not as commodities but as basic needs and sources of pleasure, [as] once again the key directive for the future’.<sup>269</sup> If, as Horne suggests, the current social reproduction crisis drives today’s contemporary revival of interest in the Hackney Flashers, this observation might be mapped backwards to the emergence of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* within the specificity of the Castlemilk Estates through an analysis of the conditions of care.

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, Susan Faludi critiqued the media’s reactionary portrayal of feminism as having caused burn-out, higher divorce rates, the neglect of children or the breakdown in nuclear familial structures.<sup>270</sup> As part of her argument, Faludi highlighted how significant advances had been made by feminism to improve the material conditions of women that were not being celebrated. Dimitrakaki’s writing could be used as a counter argument to Faludi’s observation, however, by suggesting that while feminism’s political project had successfully brought women into the workplace, capitalism’s accumulation continues to prevent the

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<sup>268</sup> Victoria Horne, ‘The Art of Social Reproduction’, *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, 2 (August 2016): 179; this is also something proposed by Kate Eichhorn in her analysis of 1990s activist archives - she suggests that whilst these archives preserve events of the past, their real value lies in the production of knowledge and perspective on the present-day researcher’s conditions of precarity; Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2013).

<sup>269</sup> Horne is referring to the acquisition of *Who’s Holding the Baby?* by the Reina Sofia (Madrid, 2010); other recent exhibitions include: *Who’s Still Holding the Baby* (Women’s Art Slide Library, Goldsmiths University, London, 2012), *Jo Spence: Work* (London, Space, 2012) *Transmitter Receiver* (touring Britain, 2012-2013), *Jo Spence* (Edinburgh, Stills Centre for Photograph, 2016); Victoria Horne, ‘Losing Ground? A Note on Feminism, Cultural Activism and Urban Space’, *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017): 67-78, 77, 78.

<sup>270</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1991).

improvement of their material reality.<sup>271</sup> Taking lead from Horne and Dimitrakaki, it might therefore be argued that like the Hackney Flashers, *Castlemilk Womanhouse*'s focus on social reproduction signalled the failures of the welfare system to account for issues that impacted the lives of women on the estate at the time. In connecting the Hackney Flashers and *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, this chapter's proposal is not that the Hackney Flashers were a secret or unrecorded inspiration for the Castlemilk artists - but that the second-wave's impassioned defence of social reproductive concerns enacted a kind of temporal drag that 'arouses, kindles, whets, or itches' upon later artists, at a time when those 'basic needs and sources of pleasure' seemed under threat.<sup>272</sup>

### **Seeking the Political Referent**

So far, the temporal drag of Hackney Flashers upon *Castlemilk Womanhouse* has been considered, forging a relationship between two art collectives that moves beyond familial lineage, and positions Castlemilk's untimeliness not as belatedness, but as a kind of productive "undertow" in the wave(s) of feminism during the 1990s. It has been argued that the artworks of the Castlemilk artists and the Hackney Flashers are closely aligned in their political aims around social reproduction, highlighting the continuing relevance of second-wave demands. However, one key difference remains; if, as suggested, the Hackney Flashers collective hold a kind of temporal drag upon Castlemilk Womanhouse, how do we make sense of stylistic differences between the two? Although they have many of the same political demands in common, the artworks in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* arguably locate their political referent in a different manner to the Hackney Flashers. One might better describe the mode of critical reference in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as an "allusion to" their political programme, rather than a didactic articulation of demands, as in the case of the Hackney Flashers. It is important we make sense of this, without recourse to an argument that suggests that the Castlemilk works were somehow "weaker" in politics.

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<sup>271</sup> She describes the specificity of neoliberalism's accumulation as a set of deeply gendered processes through which land, labour and social relations that were previously external to the market are brought in to help maintain the structure of capitalism at no extra cost. Women continue to perform a disproportionate and unrecognised amount of unpaid labour in this system; Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>272</sup> Victoria Horne, 'Losing Ground? A Note on Feminism, Cultural Activism and Urban Space', *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017): 77, 78.

As one example, Barclay's *Bathroom Installation* sees relationships formed by placing abstract or ambiguous objects, leaving the viewer to make sense of the otherwise non-sensical arrangement of forms (Figs. 1.15 - 1.16). She has described her practice as operating a 'politics with a small "p"'.<sup>273</sup> A comparison between the works used in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, and the direct and combative political tactics of the Hackney Flashers, who often refused to label themselves as artists, would at face value suggest that the exhibition in Glasgow was less politically engaged.<sup>274</sup> The photographs from *Who's Holding the Baby* (1978), such as *The State Provides...* place image next to statistical information, making it difficult for the viewer to misinterpret what the images were asking for: '1000 extra nursery places for Hackney under 5s' (Fig. 1.34). Impassioned slogans such as 'Where's my FREE nursery! ... Stand up for your right!' (Fig. 1.36) in the Hackney Flashers contrast sharply with the frame of critical reference in *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, which avoided direct confrontation, preferring to make their statement using a register based in the poetic or humorous, rather than the didactic or combative

Yet, my interview with Barclay seemed to suggest something slightly different: she remembered the period leading up to the creation of her work as being one in which she and her peers were 'constantly out protesting in some way, whether we were trying to stop the government's budget cuts, or the poll tax, we were constantly on the move and saw our job as artists as an important part of that resistance'.<sup>275</sup> There was a sense that artists were attempting to rethink how "politics" manifested in art practice; rather than directly illustrating political ideas in their work, Barclay recalls looking to portray them using the material and cultural world around them.<sup>276</sup> Writing in *Variant* in 1990, Lorna Waite recognised that:

At a time when the questions realised by community arts in the seventies features on a possible agenda, the form and activities which surround the [Castlemilk] Womanhouse project take on a political dimension which must not be lost.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by the Bea Cartwright, 16th December 2019.

<sup>274</sup> John Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

<sup>275</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by the Bea Cartwright, 16th December 2019.

<sup>276</sup> Claire Barclay interviewed by the Bea Cartwright, 16th December 2019.

<sup>277</sup> Lorna J. Waite, 'Women in Profile: Glasgow 1990 Women's Season', *Variant*, 9 (1990): 17-18.

Waite arguably saw the pull that past community arts projects had upon *Castlemilk Womanhouse*. The Castlemilk artists could then emerge as a disappointing heir to the second-wave, neither able to fully facilitate a connection with the original happening, nor deal adequately with the social reproduction crisis of their own time. Yet, returning to Freeman's *Time Binds*, it is possible to conclude by countering these potential narratives of belatedness, allowing Castlemilk to locate its affect in the meeting of bodies through time.

Nizan Shaked's *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art* (2017) argues that conceptual art shifted away from a universalising investigation into the ontology of art in the 1960s and 1970s towards a broader-based "synthetic" conceptualism by the 1990s.<sup>278</sup> Synthetic conceptualism includes references to the concrete but through a programme of politics that is not sociologically specific: in other words, it does not reference particular social and political arguments. Shaked's argument provides a way of understanding how artworks that might not appear ostensibly political, can actually be construed as such in their capacity to question *how* meaning - and thus politics - operates in art itself. With this in mind, Annie Lovejoy's Castlemilk installation *A Sense of Purpose* (Figs. 1.17 - 1.20, 1990) might be seen to engage the political referent by treating the kitchen as a place of identity creation and how meaning comes to function within it. She uses the kitchen space in Castlemilk to present the endless stream of domestic chores that have typically been the role of women in such spaces. By stringing broken plates between the cabinets, she creates a claustrophobic barrier to the window, and piles plates and utensils across the floor, making it impossible to walk across the space. Old bottles and pans fill the wall space and form an arc over the head of the viewer. Objects such as pink rubber gloves typically hold associations with the category of the feminine: unthreatening, clean and invisible.

This piece questions what happens when we take markers of a particular meaning and present them in a context that is both familiar (the kitchen) and unfamiliar (surrounded by smashed crockery and with cooking utensils on the floor). By presenting these objects in such a way Lovejoy poses to the viewer the question of how these objects garner meaning. Of course, if when viewing the object in this chaotic environment we mark it as

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<sup>278</sup> Nizan Shaked, 'Conceptual Art and Identity Politics: From the 1960s to the 1990s' in *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 27.

“unfamiliar”, it arguably entrenches our understanding of its normative meaning further. It might be said that this is part of Lovejoy’s aim - she analyses how these objects come to signify certain things by presenting them in an unfamiliar manner. In this respect, these works can be read as using synthetic conceptualism: they use the techniques learned from the structural and analytical linguistic turn, but take this use out into the real world by incorporating recognisable subject matter. By reading Lovejoy’s piece through synthetic conceptualism I argue it is possible to contrast the location of the political referent in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* to the Hackney Flashers’ works, whilst maintaining that their political aims were similar.

*Castlemilk Womanhouse* was arguably responding to a particular neoconceptual trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which analytic conceptual devices were synthesised with social consciousness to create works that alluded to a political position without articulating it outright. In the essay ‘From Aesthetics to Abstract Machine’ (2010) Simon O’Sullivan suggests that this mode of art production was typical of neoconceptualists working in Glasgow during the period.<sup>279</sup> He recognised that the diversion from clear signification was actually a return to the aesthetic potential of art not ‘to reinstate a transcendent space for art, to position it in an “elsewhere” or to suggest that it transports us to an “elsewhere”, but... to say that art is more than just an object to be read’.<sup>280</sup> As an example, he wrote of what felt like an intentional strangeness he experienced when viewing Cathy Wilkes’ assemblage works:

We might ask ourselves what this means in terms of the politics of art practice? What indeed constitutes contemporary art’s political effectivity? For, I would argue, political art does not always look political and art that looks political (“speaks” its message as it were) does not always operate politically. In fact art is not politics in the typical - or molar and signifying - sense. It operates under a different logic. Such a politics, if we can still call it this, comes from this play with matter and with this production of difference. Returning to [Cathy] Wilkes’ work, we might say that it is this, the production of something different [...] in a very

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<sup>279</sup> Simon O’Sullivan, ‘From Aesthetics to Abstract Machine’ in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, eds. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 190.

<sup>280</sup> Simon O’Sullivan, ‘From Aesthetics to Abstract Machine’ in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, eds. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 190.

specific, but unfamiliar and surprising composition [...] that gives the work its singular and forceful character.<sup>281</sup>

What O’Sullivan suggests is that sometimes the most politically forceful works are the kinds that do not state their “claim” openly as such, but instead call forth a new interpretive strategy from the viewer, rather than relying on knowledges or strategies already known to them. We can separate the works in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* from the Hackney Flashers by considering the ways in which the political referent functions: in the Glaswegian exhibition the works seemed to infer their political programme less directly, whereas in the Hackney Flashers’ works the claims are stated outright, often including a textual component to prevent their image’s aesthetic misinterpretation.

### Conclusion

By comparing the frames of reference in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* and the Hackney Flashers, it has been possible to locate the political referent in the Castlemilk works. *Castlemilk Womanhouse* reestablished demands around the provision of childcare, equal pay and educational opportunities, but approached these issues using new heuristic tactics in art. While they held many of the same political demands in common, the artworks in *Castlemilk Womanhouse* arguably buried their political referent more covertly. Instead of suggesting that the Castlemilk works were somehow weaker in feminist politics, I propose that their political referent was located in a different manner.<sup>282</sup>

By borrowing models of artmaking from the past, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* not only highlights the continuing conditions of gender inequality recognised by scholars such as Evans, but provides a return narrative that resists the neat chronologies of progress and loss narratives, as identified by Hemmings.<sup>283</sup> As mentioned, these narratives embolden postfeminism by leading either away from feminism or toward a false image of it as a project completed. The archival material in this chapter has allowed me to narrate new relationships between artists through

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<sup>281</sup> Simon O’Sullivan, ‘From Aesthetics to Abstract Machine’ in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, eds. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 193.

<sup>282</sup> This provides a foundation for the concept of the impolitical that will be developed across Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>283</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017); Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

time. By forging a kinship between the Hackney Flashers and *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, I wish to conclude by demonstrating that rather than viewing either as having more potential to circumvent the crisis in care, it is instead the unfinished, and continually transforming, political programmes of *both* collectives stipulate the seductive undertow of temporal drag, which is often disavowed by future-oriented linear, progress narratives.

Unlike the negative view of temporal dislocation that theorists such as Jack Halberstam and Lee Edelman take, Freeman is driven by the pleasures that untimely connections across history can produce.<sup>284</sup> Certainly, the Castlemilk archive material illustrates the visceral pull that past forms of feminist exhibition-making had upon the exhibition organisers. Close readings of the *Castlemilk Womanhouse* works by artists such as Barclay, Baker, Harris and Murray revealed that second-wave feminist demands around the provision of childcare, equal pay and educational opportunities were still as relevant to the lives of women on the estate in the 1990s as they had been to women in the 1960s and 1970s. In this chapter's "story" of feminist art, *Castlemilk Womanhouse* has been positioned as what Hemmings would describe as a return narrative, given that it not only returned to the past but also foregrounded the material conditions of women as a way of arguing the for the continuing relevance of feminist politics specific to the context of the present. While the importance of this exhibition was to serve its immediate locale, the questions it asked about the material conditions of women had the capacity to leap far beyond the artworks themselves, or even the housing estate around them.

By considering the tensions and kinships between different narratives of feminist exhibition-making this chapter has experimented with 'how we might *tell* stories differently'.<sup>285</sup> When read through previous histories of Castlemilk, such as that by Hamblin, it has therefore been possible for me to propose a shift in genealogy away from *Womanhouse* in the renarration of Castlemilk. Instead, using Freeman's notion of "temporal drag" and interpreting the exhibition from a non-linear perspective, this chapter reimagined a kinship with the art collective

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<sup>284</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2005).

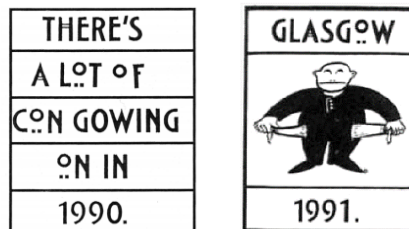
<sup>285</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16; as Freeman states, '...motions do not always go forward. If identity is always in temporal drag, constituted and haunted by the failed love-project that precedes it, then perhaps the shared culture making we call "movements" might do well to feel the tug backwards as a potentially transformative part of movement itself'; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 [2004]), 93.

the Hackney Flashers, given the groups' shared concerns for social reproduction labour. In this chapter's "story" of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* I have therefore demonstrated the polytemporal nature of feminism, showing that multiple narrative of feminism can exist at any given moment. One of the aims of this thesis is to challenge the linearity of loss and progress narratives, and in this chapter I have therefore argued for *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a return narrative, illustrating the continuities and relationships formed within feminist art-making that disprove the ubiquity of postfeminism.

## Illustrations



**Fig. 1.1.** *There's a Lot Glasgowing On in 1990*, Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising for the Miles Better campaign, 1990 (Image: Gerry Mooney, 'Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', *Local Economy*, 19, 4 (November, 2004): 331.)



**Fig. 1.2.** *There's a Lot of Con Gowing On*, artist unknown, printed fly-poster, 1990 (Image: Gerry Mooney, 'Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', *Local Economy*, 19, 4 (November, 2004): 331.)



**Fig. 1.3.** *Womanhouse* exhibition catalogue front cover, 1972, photographer unrecorded, 178 x 178 mm (Image: Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (eds.), *Womanhouse*, unpublished ex. cat., 1972; held by The Getty Research Centre).



**Fig. 1.4.** Photograph of 39 Glenacre Quadrant's exterior during *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.5.** Photograph of *Castlemilk Estate*, c.1990, photographer unrecorded, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.6.** Advert for *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, Julie Roberts, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.7.** Photograph of participants taking part in workshops at *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.8.** Photograph of children taking part in workshops at *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.9.** Photograph of women taking part in printing workshops at *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.10.** Photograph of children's activities at *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 75 x 52 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.11.** Photograph of children taking part in workshops at *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.12.** Participant wearing a “Jobs for the Girls” printed t-shirt,1990, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women’s Library).



**Fig. 1.13.** Local children visiting *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, 1990, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 102 mm  
(Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.14.** Photograph of Downcraig Terrace on the Castlemilk Estate, 1989, Pauline Meikle, dimensions unavailable (Image: Castlemilk History Group).



**Fig. 1.15.** *Bathroom Installation*, 1990, installation and photograph by Claire Barclay, 178 x 127 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.16.** *Bathroom installation*, 1990, installation and photograph by Claire Barclay, 178 x 127 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig 1.17.** *A Sense of Purpose*, 1990, photographs and installation by Annie Lovejoy, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



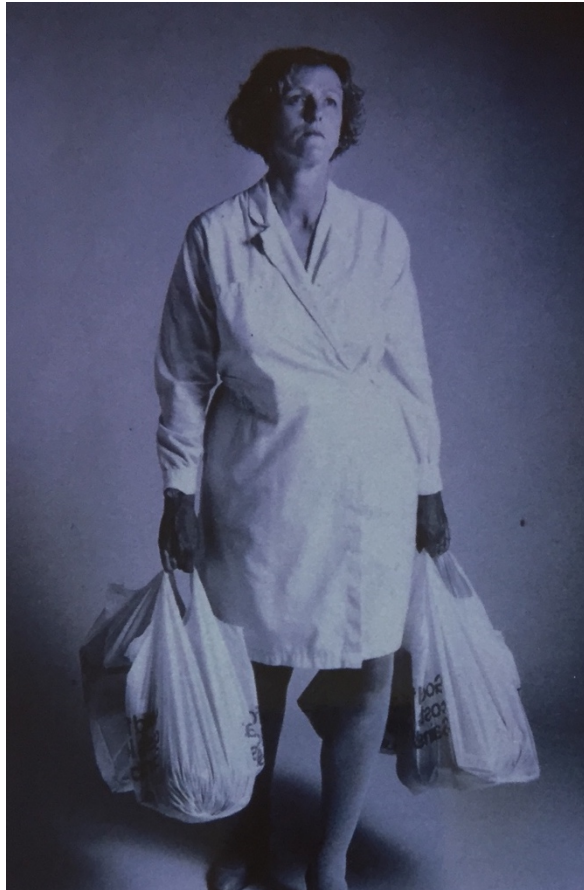
**Fig. 1.19.** *A Sense of Purpose*, 1990, photographs and installation by Annie Lovejoy, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



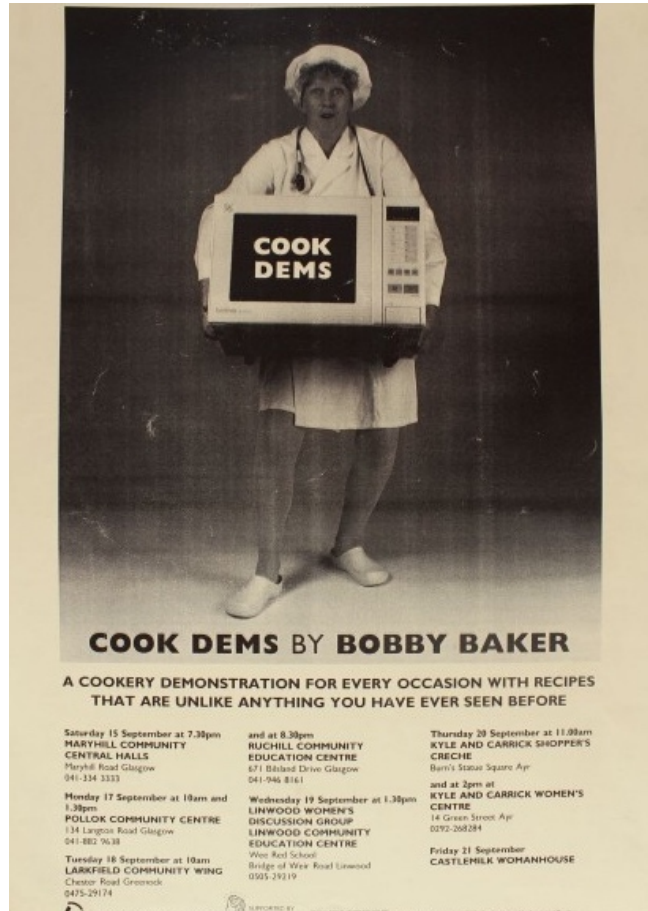
**Fig. 1.20.** *A Sense of Purpose*, 1990, photographs and installation by Annie Lovejoy, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.21.** *Visibility*, 1990, photographs of Val Murray's installation, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.22.** *Cook Dems* advertising material, c.1990, Bobby Baker, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.23.** *Cook Dems* advertising material, c.1990, Bobby Baker, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.24.** *The House That Jill Built*, 1990, installation and photograph by Rachel Harris, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.25.** *The House That Jill Built*, 1990, installation and photograph by Rachel Harris, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.26.** Photograph of the dookit on the Castlemilk Estate that inspired *The House that Jill Built*, c.1990, Rachel Harris, 152 x 102 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.27.** Photograph of the *Nurturant Kitchen* installation in *Womanhouse* comprising of the artwork *Kitchen and Eggs to Breasts*, 1972, installation by Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, Robin Weltsch, photograph by Lloyd Hamrol, 127 x 178 mm (Image: Getty Research Institute).



**Fig. 1.28.** *Dollhouse*, 1972, Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brody, wood and mixed media, 2026 x 2083 x 216 mm (Image: Smithsonian American Art Museum).



**Fig. 1.29.** Photograph of *Lea's Room* performance installation in *Womanhouse*, 1972, Karen LeCoq, photographer unrecorded (Image: Through the Flower Archive, Penn State University).



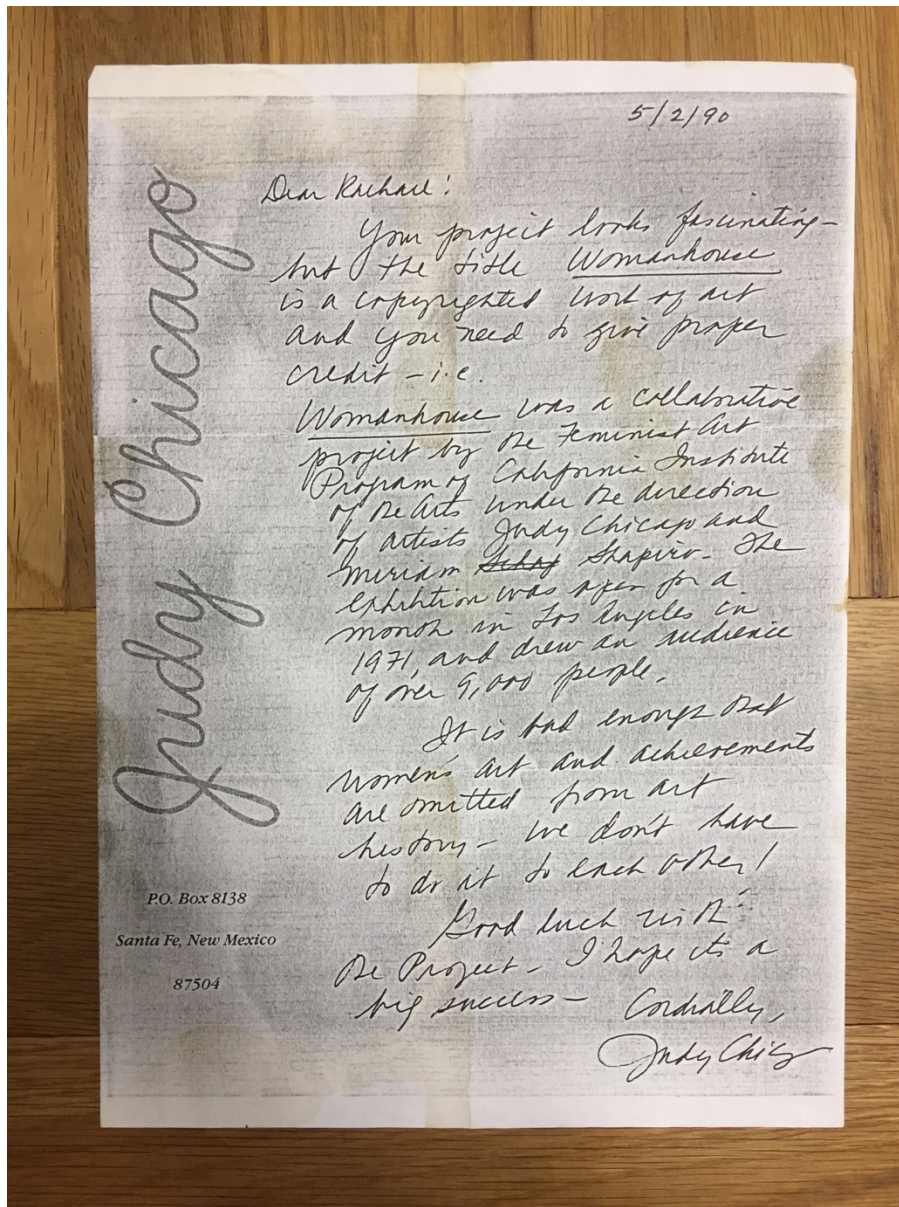
**Fig 1.30.** Photograph of *The Dining Room* installation in *Womanhouse*, 1972, installation by Beth Bachenheimer, Sherry Brody, Karen LeCocq, Robin Mitchell, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Wilding, photographer unrecorded, dimensions unrecorded (Image: 'Selected Visual Work', *Faith Wilding*, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> November, at <http://faithwilding.refugia.net/womanhouse.html>).



**Fig. 1.31.** Photograph of *Menstruation Bathroom* installation in *Womanhouse*, 1972, Judy Chicago, photographer unrecorded, 152 x 216 mm (Image: Through the Flower Archive, Penn State University).



**Fig. 1.32.** Film still from *Shulie* showing Elisabeth Subrin dressed as Shulamith Firestone, 1997, Elisabeth Subrin, chromogenic color print from 16mm film, 4537 x 3308 mm (Image: Jewish Museum Collection).



*'Womanhouse is a copyrighted work of art and you need to give proper credit.. It is bad enough that women's art and achievement are omitted from art history - we don't have to do it to each other!'*

**Fig. 1.33.** Photocopy of a letter from Judy Chicago to Rachel Harris, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1990, 210 x 297 mm (Image: Castlemilk Womanhouse archive, Glasgow Women's Library).



**Fig. 1.34.** *The State Provides...*, c.1978, Hackney Flashers, photography and text collage, 297 x 420 mm (Image: 'Work of a Women's Collective 1974-1980', *Hackney Flashers*, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019, at <https://hackneyflashers.com/slideshow-whos-holding-the-baby-1978/>).

# Don't take drugs, take action



**Fig. 1.35.** *Don't Take Drugs Take Action*, c.1978, Hackney Flashers, photography and text collage, 297 x 420 mm (Image: 'Work of a Women's Collective 1974-1980', *Hackney Flashers*, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019, at <https://hackneyflashers.com/slideshow-whos-holding-the-baby-1978/>).



**Fig. 1.36.** *Who's Still Holding the Baby*, c.1978, Hackney Flashers, photography and text collage, 297 x 420 mm (Image: 'Work of a Women's Collective 1974-1980', *Hackney Flashers*, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019, at <https://hackneyflashers.com/slideshow-whos-holding-the-baby-1978/>).

## CHAPTER 2. Postfeminism and the Politics of Refusal: *Bad Girls*, 1993

As mentioned in the Introduction, one only has to look to the many examples of the actual progress of feminism to disprove the notion that its political project had eroded in the 1990s.<sup>286</sup> The persistence of material inequality created the conditions for return narratives such as *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, which resisted postfeminism by enacting the actual politics of feminism through the collective actions of artists and women on the estate. Nevertheless, there was a palpable shift away from feminist thinking in artistic production and arts discourse in Britain at the time.<sup>287</sup> In this chapter, I seek to challenge postfeminism from a different angle, not by considering artworks that *resist* narratives of feminist loss, but by considering ones that can be interpreted as *affirming* them. In doing so, I aim to retrieve the impolitical aspects of seemingly apolitical artworks positioned within postfeminist loss narratives.

As explored in Chapter 1, feminist activism had been strong in centres such as Glasgow due to its history of community organising. This chapter will now shift its focus to London, where postfeminism as a loss narrative was prominent across media culture and in some spheres of artistic production, creating a context in which certain groups of artists and curators attempted to address the question of gender by abrogating feminist politics. A letter in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive from Pauline Barrie, coordinator of the Women Artist's Slide Library, to Rachel Harris in 1990 warned: 'feminism has, within the London Art scene become a dirty word and with male critics still insisting on writing about "post-feminism" it is an uphill battle'.<sup>288</sup> Postfeminism's voice was most

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<sup>286</sup> Diverse examples of feminism(s) in British art at the time include the founding of The New Hall collection at Cambridge University; *Fantasy. An Exhibition of the Work of 15 Contemporary British Women Artists* (Women's Art Library, London, 1994); *Our Bodies, Ourselves: An Exhibition By Women Photographers on the Subject of Health* (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, 1993); works by Lubaina Himid; books such *Passion: Discourses on Black Women's Creativity* (1990) edited by Maud Sulter; or conferences such as Women's Art Slide Library (WASL)'s 'Feminist Art Criticism' (Morley College, London 1992). As well as this, the founding of journals across the long 1990s such as *MAKE* (formerly the Women's Art Library), *Feminist Art News*, *Women's Art Magazine* (formerly the Women Artists Slide Library Newsletter) and *n.paradoxa*.

<sup>287</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, Katy Deepwell notes that between 1988 and 1995 there were only three books on feminist art practice published in the UK; Katy Deepwell (ed.), 'Introduction' in *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 3. The three books published were Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences* (London: Routledge, 1990); Wendy Beckett, *Contemporary Women Artists* (London: Phaidon, 1988); Maud Sulter, *Passions: Discourses on Black Women's Creativity* (London: Urban Fox Press, 1990).

<sup>288</sup> It should be noted that postfeminism was not just a position advocated for by men, but also some women; letter to Rachel Harris from Pauline Barrie, coordinator of the Women Artist's Slide Library in London, 11th August 1988. Folder in the Castlemilk Womanhouse Archive, Glasgow Women's Library, Bridgeton.

affirmative in sources like teen magazines, commercial films, “chick lit”, and advertising. For example, this magazine cover of *Young & Modern* (1997) inscribes beauty and sexual relationships as priorities for young women through the headlines “Catch Your Crush!” and “Get Sexy” (Fig. 2.1, 1997). With this in mind, this chapter will consider what an art practice supposedly “beyond” feminism might look like, complicating the notion of postfeminism as a loss narrative.

Several exhibitions and artworks are considered by testing the impolitical as a tool for interpreting the “bad girl” phenomenon in art, including Gillian Wearing, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Sam Taylor-Johnson who had broadly been associated with the Young British Artists (YBA) alongside the exhibition *Bad Girls* (ICA, London; CCA, Glasgow, 1993-1994). Amelia Jones first connected this exhibition and group of artists by arguing that it was based on a reaction to the perceived constraints of feminist essentialism, as well as the professionalisation of the art market that demanded constant reinvention.<sup>289</sup> This chapter will use Jones’ grouping as a way of framing the manifestations of postfeminism in art, whilst also recognising the potential problems with the conflation of many female artists from the YBA with an exhibition like *Bad Girls*, given the exhibition attempted to transgress social boundaries to a greater extent.

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<sup>289</sup> As noted in the Introduction, Jones denotes this group as the following:

‘Come the late 1980s, the dominance of psychoanalytic, avant-gardist feminist models of critique came under scrutiny (or were simply ignored) with the rise of a younger generation of women artists born mostly in the 1960s. Transformations in British politics and economic structures (including London’s renewed ascendancy as global capital of finance, an increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of the art world, and the increasing power of influential art schools such as Goldsmiths’ College) combined with generational shifts to encourage the development of a new mode of feminist practice and theory. By the early 1990s, curators could mount an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, entitled *Bad Girls*, which celebrated the more raucous and explicitly embodied work of younger women artists such as British feminists Chadwick and Rachel Evans, Irish feminist Dorothy Cross, and Americans Nicole Eisenman, Nan Goldin, and Sue Williams, who were (the catalogue claimed) rebelling “against the Puritanism and high moral ground claimed by 1970s and 1980s feminism in order to reconcile politics with pleasure”. The celebration of “bad girl” artists was linked to the rise of a particular brand of feminism based on sexualised, supposedly self-empowered exhibitionism in popular culture (with the emergence of celebrities such as Madonna) and to the professionalisation of the art market, in turn linked to the increasing solidification of ties between the marketplace and art schools in the 1980s and 1990s’; Amelia Jones ‘An “Other” History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970’ in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 172;

This grouping has been reproduced through art history in the following examples: Barbara Solomon, ‘Art Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’, *The New York Times Magazine* (January 30, 2000): 39, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2019, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/30/magazine/art-girls-just-wanna-have-fun.html?src=pm>; Katy Deepwell, ‘Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s’ in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 152-65; Amelia Jones, ‘Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-Identity’ in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-69.

It is worth noting that this analysis of *Bad Girls* will focus its critique on how the exhibition was curated, as opposed to an inherent quality in the works themselves, given that, as will be argued, works by artists such as Helen Chadwick should not be positioned as postfeminist. Moreover, this chapter does not refer to *all* female artists from the YBA as refusing feminism because artists such as Anya Gallaccio genuinely identified as feminist. As foregrounded in the Introduction, my synthetic concept of the impolitical runs on two axes. In this chapter I will locate artists such as Emin, Lucas and Taylor-Johnson as closer to Apter's notion of impolitics as a mode of disobedience, impoliteness or the refusal of the formal arena of politics. Whereas *Bad Girls* will be considered closer to Esposito's conceptualisation of the impolitical (as reflecting back a perception of the limits of feminism as a mode of politics). In doing so, this chapter seeks to retrieve the impolitical aspects of seemingly apolitical artworks, contesting the reductive quality of postfeminist loss narratives.

### **Refusing Feminism**

*Bad Girls* opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in 1993 and then travelled to the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow in 1994.<sup>290</sup> On the opening night of the ICA's exhibition, a zine containing photographs of guests was put up for sale in the museum's bookshop (Fig. 2.2, 1997).<sup>291</sup> This photograph by Anthony Oliver captured the spirit of the bad girl phenomenon. The bold title 'GRRRL POWER!' confronts the viewer, alongside a trio of women, one wearing a short tartan skirt covering her ears, another wearing a zip-up hoody covering her eyes, and another with a woolly jumper emblazoned 'BAD GIRL', covering her mouth with her hands.<sup>292</sup> They pull the proverbial "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" pose, which had been detached from its Buddhist context, to represent a shorthand for turning a blind eye to moral corruption. By placing itself as beyond

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<sup>290</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993).

<sup>291</sup> This study focuses on the UK instance of the *Bad Girls* exhibition, but it ought to be noted that an unrelated exhibition of the same name took place at the New Museum, New York, in the same year, suggesting a wider interest in the phenomenon across North Atlantic contexts; Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993).

<sup>292</sup> The show was also influenced by music movements such as riot grrrl that had originated with bands such as Bratmobile and Bikini Kill in the USA. Riotgrrrl's brazen voicing occupied a space between activism and anarchism, cross-fertilising the grunge and DIY feminisms active in the UK at the time; Leslie Heywood (ed.), *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006).

feminist politics, the bad girls phenomenon attempted to transgress the supposed limitations that feminism had placed upon not only the female body in art but the way art made by women was interpreted. Rethinking feminism's relationship with the body was partly the motivation behind *Bad Girls*, which pitted itself against the exclusion of the visceral, corporeal, and problematic facts of female experience in art.

Jones has associated these forms of "prohibition" feminism with essentialist practice, publications such as the journal *Screen*, or writers such as Judith Barry, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Laura Mulvey.<sup>293</sup> To Jones, these critics coded the gaze as male, therefore positioning visual pleasure in art and the representation of the corporeal as objectifying to women. She argues this leaves little space for women to derive visual pleasure from art.<sup>294</sup> These debates predated the 1990s, and looking back at an image such as Hannah Wilke's black and white lithograph *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism*, we see a precursor to, and partial context for, the emergence of the bad girl phenomena in art nearly twenty years later (Fig 2.3, 1977). In this black-and-white photograph, the artist is depicted in an assertive stance, hands on hips, mimicking the pose of a topless glamour model. She wears a clumsily knitted tie and a button-down shirt hangs from either shoulder, revealing her torso covered in chewed gum. The statement 'Marxism and Art Beware of the Fascist Feminism' is printed in capital letters, leaving the viewer wondering: is this a parodic declaration, or an earnest warning?

The sincerity of the statement seems to be blocked by the comedic way Wilke has presented her body, implying irony. Wilke's photograph is one of the fifty images that made up the *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1974-82), in which Wilke stuck tiny vulva-shaped pieces of chewing gum to herself. The action intended to draw comparisons between the cultural value of femininity, beauty and fame, as well as how the pursuit of these notions leaves a kind of "scarring" upon the body of women. Wilke notes that she '...chose gum because it's the perfect metaphor for the American woman - chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out and pop in a

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<sup>293</sup> Amelia Jones, 'Post-Feminism': A Remasculinisation of Culture' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 496-506; Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16, 3 (1975): 6-18; Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making', *Screen*, 21, 2 (1980): 35-48.

<sup>294</sup> Amelia Jones, 'Post-Feminism': A Remasculinisation of Culture' (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 505-06.

new piece'.<sup>295</sup> But the work impresses a somewhat indefinite relationship with the feminist movement. On the one hand, it seems to critique feminism as dogmatic, but on the other, the work reflects a sensitivity to gendered oppression of women's bodies.

During the 1970s, Wilke held a complex relationship with feminism and in her work she opted to glamorize her body, using nudity to ask questions about gender. She enlisted beauty as a tool for her art, but this often became a problem for critics. In 1976 Lucy Lippard questioned whether Wilke's use of her body as a partly beautified object allowed for 'politically ambiguous manifestations'.<sup>296</sup> Her work was at times read as narcissistic or self-indulgent. In 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making' (1980) Barry and Flitterman-Lewis consider feminist undecidability in scripto-visual work, noting of Wilke's work that '[i]n objectifying herself as she does, in assuming the conventions associated with a stripper (as someone who will reveal all), Wilke seems to be teasing us as to her motives. She is both the stripper and the stripped bare'.<sup>297</sup>

Published in *Screen*, Barry and Flitterman-Lewis' article upheld practices that refused to incorporate the body as a stronger theoretical perspective against essentialist practice in scripto-visual work.<sup>298</sup> For Wilke, however, this 'narrow politics of feminism' became reductive, stating that there is 'an ethics as well as a warning in esthetic ambiguity' in her work.<sup>299</sup> The tensions invoked by Wilke's piece are important because they provide evidence for the fact that the impolitical techniques used by Lucas and Wearing, among others were not new in the 1990s. While to Barry and Flitterman-Lewis, Wilke's work appeared essentialist, Clare Johnson has interpreted the same political ambiguity as a strength, describing:

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<sup>295</sup> Hannah Wilke quoted in Avis Berman, 'A Decade of Progress, But Could a Female Chardin Make a Living Today', *Art News*, 79, 8, (October, 1980): 77.

<sup>296</sup> Lucy Lippard quoted in *Hannah Wilke: Exchange Values*, ex. cat. (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Artium de Álava, 2006), 160.

<sup>297</sup> Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making', *Screen*, 21, 2 (1980): 35-48, 39; these theorists gendered the gaze as always already male and it was theories such as this that underpinned much artistic production exploring representation in the 1980s. Here I am thinking of artist such as Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger or Jenny Holzer; see also Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16, 3 (1975): 6-18.

<sup>298</sup> Mary Kelly argued against using her body in her art, given its highly politicised preconditioning; Mary Kelly, *Imagining Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>299</sup> Hannah Wilke quoted in Avis Berman, 'A Decade of Progress, But Could a Female Chardin Make a Living Today', *Art News*, 79, 8 (October 1980): 77.

...a gap between imitation and identification. This has implications for the stories that feminist art history tells about which artworks are to be valued and why. The dominance of feminist art historical narratives premised on critical distance is in danger of obscuring alternative stories, such as the critical potential of artworks that seduce rather than distance the viewer. This leaves us without a language to describe the traces of mimetic work in contemporary art that is ambiguous or uneven in its identification with feminism. Certainty and consistency are not always a prerequisite for feminist criticality. Wilke's affiliation with feminism fluctuated.<sup>300</sup>

With this in mind, this chapter will take a nuanced view of the bad girl phenomenon in art, unpacking both the positive and negative implications of this political undecidability in art, as well as considering the ways it was yoked to postfeminist sentiment by analysing some of its controversial associations, such as writing by Camille Paglia or Julie Burchill.<sup>301</sup> As well as considering the exhibition's potential for transgression, this chapter will also reflect on important critiques made by scholars such as Jones and Deepwell, who considered both the historical, marginalising and masculinist implications of the bad girls phenomenon as it emerged in artistic practice.<sup>302</sup> To remind ourselves of a quotation considered in the Introduction, Emin once claimed of her art:

I use myself in my work. And part of me is my body. There again, I'm not flag waving. It doesn't have to be feminist driven, because lots of really good women have fought on my behalf and have already done that. That battle has already been won.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Clare Johnson, *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art* (New York: Springer, 2013), 98-99.

<sup>301</sup> For example, see: Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Julie Burchill, *Ambition* (London: Corgi, 1989).

<sup>302</sup> Katy Deepwell, 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 152-65; Amelia Jones, 'Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-Identity' in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-69.

<sup>303</sup> Carl Freedman, 'Quite a Performance' in *Tracey Emin: Works 1963-2006*, eds. Tracey Emin, Jeanette Winterson, Carl Freedman and Rudi Fuchs (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 166.

Emin refuses political attachment as a way of understanding or experiencing her artwork, which has led many writers to conclude that her works are apolitical (explored later in “Impolitics and the YBA”). But as this chapter will argue, works such as Emin’s are already imbricated in debates about gender given their subject matter.

Julian Stallabrass positions YBA artists such as Emin as ‘theoretical niceties and visual spectacle in a neat, market-friendly and thoroughly apolitical package’.<sup>304</sup> While Stallabrass’ critique is not levelled against the gendered aspects of these works specifically, instead as a more general critique of the broader YBA movement as producing ‘one-liners’, he argues that by refusing a particular interpretative frame, these works appealed to both the mass media’s broad audience, as well as being marketable to a small circle of buyers and dealers.<sup>305</sup> The undecidability in political referent was also, to Stallabrass, where these works failed: ‘[...] to make no judgement is to accept complicity with a system of things which only appears natural, or at least to play down the conflict and contradiction in a structure seen as unitary and functional’.<sup>306</sup>

In his discussion of artists such as Lucas and Emin, alongside Taylor-Johnson, Stallabrass notes that ‘[this] new generation of artists had good formal education, having been put through sophisticated fine-art courses which informed them about high “theory” and the history of the avant garde’ but that they were not interested in using this knowledge to critical end.<sup>307</sup> For example, Lucas once stated: ‘I did read a lot of feminist books exploring pornography... and questioned my use of it as material. But I’m not trying to solve the problem. I’m exploring the moral dilemma by incorporating it’.<sup>308</sup> To Stallabrass, Lucas ultimately ‘accepted the system just as it was, and sought only to work within it’.<sup>309</sup> As I will argue, the problem with what Stallabrass proposes is that by following

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<sup>304</sup> Stallabrass’ argument fits into the notion of Hemmings’ loss narrative given that he positions the female artists of the YBA as an apolitical successor of ‘...a strong radical strand in British art of the 1970s, producing work of an explicitly political kind (and such work was always, naturally enough, more dependent upon state patronage than the market); in the 1980s this persisted in some highly theoretical forms, though it was pushed to the sidelines by a buoyant private market that favoured bombastic neo-expressionist work’. Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 172

<sup>305</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 99.

<sup>306</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 217.

<sup>307</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 20-21.

<sup>308</sup> Helen Sumpter, ‘Naughty but Nice’, *The Big Issue*, 8-14 (September 1997), quoted in Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 94.

<sup>309</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 21.

these artists' refusal to read their images as explicitly political, he forecloses his conclusion of them as apolitical.<sup>310</sup> This reading fails to account for the multiple ways that artworks can sensitise audiences politically, regardless of an artist's statements of intention. To try and neatly fit all artworks in the binary of "political/apolitical" is too reductive and in this thesis the notion of the impolitical is proposed instead as a means of approaching artworks that engage with a politics of refusal.

Liz Ellis has more precisely, and successfully, considered the position of female artists in the YBA in the article 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice' (1998).<sup>311</sup> Ellis is rightly concerned that Lucas, Wearing and Taylor-Johnson's 'ironic detachment from feeling and commitment' is problematic because '[m]any of the artists themselves are so resolute about claiming their political neutrality and their studied detachment from any socially located meaning, preferring a position of apolitical individualism'.<sup>312</sup> For Ellis, by refusing to imbue these artworks with an ethical stance, they also negate their capacity for transgressing the oppression they attempt to rebuke:

I am concerned with the implications of these arguments for the women amongst the "yBas", and the negation of an ethical stance. An ethical practice is built upon the idea that engaging with the work extends the viewer's imagination and their ability to envisage change [...] Imagination creates a space for the possibility of engagement and the possibility of change yet is able to draw attention to the intent with which it is to be read.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> It is important to note here that Stallabrass' argument is not an observation about all art of the 1990s, especially not women's art production, and this is not the way his text is interpreted in this chapter.

<sup>311</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 6-14.

<sup>312</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 6, 8.

<sup>313</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 6.

For Ellis, the idea of declining to state intention and ethical premise openly suggests that these artworks fail in their capacity to transgress social norms. Further in Ellis' critique of the YBA she says,

... I would define the ironic as a refusal to state a sincere political or ethical stance, or if in stating a stance, to continually undermine this, or even to change interpretation as suits. It is the opposite of what used to be called "engaged" or "committed" or "sincere" work.<sup>314</sup>

In critiquing the ironic elements of the YBA, Ellis recognises how important it is for art to allow us '...to deal with the physicality of a work and to engage with a sensuousness that feels and sweats, cries and caresses' and that '[t]he quality of irony by contrast leads to a disconnected - even false - experience both for artist and viewer'.<sup>315</sup> In the article 'No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art' (1991) Christine Tamblyn groups several artists emerging in North America including Barbara Hammer, Paula Levine, Joan Braderman, Abigail Child, and Karen Finley.<sup>316</sup> While not discussing the bad girl phenomena in the UK specifically, Tamblyn's article might inform our interpretation of the British context. She suggests that the bad girl sensibility emerges from women continually being afforded a marginal place in society. The rejection of feminism becomes a mode of resistance given its politics had (in Tamblyn's opinion) already been eclipsed. In the article she theorises the bad girl phenomenon as being a reaction to 1970s art practices:

By focusing on explicit sexual representation and eschewing positive role modeling, these artists depart from the feminist art practices that were prevalent in the 1970s. Although they often used nudity to celebrate women's privileged connection with nature, many feminist artists of the previous decades avoided pornographic imagery because of its associations with patriarchal oppression and

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<sup>314</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 11.

<sup>315</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 11.

<sup>316</sup> Christine Tamblyn, 'No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art', *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 53.

violence. Consequently, they endeavoured to create positive role models by representing their own triumphant journey from victimization to liberation [...]

In a cultural climate permeated with expressions of overt hostility toward feminism or denigration of the movement as already having been eclipsed, they adopt a rebellious stance regarding their own disenfranchisement. Out of an ironic elaboration of the marginal social status they have been accorded, they produce occasions of resistance. Their assessments of society lie on a continuum ranging from pessimistic to nihilistic or apocalyptic. Rather than seeking equal participation in a despoiled social system, they diagnose its maladies or plot its dissolution.<sup>317</sup>

Interrogating how and why this perceived ‘hostility toward feminism’ emerged allows for a nuanced perspective on the politics of detachment, which also aids my critique of postfeminism.<sup>318</sup> Tamblyn interprets the bad girl aesthetic as successful in ‘[p]rivileging difference rather than constructing idealized role models, they manifest their autonomous liberation through a staunch refusal of identification and affirmation’.<sup>319</sup> Deepwell has recognised the problems associated with refusing the political assumptions of an artwork stating,

[a] politics of transgression itself is inadequate if it is conflated with a personal problem, and if the personal is not seen as linked to the political - for recognition of what is being transgressed, or acceptable/unacceptable, depends upon there being a known context in which to act.<sup>320</sup>

This statement was made in a discussion of time-based body art presented in the exhibition *Body as Membrane* (Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, 1996) and female body art in Europe in the 1990s, which she delineates as speaking

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<sup>317</sup> Christine Tamblyn, ‘No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art’, *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 53.

<sup>318</sup> Christine Tamblyn, ‘No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art’, *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 53.

<sup>319</sup> Christine Tamblyn, ‘No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art’, *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 57.

<sup>320</sup> Katy Deepwell, ‘Pains and Pleasures: Women’s Performance and Body Art in the 90s’, *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 43.

from a different sensibility when compared to the Anglo-American strand.<sup>321</sup> Discussing the European context for female artists such as Annie Sprinkle and Heli Rekula, Deepwell notes,

[i]f what characterised women's performance art in the 1970s was a challenging focus on women's experience (including experience of pain and pleasure), it is clear that works of the 1990s present different priorities. These priorities encompass consumerism and the consumption of women's bodies. But parody - even of pornography - is not always an effective strategy. As Lucy Lippard suggests, "it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult".<sup>322</sup>

The essay considers how a transnational history of this phenomenon might be written, given synchronic artistic movements can emerge from different geographical contexts on very different terms. Deepwell's analysis is useful here because she articulates a split between understandings of the notion of "woman" - in Europe this was conceived in terms of language and the symbolic. In contrast, in the US this was conceived through a politics of liberation, empowerment or revolution.<sup>323</sup> With this in mind, this chapter is cautious of conflating the works of the YBA with Tamblyn's expression of the bad girl movement in the US, which she recognises '...endeavoured to create positive role models by representing their own triumphant journey from victimization to liberation'.<sup>324</sup> The same cannot be said of artists such as Emin and Lucas however, who purposefully reject the role of positive role model, nor necessarily present themselves as liberated. This constitutes a form of impolitics more closely aligned with Apter's

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<sup>321</sup> Deepwell does not see the "bad girls" label as transposing easily between geographies easily, she critiques Laura Cottingham's curation of *NowHere* (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, 1996) for trying to superficially expand the Anglo-American sensibility to include artists from Japan and Denmark; Katy Deepwell, 'Pains and Pleasures: Women's Performance and Body Art in the 90s', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 43.

<sup>322</sup> Katy Deepwell, 'Pains and Pleasures: Women's Performance and Body Art in the 90s', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 41.

<sup>323</sup> Katy Deepwell, 'Pains and Pleasures: Women's Performance and Body Art in the 90s', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 42; see also a debate about the limits of transnationalism with respect to the divergence between Anglo-American feminism and European feminism in Katy Deepwell, 'Sassy or Not: Women's Body Art', *Siksi: the Nordic Arts Review*, 11, 4 (Winter 1996): 88-90; and a follow up debate in a later issue featuring Kristine Stiles, Laura Cottingham, Tania Orum, with a concluding statement by Katy Deepwell, 'Mapping Feminism is Necessary', *Siksi: the Nordic Arts Review*, 12, 4 (Winter 1997): 88-89.

<sup>324</sup> Christine Tamblyn, 'No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art', *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 53.

axis of the impolitical, versus the axis of Esposito's impolitics that can be found in *Bad Girls*, where, as will be argued later, can still be recognised to constitute attachment to female liberation in certain respects, despite feminist histories themselves being refused by the curators.

Deepwell's essay 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' (1997) is concerned with the ways that the exhibition *Bad Girls* painted second-wave feminism pejoratively.<sup>325</sup> In claiming their "new" attitude as anti-essentialist *Bad Girls* ignored that this critique had existed within postmodern feminism for at least the past fifteen years and had been built on historical feminist interventionist strategies. For Deepwell,

The "bad girls" signalled a "feminist" interventionist strategy if one regards lesbianism, shrieking viragos, and parodic irreverence as symptoms of contemporary feminism. What is disavowed however, is also the theoretical work of the 1980s, with its emphasis on sexual/textual practices, speaking subjects, and écriture.<sup>326</sup>

Deepwell argues that while there was something to be gained from the use of humour, parody and pastiche in undoing stereotypes about gender, the exhibition is in danger of erasing a rich history of feminist art practice that had been using these devices long before *Bad Girls*.<sup>327</sup> Deepwell rightly problematises the curators' ahistorical understanding of feminism by demonstrating that the feminist continuum has always been far more multiplicitous than the exhibition implied. In dismissing previous feminism(s) as homogeneous, didactic, and essentialising, she

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<sup>325</sup> Katy Deepwell, 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 152-165.

<sup>326</sup> Katy Deepwell, 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 160.

<sup>327</sup> For Deepwell, this was one of the key differences between the U.S. iteration of the *Bad Girls* exhibition in the same year, which had presented its artists as in a continuum with previous generations of feminist artists rather than as a clean break; Katy Deepwell, 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 152-165; this was corroborated by Carolee Schneemann, who noted '[t]he term Bad Girls is the commodification of a much tougher, stronger transformation that has occurred in the culture'; Carolee Schneemann quoted in Barbara Pollack, 'Babe Power', *Art Monthly*, 235 (April 2000), unpaginated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/babe-power-by-barbara-pollack-april-2000>; see also Katy Deepwell, 'Pains and Pleasures: Women's Performance and Body Art in the 90s', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 38-43; Katy Deepwell, 'Sassy or Not: Women's Body Art', *Siksi: The Nordic Arts Review*, 11, 4 (Winter 1996): 88-90; Katy Deepwell, 'Mapping Feminism is Necessary', *Siksi: The Nordic Arts Review*, 12, 4 (Winter 1997): 88-89.

argues that *Bad Girls* was able to give the impression that their voice was a new non-ideological pluralism more suited to contemporary life where ‘the transgressions enacted by the works came from a libertarian individualism rather than a liberationist politics’.<sup>328</sup>

### **Material context**

To comprehend why these artists and curators refused feminism in this way, it is important to understand the material context and how this might have led to a sense of disillusionment with feminist politics. This is also an important task when rehabilitating feminist loss narratives using the more productive return narratives, allowing for the recognition of continued material inequality, as unpacked in Chapter 1.<sup>329</sup> By considering statistics on the economic and social conditions of women during the period it is possible to grasp the material reality of women in London at the time. For example, a graph shows economic inactivity rates (an individual not in or looking for work) for women had been steadily falling across the latter part of the century, suggesting that more women were moving into the formal workplace (Fig. 2.4).<sup>330</sup> Full-time caring duties were the most common reason for women’s economic inactivity, meaning they often had little direct access to monetary income. Whilst the fall in economic inactivity rates for women across the 1990s could be seen as a positive shift, there was however little evidence to suggest that male counterparts or the state substantially picked up caring duties.

Nevertheless, a table produced by the UN in 1991 (Fig. 2.5) showed a marginal decline in time spent on unpaid labour that included childcare and household chores across the 1960s and 1980s (from 33.9% of their time in 1961 to 30.0% of time in 1984). Following from this, a later study of trends between 1961 and 1992 suggested that women spent on average 60 minutes cooking per day, versus 20 minutes spent by men.<sup>331</sup> While these statistics

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<sup>328</sup> Katy Deepwell, ‘Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s’ in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 156.

<sup>329</sup> Meant here in the material and cultural sense articulated by Mary Evans in *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

<sup>330</sup> The UK Labour Market Bulletin quoted in Susannah Irvine, Harriet Clark, Matthew Ward and Brigid Francis-Devine, ‘Women and the UK Economy’ in *Commons Library Research Briefing* (London: House of Commons Library, 4th March 2022): 6.

<sup>331</sup> A further study of time for personal care and leisure revealed that women had 124 hours per week in 1984, versus men who had 130 hours; United Nations, *The World’s Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 106-108, 101.

indicated that on one hand that men had taken on more significant duties of unpaid labour, they do however show that certain tasks, such as cooking, were still overwhelmingly completed by women. Moreover, a study of labour hours (including paid and unpaid) between 1984-1992 showed that women in the UK spent 44 hours per week working, in comparison to 38 hours per week spent by men.<sup>332</sup> When considering these hours as a percentage share of labour, these statistics further revealed the breakdown of labour in 1984 as 72% of unpaid housework done by women, with just 28% done by men.<sup>333</sup>

These statistics corroborate Nancy Fraser's suggestion that whilst women were afforded greater freedoms across the 1980s and 1990s in seeking formal labour, the reality meant that they then were predominantly responsible for labour in both the formal and informal spheres, effectively having two jobs.<sup>334</sup> Although part-time work allows for a better balance of household and childrearing responsibilities, it is also associated with lower hourly wages, little job security and fewer training or promotional opportunities than full-time employment. Whilst there was an increase in women moving into the formal labour sector, the gender pay gap was still at 17% by 1997 with women often working in far more precarious labour roles than men.<sup>335</sup>

Rather than equating postfeminism with antifeminism, Judith Stacey believes the former term 'aptly [described] the consciousness and strategies increasing numbers of women have developed in response to the new

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<sup>332</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 105.

<sup>333</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1991), 102.

<sup>334</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (2009); Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso Books, 2013).

<sup>335</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings' (2021) quoted in Susannah Irvine, Harriet Clark, Matthew Ward and Brigid Francis-Devine, 'Women and the UK Economy', *Commons Library Research Briefing* (London: House of Commons Library, 4th March 2022): 22; During the 1990s, 45% of women worked part-time, versus 7% of men, see: Susannah Irvine, Harriet Clark, Matthew Ward and Brigid Francis-Devine, 'Women and the UK Economy', *Commons Library Research Briefing* (London: House of Commons Library, 4th March 2022): 7; The proportion of women becoming trapped in low paid work was 48% from 1981-1991 (where low pay is defined as earning below two-thirds of median hourly pay); Nye Cominetti, Louise Marston and Lalitha Try, 'Workertech and Low Pay: An Overview of Research on Low-Paid Workers in the UK', *Resolution Foundation* (July 2021): 14; these statistics become more pronounced across single parent families. As Helen Lentell notes, in 1981, among women with a dependent child aged 0-15, 45% of lone mothers and 47% of married mothers were in employment. But by 1990, just 39% of lone mothers were in employment compared with 60% of married mothers, rising to 42% of lone mothers in paid employment by 1992; Sally Holtermann quoted in Helen Lentell, 'Families of Meaning: Contemporary Discourses of the Family' in *Forming Nation, Framing Welfare*, ed. Gail Lewis (London: Routledge, 1998), 243.

difficulties and opportunities of post-industrial society'.<sup>336</sup> Stacey argues that as the postindustrial age develops women's lives become less dominated by the domestic sphere and more about balancing domestic labour with formal labour. Neoliberal transformation in the UK saw the state's privatisation of services shift care for dependants back on to families and individuals. For instance, under John Major's governance, The Child Support Agencies were established in 1993, ensuring that financial support came from absent parents instead of the government.<sup>337</sup> The successive Conservative Governments tried to maintain a tax allowance for men whose wives did not work in order to encourage traditional family structures and arguably penalised the breakdown in nuclear families. Moreover, it was not until late in the Major period that there was a shift toward individual taxation, rather than this being dealt with through the husband.

These policies were eventually removed under New Labour and replaced with working-family tax credits, for families with children.<sup>338</sup> While New Labour did transform welfare in many positive ways, it reduced access to benefits, which arguably impacted women more negatively than men since they tend to be the largest recipients of the expanded welfare system. The 1997 policy on tax credits was designed to ease the costs of childcare and thus overcome a disincentive to work. Yet, these credits were not substantial enough to support single parents, particularly those in full-time education.<sup>339</sup> Moreover, it did not provide extra childcare support when children were sick and parents needed to take time away from their job to care for them. As Stacey argues,

[n]either feminism nor other progressive movements have been as successful, however, in addressing either the structural inequalities of post-industrial occupational structure, or the individualist, fast-track culture that makes all too difficult the formation of stable intimate relations on an egalitarian, or, for that matter, any other basis. [...] I believe this explains the attractiveness of various

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<sup>336</sup> Judith Stacey, 'Sexism by a Subtler Name? Postindustrial Conditions and Postfeminist Consciousness in the Silicon Valley' (1987) in *Unfinished Business: Twenty Years of Socialist Review*, ed. Socialist Review Collective (London: Verso, 1991), 239.

<sup>337</sup> 'The Law Relating to Child Support', *Department for Workplace and Pensions*, accessed 9th December 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130525060156/http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/specialist-guides/law-volumes/the-law-relating-to-child-support/>.

<sup>338</sup> These have since been reintroduced (although any partner can claim the allowance providing they are not earning enough to pay tax).

<sup>339</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Feminism and the Third Way', *Feminist Review*, 64 (Spring 2000): 97-112; see also, Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

kinds of post-feminist ideologies and strategies for achieving intimacy, or for just surviving in a profoundly insecure milieu.<sup>340</sup>

Whilst Stacey's somewhat defeatist view of feminism fails to acknowledge its many undeniable successes, she, like Evans, observed the inevitability of a discourse like postfeminism in this economic context.<sup>341</sup>

Considering London in particular, a study taken in 1997 revealed the gender pay gap was the smallest in London out of all the UK regions; its gap was 15.1% fewer earnings versus 18.4% in Scotland (Fig. 2.6).<sup>342</sup> However, in 1991, the UK went into recession, triggered by rising inflation in the late 1980s.<sup>343</sup> This impacted London's workforce and in 1991 unemployment in London was about 6.5%, matching the country's average. But in 1994 London's unemployment rate doubled to 13% compared to 10% nationwide.<sup>344</sup> Factors driving higher unemployment in the capital included employers moving out of the city, high closure rates in the manufacturing sector and an increasing tendency for specialised sectors to recruit workers from outside London on a cheaper wage.<sup>345</sup> Moreover, one study notes that around 40% of London homeowners who had purchased property in the late 1980s found themselves in negative equity when their property became worth less than the debt secured on it; London's rate of negative equity was the highest of all regions in the UK and in some parts of East London the

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<sup>340</sup> Judith Stacey, 'Sexism by a Subtler Name? Postindustrial Conditions and Postfeminist Consciousness in the Silicon Valley' (1987) in *Unfinished Business: Twenty Years of Socialist Review*, ed. Socialist Review Collective (London: Verso, 1991), 249.

<sup>341</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

<sup>342</sup> 'London had the smallest gender pay gap 20 years ago, but now it has the largest', *Office of National Statistics* (27th November 2017): unpagged. Accessed 19th March 2020, at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/londonhadthesmallestgenderpaygap20yearsagobutnowwiththelargest/2017-11-27>.

<sup>343</sup> The Bank of England put the base rate up from around 8% in summer 1988 to just under 15% in summer 1989. By late 1991 it was still at 10%; 'Official Bank Rate History', *Bank of England Database*, accessed 12th November 2022, at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/boeapps/database/Bank-Rate.asp>

<sup>344</sup> 'Unemployment Rate (Aged 16 and Over, Seasonally Adjusted)', *Office for National Statistics* (14th Feb 2023), accessed 15th February 2023, at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/mgsx/lms>

<sup>345</sup> John Forth and Hilary Metcalf, 'London's Unemployment in the 1990s: Tests of Demand-Side Explanations for its Relative Growth', *National Institute of Economic and Social Research*, 203 (2002): unpagged.

figure rose to more than 60%.<sup>346</sup> In this economic context women were at much greater risk of redundancy given that were more likely to work in roles with less job security.

During the recession the domestic private art market collapsed, along with many commercial galleries and a number of art publications.<sup>347</sup> Between 1985-1990 average annual growth of GDP was 3.3%, falling to -1.4% between 1990-1992.<sup>348</sup> This economic climate forced Charles Saatchi to sell his collection of international post-war art and instead buy at *Freeze* (1988), a group exhibition installed at the London Docklands by Goldsmith's graduates.<sup>349</sup> These works could be purchased inexpensively, repackaged using bold PR, and sold at a much higher profit. Saatchi attempted to consolidate an aesthetic strategy for the otherwise dissimilar practices of the group during the *Young British Artist* group shows at The Saatchi Gallery from 1992 onwards.<sup>350</sup> While this group of artists found market success through Saatchi's collection, there has always been a vast discrepancy in market value dividing male and female artists.

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<sup>346</sup> This crisis had been caused by the right-to-buy scheme, tax relief on mortgages and relaxed lending criteria from banks.; Danny Dorling and James Cornford, 'Who Has Negative Equity? How House Price Falls in Britain Have Hit Different Groups of Home Buyers', *Housing Studies*, 10, 2 (1995): 158; 156.

<sup>347</sup> For example *Artscribe*. See also a short testimony of the barriers women face in finding gallery representation in the early 1990s, causing many artists and dealers to self-organise; Maureen Paley, 'On Women Dealers in the Art World' in *New Feminist Art Criticism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 96-100.

<sup>348</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 147.

<sup>349</sup> The first significant group exhibition by this group was their graduate show at the London Docklands in 1988. The exhibition included Angela Bulloch, Mat Collishaw, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Gary Hume, Steven Adamson, Michael Landy, Abigail Lane, Sarah Lucas, Lala Meredith-Vula, Stephen Park, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson and Fiona Rae, see: *Freeze*, ex. cat. (London: Unpublished, 1988); Simon Ford identified *Freeze* as the moment that the myth of the YBA began in Simon Ford, 'Myth Making', *Art Monthly*, 194 (March 1996): 3-9.

<sup>350</sup> It was only after these shows that the *Freeze* group – along with a number of other non-Goldsmiths artists such as Chris Ofili – began to gain recognition under the title "YBA" in the popular press. The term "Young British Artist" was first used in Michael Corris' 'British? Young? Invisible? w/Attitude?', *Art Forum*, 30, 9 (May 1992): 16; for more on the nomenclature see: Patricia Bickers, 'Sense and Sensation', *ArtForum*, 211 (Nov. 1997): 1-6; for the Saatchi show catalogues see: Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists: John Greenwood, Damien Hirst, Alex Landrum, Langlands & Bell, Rachel Whiteread*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1992); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists II: Rose Finn-Kelcey, Sarah Lucas, Marc Quinn, Mark Wallinger*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1993); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists III: Simon Callery, Simon English, Jenny Saville*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1994); *Young British Artists IV: John Frankland, Marcus Harvey, Brad Lochore, Marcus Taylor, Gavin Turk*, ex. cat. (London, Saatchi Gallery, 1995); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists V: Glenn Brown, Keith Coventry, Hadrian Pigott, Kerry Stewart*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1996); see also, Rita Hatton and John A. Walker, *Supercollector: A Critique of Charles Saatchi* (London: Ellipsis, 2000).

In 1999 Saatchi paid around £1,000,000 for Damien Hirst's *Hymn* (1999), a modest-sized sculpture with little overall reputation within his oeuvre or the YBA movement.<sup>351</sup> By comparison, Saatchi paid just £150,000 for Emin's *My Bed* (1998), a much larger piece that has become an emblem of the movement overall, Turner Prize shortlisted and arguably one of the most recognisable artworks by a female artist created during the 1990s. In 1998 UNESCO published a report on the problems female artists faced in the arts industry, noting that their recognition required:

...both cognitive realisation and emotive respect. Women's rights as human rights must be recognised along with their past and present achievements. Society will only then be able to make full use of the wealth of talent, expression and experience contributed, but often not recognised sufficiently [...]

Economic as well as cultural development heavily depend on creativity and innovation. Without productivity, especially in such fields as media/new technologies, sustainable development will not be achieved. There have been efforts to improve the role and the status of women by reflecting on their economic importance in the marketplace as consumers or cheap labour. Such efforts need to be reconciled with societal needs, emphasising individual creativity/talents as opposed to pure market demands.<sup>352</sup>

This report suggests that the recognition and status afforded to creative outputs by men is not often replicated for women. Indeed, the Women's Art Library revealed that by the 1990s in Britain women were still rarely appointed as professional fine art lecturers despite forming 68% of the student population.<sup>353</sup> This material reality is confirmed

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<sup>351</sup> Amelia Jones 'An "Other" History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970' in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 176; Jones argument was based on an article by Alicia Foster, 'Is This Fair? Two Renowned Brit-Artists; Two Very Different Price Tags', *The Guardian* (7<sup>th</sup> April 2004), accessed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/apr/07/art.gender>.

<sup>352</sup> Danielle Cliche, Ritva Mitchell and Andreas Wies, 'Women and Cultural Policies', *Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development* (Unpublished Conference Report: Stockholm, 1998), accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021, at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000116392>

<sup>353</sup> Pauline Barrie, 'Preface' in *New Feminist Art Criticism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xiv.

if we look closer at auction records. Hirst's sale record is for the medicine cabinet *Lullaby Spring* (2022), selling for £15,712,067 at Sotheby's in 2007.<sup>354</sup> His second and third records were for *Golden Calf* (2008) at £15,199,219 and *The Kingdom* (2008) at £14,047,368.<sup>355</sup> By comparison, Emin's works have a much lower secondary market value, with her top three records coming in at £2,546,500 for *My Bed* (1998); £2,322,000 for *Like a Cloud of Blood* (2022); and £722,500 *Mad Tracey from Margate Everyone's Been There* (1997).<sup>356</sup> The sales records of other female artists from the YBA come in at lesser still: Lucas at £757,544 for *Ace in the Hole* (1998); Sam Taylor-Johnson at £142,000 for *Wrecked* (1996); and Gillian Wearing at £52,735 for *Self Portrait at 17 Years Old From Album* (2003).<sup>357</sup>

What these numbers suggest, at least in the case of the YBA, was that the material reality of being a female artist equated to being valued at just a fraction of what a male counterpart of similar standing could be. If we expand this analysis to take into account the artists from *Bad Girls*, the difference is even more pronounced. For example, Helen Chadwick's highest auction price is just £20,926 for *Piss Flowers* (1991-1992) or £115,096 for Sue Williams' *Tighter Flocky with Green Yellow* (1997).<sup>358</sup> As proposed earlier, this complicates Susan Faludi's idea of postfeminism as a neo-conservative "backlash" against women's improved material conditions, given that they show no considerable progress.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Coline Milliard, 'Art Market Analysis: What Is the Work of The YBAs Really Worth?', *Art Net* (March 30<sup>th</sup> 2014), accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021, at <https://news.artnet.com/market/art-market-analysis-what-is-the-work-of-the-ybas-really-worth-7795>.

<sup>355</sup> Coline Milliard, 'Art Market Analysis: What Is the Work of The YBAs Really Worth?', *Art Net* (March 30<sup>th</sup> 2014), accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021, at <https://news.artnet.com/market/art-market-analysis-what-is-the-work-of-the-ybas-really-worth-7795>.

<sup>356</sup> 'Tracey Emin', *Art Net* (auction records correct on 13th December 2022), at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>

<sup>357</sup> 'Sarah Lucas', *Art Net*, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023, at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>; 'Sam Taylor-Wood', *Art Net*, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023, at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>; 'Gillian Wearing', *Art Net*, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023, at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>.

<sup>358</sup> 'Helen Chadwick', *Art Net*, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023, at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>; 'Sue Williams', *Art Net*, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2023, at <https://www.artnet.com/price-database.com>.

<sup>359</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1991).

For McRobbie, it was not simply the conservative backlash calling for a retraditionalisation of women's familial roles that led to the eschewal of feminism, but the 'ghostly existence' of feminism in popular culture.<sup>360</sup> This blocked the potential for intergenerational and crosscultural solidarities amongst women by presenting older versions of feminism as outmoded. According to McRobbie, postfeminism encouraged women to fully submit to consumer culture; tend carefully to their appearance through the fashion and beauty industries; control their fertility given their new sexual freedom; strive for career success given the new found access to education and the labour market.<sup>361</sup> This creates 'an economic rationality which envisage[s] young women as endlessly working on a perfectible self, for whom there can be no space in the busy course of the working day for a renewed feminist politics'.<sup>362</sup> What the auction records and statistics, as well as McRobbie's formulation of postfeminism, suggest is that the refusal of feminism in this period might have been motivated by women seeing no significant shift in their actual material conditions.

### **Why Impolitics?**

As the evidence from art criticism above suggests, the bad girl phenomenon has often been interpreted as apolitical or politically undecided.<sup>363</sup> This chapter however attempts to interrogate feminist detachment in these works, to

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<sup>360</sup> This was characterised by the film *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) based on the Independent's column 'Bridget Jones' Diary' by Helen Fielding (1995-1997). While Jones mentioned her awareness and respect for feminism, it was often side-lined as stifling her pursuit of pleasure. Whether this be sex or shopping, these things were presented as antithetical to feminism, 'Bridget imagines herself in a white wedding dress surrounded by bridesmaids', but McRobbie notes 'the audience laughs loudly because they, like Bridget, know that this is not how young women these days are meant to think'; Angela McRobbie, 'Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and The New Gender Regime' in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 27-39; Helen Fielding, 'Bridget Jones' Diary', *Independent* (28<sup>th</sup> February 1995).

<sup>361</sup> This new technology of control moves away from the Foucauldian "disciplinary subject" and becomes self-regulating; Angela McRobbie, 'Top Girls? Young Women and the New Sexual Contract' in *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008), 54-94; see also, Angela McRobbie, 'Top Girls? Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract' in *Cultural Studies*, 21, 4-5 (July/September 2007): 718-37.

<sup>362</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Top Girls? Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract' in *Cultural Studies*, 21, 4-5 (July/September 2007): 718.

<sup>363</sup> I will develop this argument later in the chapter. Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 6-14; Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999); Rosemary Betterton, "'Young British Art' in the 1990s", *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*, eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

better understand what it is that these works communicate about the material conditions of women in Britain. The impolitical is used as a way of interpreting artworks that employ a politics of refusal. Apter and Esposito's conceptions of impolitics are helpful here because they provide two axes upon which I have found a language for speaking about artworks that resist taking part in the formal sphere of politics. As a reminder, the term does not mean antipolitical or apolitical, nor is it the simple negation of the political, but rather, as stated by Esposito: '[t]he impolitical *is* the political, as seen from its outermost limit'.<sup>364</sup> By this, what is meant is that the impolitical allows us to see where politics has failed to provide oppositional poles from which respectful adversaries might present their positions, and thus have been refused.<sup>365</sup>

In Apter's conceptualisation, she considers how actions outside of the spaces of classical political theory can impact political institutions - activities such as fallible human desire, handshake agreements or community organising on a micro-level.<sup>366</sup> While Esposito and Apter both use the impolitical as a way of dislodging the limits of the political, Apter's axis of the impolitical means 'contrary to, or wanting in policy; unwise; imprudent; indiscreet; inexpedient; undiplomatic, as in, an impolitic ruler, law, or measure'.<sup>367</sup> While Esposito's axis can be understood as a mode of recognising the spaces where politics breaks down, Apter's impolitics constitutes a refusal of obedience:

A strongly impolitic way of doing politics connotes gestures of refusal, non-cooperation and civil disobedience [...] It assaults conventions of *bienséance*, good taste, and liberal tolerance with obscene gestures and nasty retorts. It points to instances of violent *disaffiliation* or disidentification with a community, a *habitus* of citizenship, a select political estate, a given set of identitarian affiliations.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]), 13.

<sup>365</sup> As stated in the Introduction, Mouffe's notion of "agonism" is helpful in understanding the ways that adversaries must have mutual respect for one another in political debate; Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>366</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018).

<sup>367</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 84-8.

<sup>368</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 90.

We might recognise, as will be argued in this chapter, a similarity in tone between Apter's conception of impolitics as impolite and uncouth, and the way that the bad girl phenomena positioned itself as not '...seeking equal participation in a despoiled social system' but instead seeking to 'diagnose its maladies'.<sup>369</sup>

### ***Bad Girls (1993-1994)***

The exhibition *Bad Girls* opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London from the 7<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1993, and later travelled to the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow from the 29<sup>th</sup> January to 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1994.<sup>370</sup> The exhibitions were co-financed by the ICA and CCA, which both operated using public funding. One newspaper article about the CCA run in Glasgow highlighted several differences between the two exhibitions.<sup>371</sup> The article noted a roster of writing, performance and music that took place alongside the exhibition in alternative spaces such as Glasgow Film Theatre and King Tut's. This included Scottish artists such as Donna Rutherford and Leslie Hill, as well as several artists like Annie Sprinkle, Penny Arcade and Pamela Sneed. By presenting these Scottish artists alongside artists from the US pursuing liberationist strategies, the Glaswegian exhibition arguably positioned itself as closer to a politics of liberal feminism than the London run, which is why

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<sup>369</sup> Christine Tamblyn, 'No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Art', *Art Journal*, 50, 2 (Summer, 1991): 53.

<sup>370</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993). These UK exhibitions happened, coincidentally, in the same year as a series also entitled *Bad Girls* in New York and Los Angeles, for a comparison of these exhibitions see: Jan Avgikos, Benjamin Weissman and Michael Corris, 'Bad Girl Blues: Bad Girls', *Artforum* 32, 9 (May 1994): 86.

<sup>371</sup> Brennan states: 'Scottish Bad Girls, it seems, reach more readily for the pen than for the palette. So, in collaboration with Harpies and Quines - Scotland's own feminist magazine - there is an evening of new writing (read by the authors) while the February issue of H & Q is given over to the consideration of what makes a Bad Girl bad in her own eyes or in the eyes of others. Read it and learn. Scottish Bad Girls are also prone to forming rock bands - hence the involvement of King Tut's Wah Wah Hut where, as part of the Bad Girls music season, there's a Girl Noise Valentines Bash (February 14, but of course), featuring Pink Cross, Batfink, and other new Scottish talent. Using outside venues - Glasgow Film Theatre and King Tut's - will, so the CCA hopes, bring the season to the notice of a widespread audience some of whom never go to exhibitions or performance events. And what Bad Girls has Mark Wardell, events director at CCA, recruited for the performance element of the six-week season? There is, for the moment, no British equivalent of Annie Sprinkle, LA's self-proclaimed sex-goddess whose one-woman show includes her famed Public Cervix Announcement. Also from America -- Penny Arcade (a hit at least year's Fringe) and Pamela Sneed, whose work looks at black women's search for identity and personal freedom. But there is also our own Donna Rutherford, whose *Ochone I saw* (and thought very fine) last October. She is in a double bill with Leslie Hill who also draws on personal history as a way of exploring attitudes and family systems. Emilyn Claid introduces dance into the process of romance and reality with her company piece *Laid Out Lovely* while the IDA Institute - Ann Whitehurst and Pat Wycher - will invite all-comers and all passers-by to exchange the Fax of Life with them in a long distance, across the wires'; Mary Brennan, 'The Bad Girls are Coming to Town, So Beware', *The Herald* (26<sup>th</sup> January 1994): unpaginated.

this chapter opts to focus on the latter given it provides a more impolitical version of feminist refusal to be unpacked.<sup>372</sup>

The exhibitions were curated by Kate Bush, Nicola White and Emma Dexter and included works by Sue Williams, Dorothy Cross, Helen Chadwick, Rachel Evans, Nicole Eisenman and Nan Goldin. While each artist's style and medium differed, all dealt with themes such as pleasure, disgust, sex and aggression. The works engendered the scopophilic gaze whilst exposing the ways it objectified. The political programme of the curatorial strategy was indefinite enough that it did not privilege one over the other and it was perhaps on these grounds that *Bad Girls* divided opinion. In the catalogue the curators outline the show's separation from what they saw as 'hard edged didactic work' informed by feminist politics:

At grass roots level, younger women have rebelled against the puritanism and high moral ground claimed by 70s and 80s feminism in order to reconcile politics with pleasure. Against the background of this wider cultural transition, the work in *Bad Girls* might be seen as a reaction against the hard edged didactic work created during the 80s by artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer; work which put feminist gloss upon the power and manipulations of the media, movies and advertising.<sup>373</sup>

*Bad Girls* attempted to separate itself from earlier collective feminist strategies, which the curators positioned as restricting individual freedoms and embodied pleasure in art. While not strictly equivalent in all contexts, Whitney Chadwick places the international trend for *Bad Girl* exhibitions as part of a self-conscious reaction 'against the moralist tone of some 1970s and 1980s feminism to reconcile politics with pleasure, or to reinsert anger and confrontation as aspects of representation'.<sup>374</sup> Indeed, the curators proclaimed an 'unmediated enjoyment of materials' connected the artworks selected for the show, arguably pitting pleasure against the notion of a well-

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<sup>372</sup> Liberal feminism is mean in the sense defined by Alison Jaggar in 'Liberal Feminism and Human Nature' in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 173-203.

<sup>373</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 3.

<sup>374</sup> As mentioned, the *Bad Girls* title was also used in a number of unrelated exhibitions in the US at the New Museum, New York (1993), The Wight Art Gallery, Los Angeles (1994) and it is these that Chadwick is also referring to when describing the movement as international; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003 [1990]), 408.

defined feminist political programme yet still dealing with the problematics of gender in the works.<sup>375</sup> Several scholars have argued that the curators ignored the feminist attachments of these works, rendering the exhibition as postfeminist.<sup>376</sup> Picking up from where these writers left off, this section will argue that the exhibition represents an impolitical strategy and by reinterpreting a number of the artworks individually, this chapter will unpick the politics of refusal used to curate them.

In the international context there was a recognisable shift toward practices representing the body across the 1980s and 1990s, though not all of these should be considered feminist by default.<sup>377</sup> This “return to the body” was perhaps due to a number of rights debates around HIV, abortion and sexuality. Many artists responded to these social debates by representing the often-concealed processes of the corporeal, such as the pleasure-seeking, venerable, sexually explicit, or disgusting. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) Julia Kristeva proposes that by destabilising the borders previously considered to be solid and unchangeable, this deconstructs the illusion of bodies as coherent identities.<sup>378</sup> The abject, she writes, is that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’ and does not ‘respect borders, positions, rules’.<sup>379</sup> This provides a useful premise for artists transgressing social boundaries when considering illness, morbidity, or generally rejected corporeal functions in their art.

The renewed emphasis on the body represented a marked shift away from earlier feminist practices such as Mary Kelly’s, who opted not to directly represent the female body in order to subvert the potential for this kind of imagery to become objectified. Janet Woolf argued in ‘Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics’

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<sup>375</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 3.

<sup>376</sup> For example, Doris Guth, ‘A Short History of Women’s Exhibitions from the 1970s to the 1990s: Between Feminist Struggles and Hegemonic Appropriation’ in *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces*, ed. Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 29-40; Katy Deepwell, ‘Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s’ in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 152-65; Amelia Jones, ‘Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-Identity’ in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-69.

<sup>377</sup> Some international examples are: The 46<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale curated by Jean Clair (1995); *The Body and the East* (Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art, 1999); *Masculin/Feminin* (Centres Pompidou, Paris, 1995); *COIL: Body and Art* (Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj); *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1993).

<sup>378</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>379</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

(1990) that the body must be considered a legitimate site of cultural politics.<sup>380</sup> Following from this, exhibitions such as the Tate's *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century* (1995) explored contemporary representations of the body, considering the ways that society derived meaning from its representation including female artists such as Mona Hatoum, Susan Hiller, Jana Sterbak, Louise Bourgeois.<sup>381</sup> What set these considerations of the body apart from the bad girls phenomenon though was the notion of transgression.<sup>382</sup> Transgression functions by breaking taboos - exceeding limits, rules, and boundaries - that which '...opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order'.<sup>383</sup> In doing so, it 'prevents stagnation by breaking the rule', allowing for movement into a more politically progressive space.<sup>384</sup> As I argue however, impolitical works refuse transgression as a route toward liberation.

### **Sue Williams, *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?* (1992)**

Included in *Bad Girls* is the painting *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?* (Fig. 2.7, 1992), an oil on canvas created with loose strokes in muted colour tones. Across the top, a body is depicted as being pulled apart by two horses running in opposite directions. The figure wears a t-shirt reading "Women's Movement" and the question "Are You Pro or Anti-Porn?" below. Williams is a US-based artist well known for tackling the topics of sexual abuse, rape and pornography in her artwork. In this image, a narrative emerges at specific points: '[p]ainting this horse is the maddest thing I've ever done' is written in the centre, but the stream of consciousness fades to invisibility, never revealing Williams' actual stance on pornography. Williams' piece references the pornography debate that erupted in the US during the early 1980s, when radical feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin attempted to

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<sup>380</sup> Janet Wolff ed., 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics, in *Feminine Sentences Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 120-141.

<sup>381</sup> Among others included in this exhibition were Joseph Beuys, Mona Hatoum, Susan Hiller, Jana Sterbak, Louise Bourgeois and Bill Viola; Francis Morris and Stuart Morgan (eds.), *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century*, ex. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1995).

<sup>382</sup> The concept of transgression was frequently evoked in art criticism across the mid-1980s and late-1990s. See Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002); Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression' in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000); Charles Penwarden, 'Of Word and Flesh: An Interview with Julia Kristeva,' in Stuart Morgan and Frances Morris (eds.), *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century*, ex. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1995), 21-30; Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (Routledge: New York, 2003).

<sup>383</sup> Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (Routledge: New York, 2003), 7.

<sup>384</sup> Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (Routledge: New York, 2003), 7.

pass legislation removing pornography from public consumption.<sup>385</sup> Representing each side of the debate in the image are Williams' two stallions, who threaten and command an answer from the viewer, forcing them to choose a side. The legislation MacKinnon and Dworkin sought to pass would have meant that women could treat material that exploited their bodies as a violation of their civil rights. But fundamentalists and right-wing groups quickly capitalised on the abolition of pornography for their own agenda; the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) used it as an opportunity to curb the funding of any work of a sexually explicit nature, which came to include Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of BDSM culture for example, along with other LGBTQ+ and feminist representations of the female body.<sup>386</sup>

The pornography debate also saw expression in Britain; groups such as the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, Lesbians Against SadoMasochism (LASM), Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship (CPC) fought against what they perceived as violence against women encouraged by pornographic representations of the body.<sup>387</sup> Katherine Harrison and Cassandra Ogden's *Pornographies: Critical Positions* (2018) note how difficult questions around sex, desire and pleasure divided different branches of feminism.<sup>388</sup> There also emerged feminist justifications in favour of pornography by groups such as the Feminists Against Censorship, and Perverts Undermining State Security (PUSSY) who felt the censorship of pornography played into the denial of non-heteronormative sexual desire.<sup>389</sup> This was spurred by the government's introduction of Section 28 in 1988 (not repealed until 2000), which prohibited local authorities from

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<sup>385</sup> Here MacKinnon and Dworkin are labelled as radical feminists as defined by Jaggar in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 83-122; for a compilation of their views, see Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>386</sup> For more on the context of this debate, see: Steven C. Dubin, 'Arresting Images: Impolitic Act and Uncivil Actions', *Journal of Arts Management*, 23, 3 (Fall, 1993): 255-262; Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*, (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Timothy Murphy, *Reader's Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Chicago; London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 411.

<sup>387</sup> Katherine Harrison and Cassandra A. Ogden, *Pornographies: Critical Positions* (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2018), 30; Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006); Cherry Smyth, *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992).

<sup>388</sup> The question of BDSM divided opinion, with some arguing that even queer representations of it implied a male dominated power-structure based on exploitation. Following this, the London bookshops Gay's the Word and Silvermood and Sisterwrite refused to stock Della Grace's book of lesbian BDSM documentary photographs called *Love Bites* (1991), see Katherine Harrison and Cassandra A. Ogden, *Pornographies: Critical Positions* (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2018), 32.

<sup>389</sup> Another example is Lesbians Answer Back in Anger (LABIA).

‘promoting homosexuality or by publishing material’ that banned the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in school sex education.<sup>390</sup> This clause was later galvanised by Major, whose “back to basics” campaign endorsed socially conservative moral values like the nuclear family structure.<sup>391</sup> In this context, several anticensorship feminists were suspicious that attempts to remove pornography would further threaten the open discussion of homosexuality.

Smyth was involved in the pro-pornography campaign precisely for this reason and this is arguably reflected in her *Bad Girls* exhibition catalogue essay, where she upheld the emancipatory potential for embracing, rather than censoring, desire.<sup>392</sup> Williams’ *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?* can be positioned as an illustration of the multiplicity of feminisms that exist at any one time, as well as the rifts that had emerged specific to the context of 1992, the year of the work’s creation. In the exhibition catalogue, Smyth celebrated artists like Williams for continuing the trajectory of artist bad girls from the 1960s in relocating ‘the female body as sexual subject’.<sup>393</sup> Smyth implied a connection between bad girls and feminist artists who have ‘attempted to undermine dominant cultural iconography, which frames masculine as active, rational and omnipotent and feminine as passive, irrational and subordinate’.<sup>394</sup> Yet, by not naming any artist from the 1960s, nor implying that the show’s artists are feminist (instead implying that one can be a bad girl without being a feminism), Smyth effectively erased the work of previous generations of feminist artists who provided the possibility for this exhibition to take place.

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<sup>390</sup> ‘Local Government Act 1988’, *UK Public General Acts* (1988), accessed 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28>. This meant that many schools refused to offer non-heteronormative sex education, a particularly detrimental move in the face of the HIV epidemic of the mid-1980s.

<sup>391</sup> ‘The old values – neighbourliness, decency, courtesy – they’re still alive, they’re still the best of Britain. They haven’t changed, and yet somehow people feel embarrassed by them. Madam President, we shouldn’t be. It is time to return to those old core values, time to get back to basics, to self-discipline and respect for the law, to consideration for others, to accepting a responsibility for yourself and your family and not shuffling off on other people and the state’; John Major, speech at the Conservative Party Conference (Blackpool, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1993).

<sup>392</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 6-12.

<sup>393</sup> Cherry Smyth, ‘Bad Girls’ in *Bad Girls*, eds. Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 6.

<sup>394</sup> Cherry Smyth, ‘Bad Girls’ in *Bad Girls*, eds. Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 6. Writing elsewhere about the pornography debate Smyth notes, ‘Debates in Britain have tended to pivot on the oppressive nature of power without often recognising the possibility of women’s pleasure... Many radical feminists have striven to protect us from its corrupting force... Just as it has been taboo for women to express an interest in sex and sexual satisfaction, so feminism has prescribed further taboos declaring politically correct ways of having sex and seeking arousal’, Cherry Smith, ‘The Pleasure Threshold’, *Feminist Review*, 34 (1990), 153.

The curators of *Bad Girls* sparked controversy by engaging with these subjects without attempting to resolve, or take a defined position, on the debate. It is telling in this respect that they chose to include essays in the exhibition catalogue by anticensorship supporter Smyth, alongside Laura Cottingham's essay 'What's So Bad About 'Em', in which she noted finding the antipornography position carved by MacKinnon and Dworkin as 'much more substantive and persuasive than those of their critics'.<sup>395</sup> The exhibition therefore attempted to uphold the contradictions that rendered untenable a monolithic interpretation of second-wave feminism, stating '*Bad Girls* dares to attack on two fronts at once: offending proscriptive feminism as well as the reactionary forces of patriarchy'.<sup>396</sup>

The notion of impolitics is helpful here in revealing the politics nestled within Williams' contribution to the show. The work traces how the pornography debate had created an impasse by hardening into two camps. In presenting both sides of the argument but without identifying with either side, Williams demonstrated, I argue, how '[t]he impolitical *is* the political, as seen from its outermost limit'.<sup>397</sup> The outermost limit of political debate therefore becomes the moment of impasse represented in this work, in which political action becomes inert through the separation into a stalemate of two firmly opposing camps of "for" and "against" pornography. By positioning her own narrative voice in the register of madness Williams refuses the role of legitimate player in this debate, relinquishing the responsibility of choosing a camp to side with.<sup>398</sup> By declining to abide by an accepted rationale, compromise or decision-making structure Williams is arguably positioning herself outside of the formal arena of politics.

Here we might map the purposefully naive voicing of her art back to other artists considered in the group - for example, Emin. Williams' other work from the exhibition *A Funny Thing Happened* (Fig. 2.8, 1992) depicts

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<sup>395</sup> Cottingham also mentions that Williams attended consciousness raising sessions at CalArts in the 1970s. This shows that Williams was aware and engaged with the debates of second-wave feminism; Laura Cottingham, 'What's so Bad About Em?' in *Bad Girls*, eds. Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 60.

<sup>396</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 3.

<sup>397</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]), 13.

<sup>398</sup> The purposeful naivety of this work is important in presenting an obstacle to legitimate political player, in which women continue to live in a society in which sexual abuse and assault still exist.

using a confessional voice her experience of sexual abuse. The black and white paintings appeared like sketchy automatic drawings, akin to drawings one might find in a child's diary, but instead, these images recalled the graphic memories of rape. While not featured in *Bad Girls*, in Emin's work a similar employment of naivety can be found, which is useful for my analysis. In *Margate Suite* (Fig. 2.9 and 2.10, 1997) Emin recalls her sexual abuse at a young age in raw and confessional form. Using simple ink on paper she noted in the centre of a small 425 x 600 mm page 'everybodies [sic] been there' (Fig. 2.9) on one part, and 'I couldn't stop it' on another (Fig. 2.10). Emin's drawings appear like the recording of a child's daydreams, in which she sketched haunting images of her abusers, next to what looked like an outstretched leg attached to a body (perhaps Emin's) with their head scratched out.

The image's scrawled handwriting is emphatic given the use of capitalisation, yet childlike given the text's varying sizes and line spacing. While the subject matter evidences that feminist demands had not yet been met, Emin does not attempt to anchor these as the aims of her art. In an interview with Carl Freedman he asked '[d]o you see yourself as patriarchal?' and she replied '[i]f you mean I don't challenge men's authority, well then no, I don't challenge it. But then I don't challenge anyone's authority'.<sup>399</sup> It might be argued that this employment of a child's voicing is the attempt to refuse a place in the formal arena of politics, perhaps given that this has traditionally been a space encoded with patriarchal values, structurally resistant to the legitimacy of women's place in it. The purposeful naivety of this work is important, given that it resists the role of legitimate political player, perhaps reflective of these artists' experience of a society where women continue to experience sexual abuse and assault. These works question what it means to be a legitimate player in politics and how the voicing of those outside of that arena might be represented.

It is hard to position Williams' works as beyond the register of feminism: paintings such as *A Funny Thing Happened* (Fig. 2.8) depict in confessional form her own horrific experiences of sexual and physical abuse. It is also difficult to argue that such images refused political intervention, mainly when assessed against other postfeminist texts published during the period, such as Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism*

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<sup>399</sup> Carl Freedman, 'The Turn of the Screw' in *Tracey Emin: Works 1963-2006*, eds. Tracey Emin, Jeanette Winterson, Carl Freedman and Rudi Fuchs (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 332.

(1994).<sup>400</sup> Williams' confessional paintings, if anything, act as macabre reminders of the problems with postfeminist writing such as Roiphe's. The *Bad Girls*' curatorial strategy deflected the politics at play in these works, regardless of whether the artist states this as their intention or not. For example, if we take Nan Goldin's cibachrome photograph *Joey at the Love Ball NYC* it is difficult to see how this image of a drag queen claims femininity as a bodily property, or a makeover paradigm premised on self-surveillance. Instead, the drag queen consciously performed femininity as a mode of survival. This image was not so much about sexualisation, commodification or even the pursuit of pleasure, so much as it is a document of fragile relationships navigating the terror of HIV.

Doris Guth mentions *Bad Girls* in *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces* (2016), rightly arguing that by viewing the work only in terms of sensuality, the curators of *Bad Girls* ignored the social capacity of the works.<sup>401</sup> All of the works had a clear political investment and for many, this new liberated "attitude" towards desire, the body and its representation, acted against the aims of feminism, trivialising the artworks of *Bad Girls* by conflating them under superficial themes of sex and pleasure.<sup>402</sup> As a result, the popular press surrounding the exhibition was hugely divided and Iwona Blazwick explored this in the article 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls' (1994) for *Frieze*:

The title "Bad Girl" stresses an infantile, naughty, rebellious posture whereas there was actually a very serious and powerful thrust to a lot of work in the show. I suppose it aimed at trying to find a young audience who are going to respond because it feels trendy - the rationale being not to look didactic, agit-propish or

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<sup>400</sup> Roiphe's polemic disparages what she sees as a culture of "victimisation" caused in part by second-wave feminism. She problematically claims that feminism views women as victims of sexual objectification, causing them to deny and become fearful of their sexuality; Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994).

<sup>401</sup> Doris Guth, 'A Short History of Women's Exhibitions from the 1970s to the 1990s: Between Feminist Struggles and Hegemonic Appropriation' in *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces*, ed. Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 29-40.

<sup>402</sup> Another example is Nicole Eisenman's works, which were about undoing negative stereotypes of lesbian sexual intercourse. Noting this, Harmony Hammond argued that the exhibition reinscribed heterosexuality as normative; Harmony Hammond, 'Against Cultural Amnesia' in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 555-60, 560; Iwona Blazwick, 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls', *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpagged, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

oppressive when certain aspects of feminism could be seen to be all of these things.<sup>403</sup>

Blazwick was the Director of Exhibitions at the ICA at the time. The contributions to her article captured the exhibition's controversy and her discomfort with the show. She invited a range of artists, writers, and curators to respond. The critic B. Ruby Rich accepted that it was a show 'by curators, not academics or activists' but that she was happy nonetheless to see them seize back the 'messy ground of political correctness'.<sup>404</sup> Curator Nicola White defended the title "bad girls", arguing it functioned akin to the notion of queer: taking what was once a pejorative term and turning it into a positive one using irony.<sup>405</sup> However, other responses to 'Who's Bad' were less positive about the message, including even the artists themselves. Williams remembers that her dealer had declined to lend a piece to the *Bad Girls* show at the New Museum in New York, but the curators had secured a piece from a collector regardless: '[w]hen it comes to women's art shows I try to avoid controversy. I try to be more accommodating. But no means no'.<sup>406</sup>

When the press were critical of the exhibition, it only played back into the logic of *Bad Girls*. For example, Brian Sewell's vehement attack of the exhibition as 'anti-male prejudice at its silliest and most obsessive - hysterical and violent propaganda utterly contemptible as art', read as a performative misreading of the show by a male critic likely intended to entertain newspaper readers.<sup>407</sup> From the multiple contributions to Blazwick's article, the force of the *Bad Girls*' message seemed to emanate from how it was curated, rather than something inherent in the works or the artists' intention. Indeed, something is haunting about the deeply traumatic experiences such as rape or

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<sup>403</sup> Iwona Blazwick et. al., 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls', *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpaginated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

<sup>404</sup> Iwona Blazwick et. al., 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls', *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpaginated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

<sup>405</sup> Iwona Blazwick et. al., 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls', *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpaginated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

<sup>406</sup> Iwona Blazwick et. al., 'Who's Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls', *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpaginated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

<sup>407</sup> Brian Sewell, 'Bad Girls', *The Standard* (12th November 1993), unpaginated.

bulimia depicted in some of these images, which cannot be justified by the triviality of the term “bad girls” which implies guilt, whether it is intended as self-conscious or ironic.<sup>408</sup> It could be argued that *Bad Girls* allowed in the name of pluralism a widening of acceptable aesthetic interpretation, but if we are to attend to images that reproduce sexual abuse, nudity and pornography as satirical, then the severing of these topics from feminist histories leaves the curators in danger of parodying of feminism’s genuine demands and ignoring the transgressive potential of the works.

### **Rachel Evans, *Untitled* (1990)**

Rachel Evans’ self-portrait colour photograph *Untitled* (Fig. 2.11, 1990) depicted the artist’s face surrounded by strawberries, signalling sweetness and abundance. Her clear skin, piercing blue eyes and soft blonde hair play to a clichéd register of youthful innocence and was created as a tongue-in-cheek illustration for an article about the artist for *Blitz* magazine. Lori Waxman and Catherine Grant argue that depictions of girlhood can represent a fluid state of transition, associating girlhood not with immaturity but with the state of “becoming”.<sup>409</sup> However, as one article in *Artforum* noted ‘[i]n an art-world context, the irony of the image’s staged feminine sweetness and innocence was unproblematically evident’ but ‘the image was republished without the artist’s consent in *Newlook* magazine, a publication well known in France for its mix of life-style articles and soft-core pornography’.<sup>410</sup>

It can be argued that the curators presented this work in the exhibition impolitically, given they refused to provide the context surrounding the work that might allow for the viewer to grasp its potentially subversive connotations.<sup>411</sup> This highlights the problem with undecided representations of girlhood. Writing about the

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<sup>408</sup> In Ellis’ critique of irony in the YBA might be seen as equivalent on this point (though she was not talking about *Bad Girls* specifically), she states ‘... I would define the ironic as a refusal to state a sincere political or ethical stance, or if in stating a stance, to continually undermine this, or even to change interpretation as suits. It is the opposite of what used to be called “engaged” or “committed” or “sincere” work’; Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 11.

<sup>409</sup> Lori Waxman and Catherine Grant (eds.), *Girls Girls Girls! In Contemporary Art* (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011), 89.

<sup>410</sup> Anon., ‘Rachel Evans’, *Artforum*, 30, 9 (May 1992), unpaginated, accessed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019, at <https://www.artforum.com/print/199205/rachel-evans-57982>.

<sup>411</sup> Other works from Evans’ practice illustrate the critical capacity of her work and her exploration of the constraints of girlhood, for example in *All Things Nice* (1988) Evans presents herself iced into a ballgown, perfectly embodying heteronormative desire, yet also

prevalence of depictions of young women in narrative photography across the 1990s, Lucy Soutter acknowledged that these images ‘present and sustain semiotic and political ambiguity’ and by ‘leaving open the potential that their stance might actually be masochistic, misogynistic or crassly materialistic is another optional overlay, to be retained or discarded by the viewer at whim’.<sup>412</sup> This arguably allowed *Newlook* magazine to easily reinterpret Evans’ piece for reception in an entirely different context.

Jessica Taft has problematised the appeal of postfeminism to young women, highlighting how the popular “girl power” discourse replaced feminism with a depoliticised alternative creating a barrier to women’s political subjectivity.<sup>413</sup> As an example, even though the Spice Girls invoked a connection to sexual equality ‘they make clear that Girl Power is not feminism, but instead is going to be a new way of being girls/women, one that kicks feminism, not embraces or extends it’.<sup>414</sup> Taft suggested that by positioning this quote next to an image of the band draped over a bed wearing sexually suggestive nightwear, as had been done in a Spice Girls fan book, it quelled the possibility for this as a real call for social and political change but instead ‘implies that Girl Power is softer, sexier, less active than feminism [...] by emphasising beauty and appearance’.<sup>415</sup> These observations were entrenched through the huge proliferation of teen magazines that emerged in Britain at the time. Publications like *Mizz*, *Bliss*, *Sugar* or *Top of the Pops* - also exemplified by the cover of *Young & Modern* considered earlier in the chapter (Fig. 2.1).

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completely constrained by it given she is unable to move due to the stiffness of the icing. In *Harvest* (1990) Evans presents an array of jam jars with gingham tops, make to look like a Women’s Institute contribution. On closer inspection however, the labels describe sexually explicit fantasies.

<sup>412</sup> Lucy Soutter, ‘Dial “P” for Panties: Narrative Photography in the 1990s’ (1999) in *Girls Girls Girls! In Contemporary Art*, eds. Catherine Grant and Lori Waxman (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011), 46, 58.

<sup>413</sup> Taft observes that the Spice Girls fan book *Girl Power* (1997) proclaimed in large pink block letters that ‘...feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse’; The Spice Girls, *Girl Power* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1997), 49, quoted in Jessica Taft, ‘Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance’ in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 69-78, 71.

<sup>414</sup> Jessica Taft, ‘Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance’ in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 71.

<sup>415</sup> Jessica Taft, ‘Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance’ in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 71.

Magazines such as this contained articles aimed at women with self-help topics such as beauty or attracting the attention of boys. Women's art journal *Make* published a short critique of these publications entitled 'Feminism Squeezed Out: Reading Popular Teen Mags' (1997),

This new script defining itself against the established culture of femininity was inevitably snapped up by the commercial in Britain and the US. Magazines like *Elle*, *Marie-Claire*, and even *Vogue* started to flirt with this new brand of feminism. Yet where *Just 17* and *Sassy* were speaking to young women in a new language, magazines like *Elle* missed the point, merely regenerating their own tired formulas of femininity with style tropes of the bad girl. Soon a general move towards this sweet but sassy femininity was taken up by most of the new magazines to emerge in the mid-1990s. *Sugar*, *Mizz*, *Bliss* all had titles that reflected this pre-adult girl world, yet their content failed to contain the bite or irony of their predecessors. Concurrently girl culture not only established itself within publishing but spread to fashion and, of course, to the artworld. The current obsession with the girl and its recuperation by the mainstream culture is analogous to the revival of the lad in masculine culture, the complications of being men and women are miraculously resolved with a return to something more basic, simple and cute.<sup>416</sup>

Thompson saw certain merits in providing a space for discussing the parts of women's lives previously considered trivial or too private for publication, yet, she also recognised the ways that this emphasis on girlhood does not constitute a long-term strategy given '...feminism's impact on magazines destined for older women is far more diluted, squeezed out by advertising and a more persistent, older type of femininity which is unable to reinvent itself'.<sup>417</sup> There is of course benefit to invoking girls as potentially powerful people. Still, the problem with ads, articles and popular culture that emphasised girl power was that women were either infantilised as being at a lesser stage in development or as losing this power as they age.

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<sup>416</sup> Else Thompson, 'Feminism Squeezed Out: Reading Popular Teen Mags', *MAKE* (1<sup>st</sup> September, 1997): 3.

<sup>417</sup> Else Thompson, 'Feminism Squeezed Out: Reading Popular Teen Mags', *MAKE* (1<sup>st</sup> September, 1997): 3.

In *Seeing Differently* (2012) Amelia Jones argues that this also prevented meaningful conversations about how social factors like age, race, class, physical ability, and sexuality impacted women. She positioned the postfeminist connotations of *Bad Girls* as emblematic of postidentity discourses, recognising how the media championed postfeminism as a marketing tool whilst overlooking its antifeminist undertones:

While not proclaiming explicitly the situation of post-feminism, essentially this is what many were identifying as a post-feminist condition; it is typical of the state of identity politics in art discourse by the late 1990s and before 9/11. It also paralleled a strong turn, from [Sue] Williams and her cohorts onward, towards increasingly exhibitionistic self-displays among feminist artists; ultimately much of the work of this ilk since 2000 has paraded under the guise of “radical” reversals of fetishism while simply selling the female body as a commodity in the most overt fashion. The nuances of generations of feminist visual strategies are, with these works, often completely lost.<sup>418</sup>

Jones objected to these discourses of postidentity - of terms such as postfeminism or postblack.<sup>419</sup> She pointed to the ‘convenient blindnesses’ behind these concepts, whose strategic ignorance of identity acted to quiet uncomfortable debates around their meaning in society. When Jones’ book was published in 1993 she noted that, ‘issues of identification (how we identify the bodies we see, whether in representation or in real time and “live”) still guide and even overdetermine every experience we have in the contemporary world’.<sup>420</sup> What postfeminism actually did was quietly proffer its subject as affluent, white, heterosexual, young, and able-bodied.

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<sup>418</sup> Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 143; see also Amelia Jones, “‘Post-Feminism’: A Remasculinization of Culture’ (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000* ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 498-506.

<sup>419</sup> Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 154.

<sup>420</sup> Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 21.

Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin's *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype* (2008) addresses the bad girl image, positioning it as a myth enlivened by the media.<sup>421</sup> Chesney-Lind and Irwin argue the image has actually effected a greater policing of girlhood, justifying the disciplining of "disobedient" female bodies, which have far greater consequences for women of colour from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds where the "bad girl" image is more likely to result in incarceration or police brutality.<sup>422</sup> Chesney-Lind and Irwin's writing might be interpreted alongside Jones', showing the detrimental impact that ignoring the nuances of identity have when we give meaning to objects. By appearing to uphold the values of pluralism, postfeminism therefore deters users from critical thinking or viewing themselves as political subjects, corroborating McRobbie's statement that 'the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom'.<sup>423</sup>

While not an image from *Bad Girls*, Joy Gregory's *The Blonde* (Fig. 2.12 - 2.13, 1998) is an example of how postidentity discourses in art flatten experiential factors between bodies.<sup>424</sup> The artwork consists of photographs and drawings depicting blonde hair. Gregory recalled photographing her subjects and asking them about their decision to dye their hair blonde - the reply she normally got was that it signalled 'a big personality change temporary or permanent'.<sup>425</sup> By representing the uses of blonde hair Gregory attempted to stress the positive and potentially humorous sides of assimilating new identities by omitting racial signifiers, instead 'around the notion of

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<sup>421</sup> Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin, *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype* (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>422</sup> Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin, *Beyond Bad Girls: Gender, Violence and Hype* (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 2008), 45; see also Lola Olufemi, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

<sup>423</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, 3 (2004): 260.

<sup>424</sup> The work started as an exhibition displayed in a shopping centre and was then transferred to a webpage currently accessible through the artist's website and the INIVA archive; 'The Blonde', *Joy Gregory* (1998), accessed 2nd May 2020, at <https://www.joygregory.co.uk/project/the-blonde/>; 'Joy Gregory', *INIVA*, accessed 2nd May 2020 at <https://iniva.org/library/digital-archive/people/g/gregory-joy/>.

<sup>425</sup> Ingrid von Rosenberg, 'Female Views: Cultural Identity as a Key Issue in the Work of Black and Asian British Women Artists', *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Art*, ed. Lars Eckstein et. al. (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2008), 235.

blonde beyond the old stereotypes associated with the fairy princess, the dumb, and the perfect sex object'.<sup>426</sup> But in asking 'Is Blonde just the new *post-feminist, post-colonial* hair colour?' Gregory's work unintentionally clarified Jones' proposal: by smoothing over racial differences through the use of blonde hair, the ideal subject of postidentity was potentially reinscribed as white.<sup>427</sup> Kimberly Springer suggests that 'forces determined to maintain the status quo use "post" formulations to attempt to make us believe we are beyond particular forms of oppression or liberation struggles'.<sup>428</sup> But the invisibility of women of colour in the historical conceptualisation of postfeminism (which is also why in a large proportion of the artworks in engagement with racial politics is absent) reminds us of the persisting importance of sensitivity to identity and the ways this intersects with gender.

Through an analysis of representations of women in film Springer asked why, if we are beyond discrimination as the post-civil rights discourse implied, that '[e]ven when they are not on screen, women of colour are present as the counterpart against which white women's ways of being [...] are defined and refined'.<sup>429</sup> She extended her critique of postfeminist backlash culture to include a backlash against racial inclusion, arguing that it constituted a double loss for women of colour.<sup>430</sup> Postfeminist cultural discourse therefore created an environment ostensibly beyond discrimination where political subjectivity was considered irrelevant, but this actually ignored how racism and misogyny continued functioning. By refusing to meaningfully engage with the political dimensions of the works included in the exhibition, the curators of *Bad Girls* bypassed intersectional frictions, ignoring

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<sup>426</sup> Ingrid von Rosenberg, 'Female Views: Cultural Identity as a Key Issue in the Work of Black and Asian British Women Artists', *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Art* ed. Lars Eckstein et. al. (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2008), 235.

<sup>427</sup> Joy Gregory quoted in Ingrid von Rosenberg, 'Female Views: Cultural Identity as a Key Issue in the Work of Black and Asian British Women Artists', *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts*, ed. Lars Eckstein et. al. (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2008), 235.

<sup>428</sup> Kimberly Springer, 'Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women: African American Women in Postfeminist and Post-Civil-Rights Popular Culture' in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 249-276, 273; see also, Jess Butler, 'For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion', *Feminist Formations*, 25, 1 (Spring 2013): 35-58.

<sup>429</sup> Kimberly Springer, 'Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women: African American Women in Postfeminist and Post-Civil-Rights Popular Culture' in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 249-276, 249.

<sup>430</sup> The term backlash was one first proposed by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006 [1991]).

oppression by deeming it irrelevant to the newly “liberated” postfeminist body, proving that Jones was correct to emphasise that ‘we are *not* by any means post-identity’.<sup>431</sup>

### **Helen Chadwick, *Loop My Loop* (1991)**

While the curators of the exhibition argued that they reclaimed the use of the term bad girls ironically, Cottingham acknowledged in the exhibition catalogue her issue with the label, given it had historically implied sexual deviancy.<sup>432</sup> For Cottingham, though all of the artists sought to undo repressive aesthetic codes the problem was that none actually claimed the label of bad girl for themselves. For the exhibition to label them as such solidified their place as subcultural and, in many ways, trivialised the force of their work. Helen Chadwick’s cibachrome *Loop My Loop* (Fig. 2.14, 1991) was a large photograph showing a golden blonde lock of hair and a pig’s intestine entwined in rich detail. The work provoked the enjoyment derived from the seductive silkiness of the hair as a representation of external beauty, at the same time as the disgust of bodily interiority represented by the intestine seeping with liquid as it decayed. The light box displaying the image heightened the photograph’s fetishist allure, whilst also causing the viewer to consider what it was about the uncanny object that brought both gratification and revulsion. Chadwick later noted the way that the curatorial message eclipsed any real debate around the work itself:

I’ve never known an exhibition where so much discussion focused on the title. It was curious, since most titles are pretty terrible, and most exhibition concepts are really just crude pegs to facilitate real encounters between artworks and viewers. In this case, I did think it was a cheap hook, but as a marketing ploy, it worked - the audiences were extraordinary. Even so, I did feel ambivalent about my work being presented under the “Bad Girls” rubric. To a large extent the title eclipsed any real debate around the work, which was a shame.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 154.

<sup>432</sup> Laura Cottingham, ‘What’s So Bad About Em?’ in *Bad Girls*, eds. Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 54-61.

<sup>433</sup> Iwona Blazwick et. al., ‘Who’s Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls’, *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994), unpagged, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

Chadwick's work pushed beyond the notion of political refusal at the heart of the impolitical, given that she had actively tried to establish her work as imbricated in contemporary debates about the politics of gender, pain and pleasure. *Loop My Loop* can be read using the notion of the abject, which is engaged through the combination of interior and exterior bodily facets. Kristeva argues that when we look at matter excreted from the body it destabilises the borders we had previously considered solid and unchangeable, thus shattering the illusion of bodies as coherent identities.<sup>434</sup> Kristeva's notion of abjection is guided by her understanding of psychoanalysis; she argues that bodily fluids are both disgusting yet intriguing to viewers because of their relation to the pre-Oedipal phase of development.<sup>435</sup> Following Lacanian thought, this is the time when a child is attached to their mother and has not yet made the distinction between self and other.

The uncanny in Chadwick's *Loop My Loop* emerges in the indeterminate, fluid, location of the body's borders, given we see the combination of hair, an exterior bodily facet, and the pig's intestine representing bodily interiority. Rosemary Betterton notes of this work that '[f]emininity is represented here both as surface and depth. The fetishized sign of femininity is inseparable from a visceral and forbidden interior'.<sup>436</sup> *Loop My Loop* might be interpreted as considering the ways that "woman as sign" in the dominant male discourse is both object of fascination (represented as a fetishised blonde lock of hair) at the same time a threat created by the sight of female lack. Chadwick's work presents a slippage between human and animal, interior and exterior, that ultimately presents the interconnectedness of erotic attraction and repulsion held apart within the conventional binary division of sexual difference.

It is hard to position Chadwick's work as an example of a politics of feminist refusal given her clear feminist sympathies. Niclas Östlind rejects positioning Chadwick as a postfeminist artist.<sup>437</sup> This pushes back against the ways that *Bad Girls* collapses differences between Chadwick's work and the newer artists in the show, separating

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<sup>434</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 56.

<sup>435</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 56-90.

<sup>436</sup> Rosemary Betterton (ed.), *An Intimate Distance: Women Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 142.

<sup>437</sup> Niclas Östlind, *Helen Chadwick: Notes on the Art of Helen Chadwick, Especially the Early Works* (Stockholm: Liljevachs Konsthall, 2005), 2-3.

Chadwick her influences in essentialist art of the 1970s. Not only this, but evidence that she has studied French feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous exist in her artwork development notebooks. Across Chadwick's notebooks held at the Henry Moore Institute Archive indications can be found showing that the artist was thinking carefully about the interplay of the female body in the social field, in one notebook she considers the difference between nudity and nakedness: 'Nudity - conventionalised, controlled sexuality, Nakedness - individual real self' later considering the ways that 'women accept "shame" imposed upon them' as well as exploring certain beauty rituals such as hairdressing that act to produce desire.<sup>438</sup>

Chadwick's notebook also reveals notes on Valerie Solanas' SCUM Manifesto (1967) recording 'woman relegated to child bearing function' and 'women support, receive, nurse' and so 'abort true nature'.<sup>439</sup> As Maria Luísa de Sousa Coelho notes 'excess destabilises the fixed meaning attached to the female body and the grotesque threatens to overthrow the discursive and social structure in which those meanings are grounded'.<sup>440</sup> Chadwick's work is integrally in conversation with feminist essentialist practices not because she attempts to find a stable, intrinsic and unitary meaning of femininity but because she explores how to unpick logocentric "truths" such as the notion of an inherent femininity. While not included in the exhibition, Chadwick's other works such as *Piss Flowers* (1991) or *Billy Bud* (1991) explore the body as a site where social, cultural and political contradictions can be held in tension, destabilising the possibility for an essentialist feminist practice. As De Sousa Coelho argues,

[r]ather than inscribing Chadwick in a feminist tradition that has reclaimed a female language and a separatist history, [Chadwick's] work offers the possibility of a feminist analysis and evidences, whether the artist acknowledges it or not, a feminist-oriented approach to gendered subjects and gendered bodies. [...]

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<sup>438</sup> Helen Chadwick, Notebook on early works 1975-1978 (Unpublished, March 1975), 19/E/2: 62. Folder held in the Helen Chadwick Archive, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

<sup>439</sup> Helen Chadwick, Notebook on early works 1975-1978 (Unpublished, March 1975), 19/E/2: 60. Folder held in the Helen Chadwick Archive, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; Valerie Solanas' radical feminist manifesto argued for the formation of SCUM, a group dedicated to ridding society of men, Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2013 [1967]).

<sup>440</sup> Maria Luísa de Sousa Coelho, 'The Feminine in Contemporary Art: Representation and Contamination in the Work of Helen Chadwick, Michèle Roberts and Helena Almeida' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Minho, 2012), 25.

Chadwick's preference for performative events and hybrid objects further allows the artist to question the notion of a natural female body and, as a result, of an intrinsically female art.<sup>441</sup>

By positioning Chadwick's work outside of the history of essentialist feminist practice and separating it from the notion of the abject, the curators of *Bad Girls* therefore elide the transgressive dimension of *Loop My Loop*. Transgression was a key term in the politics of representation in this period and across artistic practice it has come to mean the traversing of borders created by social norms. Transgressive art is often controversial initially, it might be disturbing or uncomfortable, but it creates a form of the sublime that asks us to reconsider our connection with the world around us.<sup>442</sup> The notion of transgression is helpful here in understanding the relationship between the impolitical and postfeminism. Artists such as Chadwick used abjection and the uncanny in art to encourage viewers to reconsider the social limits placed upon their lives. As mentioned, the notion of the impolitical is an attempt to represent the limits of politics, without constructing an alternative programme that might allow for the overcoming of a restrictive social norm or boundary. Therefore, we can say that the impolitical is not transgressive. Given that Chadwick can more successfully be positioned as having feminist attachments when separated from the curatorial strategy of *Bad Girls*, it is harder to define her work as inherently impolitical.

### **Impolitics and the YBA**

There were no YBA participants in the *Bad Girls* exhibition, but some of their works have been associated with the phenomenon by critics such as Jones, as mentioned.<sup>443</sup> Both of these groupings have been used to exemplify the

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<sup>441</sup> Maria Luísa de Sousa Coelho, 'The Feminine in Contemporary Art: Representation and Contamination in the Work of Helen Chadwick, Michèle Roberts and Helena Almeida' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Minho, 2012), 32.

<sup>442</sup> Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 76.

<sup>443</sup> Amelia Jones 'An "Other" History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970' in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog, 1998), 169-170; Barbara Solomon, 'Art Girls Just Wanna Have Fun', *The New York Times Magazine* (January 30, 2000), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/30/magazine/art-girls-just-wanna-have-fun.html?src=pm>; Clare Longrigg, 'Sixty Minutes, Noise: By Art's Bad Girl', *The Guardian* (4<sup>th</sup> December 1997), accessed 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019, at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/1997/dec/04/20yearsoftheturnerprize.turnerprize1>.

emergence of postfeminism in British art.<sup>444</sup> Considering artists such as Lucas, Wearing, and Taylor-Johnson alongside others from *Bad Girls* is helpful given that both groups have been considered to be lacking in critical, political and ethical rigour.<sup>445</sup> In pursuing a critique of postfeminism, this section will use an impolitical lens as a way of understanding the feminist refusal at the heart of these works, as well as a means of arguing against their potential positioning as apolitical.

The YBA artists came to prominence through the financing of Saatchi, who also attempted to delineate an aesthetic strategy for an otherwise dissimilar collection of artists.<sup>446</sup> Other group exhibitions that have come to define the movement are *Minky Manky* (South London Art Gallery, London, 1995); *Take Me I'm Yours* (Serpentine Gallery, London, 1995); *Life/Live* (Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1996-1997); *Sensation* (The Royal Academy of Art, London, 1997); and *Brilliant! New Art From London* (Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, 1996).<sup>447</sup> Though one magazine labelled works by these artists as '[n]ihilism with attitude, grungism, dysfunctional', there is very little holding these artists together in terms of style, medium or content.<sup>448</sup> Even the official catalogue for the collection written by Sarah Kent avoided identifying a common aesthetic, instead interviewing each artist individually she claimed:

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<sup>444</sup> Amelia Jones, 'Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-Identity' in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-69; Katy Deepwell, 'Bad Girls? Feminist Identity Politics in the 1990s' in *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art*, ed. Juliet Steyn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 152-65.

<sup>445</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999); Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 4-19.

<sup>446</sup> Catalogues for these group exhibitions backed by Saatchi included: Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists: John Greenwood, Damien Hirst, Alex Landrum, Langlands & Bell, Rachel Whiteread*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1992); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists II: Rose Finn-Kelcey, Sarah Lucas, Marc Quinn, Mark Wallinger*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1993); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists III: Simon Callery, Simon English, Jenny Saville*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1994); *Young British Artists IV: John Frankland, Marcus Harvey, Brad Lochore, Marcus Taylor, Gavin Turk*, ex. cat. (London, Saatchi Gallery, 1995); Sarah Kent, *Young British Artists V: Glenn Brown, Keith Coventry, Hadrian Pigott, Kerry Stewart*, ex. cat. (London: Saatchi Gallery, 1996); Rita Hatton and John A. Walker, *Supercollector: A Critique of Charles Saatchi* (London: Ellipsis, 2000).

<sup>447</sup> Adam Brooks (ed.), *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, ex. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1998); *Minky Manky*, ex. cat. (London: South London Gallery, 1995); *Take Me I'm Yours*, ex. cat. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1995); *Life/Live*, ex. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne, 1996-1997); *Sensation*, ex. cat. (London: The Royal Academy of Art, London, 1997); *Brilliant! New Art From London*, ex. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1996).

<sup>448</sup> Martin Gayford, 'Art '97', *Harpers and Queen* (January 1997): 47; this incoherence in style, medium and content has also often been associated with the teaching practices of Goldsmith's Fine Art courses, which stress the importance of training in all mediums and the removal of the boundaries between them. Key influential tutors to this group were Jon Thompson, Richard Wentworth and Michael Craig-Martin; Louisa Buck, *Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now* (London: Tate Gallery, 1997), 18.

Despite their work being lumped together under the rubric of “conceptualism”, often by those hostile to it, these artists do not form a group or a school. Many of them studied at Goldsmiths’ and some are friends, but others have never met nor even heard of one another. Kerry Stewart graduated only recently, Jenny Saville lives in Scotland, Carina Weidle has returned to Brazil and, although most of the others live in London, it is a big city. There is no café society or artists’ meeting place and these people do not form a cosy coterie.<sup>449</sup>

Kent concluded that the works pose questions that are hard to answer and ‘simply say what they feel’ and that ‘[t]hey do not stake any claims [...] Nor do they have overblown expectations about changing the world’.<sup>450</sup>

As argued above, both Stallabrass and Ellis reject the ethical premise of the YBA given the artists’ abrogation of moral positioning.<sup>451</sup> Ellis’ writing is more useful to me, given that she focuses specifically on the production of female artists from the YBA, which allows for a more nuanced consideration of the issues at play in these works rather than reductively dismissing them all as apolitical ‘one-liners’ as Stallabrass does.<sup>452</sup> For example, Ellis separates women from the YBA into subgroupings, noticing that Emin, Rachel Whiteread and Anya Gallacio embrace sensuality and lived experience, whilst Lucas and Taylor-Johnson ‘leave us only as passive alienated observers’ - this chapter will focus on the latter artists given their works are more easily dismissed as apolitical.<sup>453</sup>

But like Stallabrass, Ellis argues that the YBA is challenging because ‘[m]any of the artists themselves are so resolute about claiming their political neutrality and their studied detachment from any socially located meaning, preferring a position of apolitical individualism’.<sup>454</sup> Ellis characterises the movement by its lack of ethical dimension

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<sup>449</sup> Sarah Kent, *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003), 6.

<sup>450</sup> Sarah Kent, *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003), 6.

<sup>451</sup> Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 6-14; Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999).

<sup>452</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 99.

<sup>453</sup> Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 7.

<sup>454</sup> Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 8.

and not through the use of any homogenous style or material, suggesting that '[t]he crucial emotion seems to be a distanced position combined with a refusal to honestly locate any meaning'.<sup>455</sup> This, to Ellis, is challenging because she defines the ironic as the rejection of: '... [stating] a sincere political or ethical stance, or if in stating a stance, to continually undermine this, or even to change interpretation as suits'.<sup>456</sup>

Betterton also argues that the parodic approach to the grotesque female body and gendered stereotypes evoked by these artworks fails the political commitment and intervention of much feminist-oriented art produced in the 1970s and, consequently, to change the place occupied by women and the female body in visual art. In Betterton's words:

The contradictory positioning of [Emin and Lucas] between the politics of feminism and a depoliticised post-feminism and between modernist shock and postmodern irony is typical of the ambivalent status adopted by many of the young British artists in the 1990s. The content and form of their work was often disturbing and challenging, yet their silence or indifference to its meaning effectively defuses - or confuses - theoretical and critical analysis.<sup>457</sup>

For Betterton, Ellis and Stallabrass, this undecidability allows viewers to see how these works capitulate to the consumer market and create a context in which it is difficult to see and understand the importance of identity. However, by interpreting these artworks as apolitical, these writers arguably diminish the artwork's political capacity and potentially obscure what the works might be communicating about the conditions of gender in their given context. Instead, impolitics can be used as a tool for understanding how these works do not represent apolitics, but might be more representative of these artists reaching a point of capitulation.

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<sup>455</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 8.

<sup>456</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 11

<sup>457</sup> Rosemary Betterton, "'Young British Art' in the 1990s', *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*, eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 302.

### Sarah Lucas, *Shine On* (1991) and *Summer* (1998)

*Shine On* (Fig. 2.15, 1991) is a photocopied newspaper collage comprising four 306 x 406 mm panels. Lucas enlarged a tabloid spread about a heatwave, featuring purposefully seedy headlines like ‘Baking Britain sizzles into the Naughty 90’s!’ next to images of partially clothed women at the beach. Betterton noted that ‘[art] criticism has paid little attention to the ways that exposure to tabloid culture, TV and magazines has impacted constructions of artistic identity on subjective and gendered pleasures of consumption’ and so instead of ‘deconstructing forms of popular culture from a critical distance, these artists go out and “live” them, identifying positively with their values...’.<sup>458</sup> Arguably, the growth of the tabloid press during this period fed into the polarised thinking around gender and it comes as no surprise that tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* in the UK ran troubling headlines like ‘Has feminism gone too far?’ or ‘Why feminism has failed most women’.<sup>459</sup> In the *Daily Express*, Marcela D’Argy Smith wrote ‘Feminism: the “F” word of the Nineties’ (1996).<sup>460</sup>

Lucas mentioned of her work ‘[j]ust look at the picture and think what you like. I knew that everybody would have a response to these pictures, whether they thought I was being gratuitous or whether they thought I was making a feminist point or [...] just carrying on the exploitation’.<sup>461</sup> As another example, in the self-portrait *Summer* (Fig. 2.16, 1998) Lucas displayed herself recoiling as a can of beer sprays in her face, the partially degrading action might be a reference to sexual encounter or contemporary pornography. Instead of positioning this approach as apolitical, it might be more helpful here to consider this approach’s undecidability as impolitical. In doing so, we can take seriously these representations of this “philistine voice” (more on this later) and better understand how they act to produce the postfeminist subject in art. Martin Prinzohorn observes that the ambiguities of these kinds of works resist both a definite stance, as well as the complete relinquishment of one:

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<sup>458</sup> Rosemary Betterton, ‘Why is My Art Not as Good as Me? Femininity, Feminism and “Life Drawing” in Tracey Emin’s Art’ in *The Art of Tracey Emin*, eds. Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 25.

<sup>459</sup> Miriam Saxton et. al., ‘Has Feminism Gone Too Far?’, *Daily Mail*, (15<sup>th</sup> March 1995): 62; Erin Pizzey et. al., ‘Why Feminism Has Failed Most Women’, *Daily Mail* (18<sup>th</sup> December 1997): 58.

<sup>460</sup> Marcela D’Argy Smith, ‘Feminism the “F” Word of the Nineties’, *Daily Express* (11<sup>th</sup> September 1996): 25.

<sup>461</sup> *Brilliant! New Art From London*, ex. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1995).

...the female authorship of this work [does not] offer a clear interpretation, and it would be wrong to regard Lucas' work simply as art with a part enriched by feminist strategies. Lucas does not make it as simple as allowing her work to be read from a particular angle. She can adopt or refer to a masculine, sexist stance - which means it is impossible to understand her work as simply ironic.<sup>462</sup>

Flicking through Lucas' catalogue raisonné, for example, one becomes almost bored with the references to heteronormative intercourse repeated through a masculinised voice.<sup>463</sup> Bodies become like empty signifiers, caught in sexual acts. When repeated over and over in her practice these images become dull, like a joke told too many times, and the viewer simply moves on, no longer finding humour in their misogynistic voice. As Kent notes, Lucas 'acts as a mirror, monitoring the sexism and misogyny routinely found there' but at the same time by reflecting a mirrored image of society back at the viewer she makes no claim to how we might interpret these lexicons of femininity and the female body.<sup>464</sup> But the problem with this dimension of Lucas' work is that it performs the very objectifying voice that the work seems to resist simultaneously. The purposeful crassness of the work prevents any suggestion that what she is doing here is feminist, but the impolitics of this work can be found in the repetition of the sexualised body to the point in which its political content dissipates, positioning itself at the 'outermost limit' of politics.<sup>465</sup>

One might say that Lucas' work fights for the right for the body to simply be a body, not always imbricated in a social matrix in which the female body is carefully scrutinised, regulated and hidden away. The body in Lucas' work purposefully fails to perform the role of political signifier - it is simply a body, and perhaps this was what Stallabrass, as a male critic, found most frustrating: Lucas' work remains undecided in its political positioning, therefore resisting containment or classification sought by critics to apprehend meaning. After all, Lucas states that

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<sup>462</sup> Martin Prinzohorn, 'The Bare Image' in *Sarah Lucas: Exhibitions and Catalogue Raisonné 1989-2005*, eds. Yilmaz Dziewior and Beatrix Ruf (Liverpool: Tate, 2005), 8-11.

<sup>463</sup> Yilmaz Dziewior and Beatrix Ruf (eds.), *Sarah Lucas: Exhibitions and Catalogue Raisonné 1989-2005* (Liverpool: Tate, 2005).

<sup>464</sup> Sarah Kent, *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, 2003 [1994]), 47.

<sup>465</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]), 13.

her work was responding to the ‘the nudity, titillation and hypocritical morality being served up daily to most people in this country’ but the point being ‘that it’s not necessary to take up an entrenched position, politically, in order to make a thought-provoking, concrete object’.<sup>466</sup>

While Lucas arguably displays female sexual oppression and parodies hypermasculinity by holding it up for analysis, Chadwick’s work instead explores the ways that gender binaries actually function through the incorporation of pleasure, disgust and fear - her work represents a process of breaking these categories down, where Lucas’ leaves them intact. In Paula Smithard’s comparison of Chadwick and Lucas she separates the two artists into generational groupings, noting that artists such as Lucas and Emin are responding to the impasse reached by earlier feminist artists.<sup>467</sup> In doing so, Lucas and Emin can be read using Hemmings’ loss narrative, given they move away from the possibility of feminism as a route toward gender equality, whereas Chadwick might be read using a progress narrative. Smithard’s article however represents a paradox in that she celebrates this new group of artists for overcoming the impasse reached by earlier feminist-oriented artists, at the same time as recognising how integral their work is to artists such as Lucas:

Although many of the women artists who have recently come to the fore resist the label or context of a feminist art practice, much of this work could not have taken on the aesthetics and forms that it has without the ground prepared by generations of artists since the late 1960s and early 1970s [...] In a sense Emin, Lucas and others are artists whose work shows the evidence of over twenty years of feminist art practice.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Beatrix Ruf, ‘Conversation with Sarah Lucas’ in *Sarah Lucas: Exhibitions and Catalogue Raisonné 1989-2005*, eds. Yilmaz Dziewior and Beatrix Ruf (Liverpool: Tate, 2005), 29.

<sup>467</sup> Paula Smithard, ‘Grabbing the Phallus by the Balls’, *Everything*, 21 (1996): 5-9.

<sup>468</sup> Paula Smithard, ‘Grabbing the Phallus by the Balls’, *Everything*, 21 (1996): 8.

However, one only needs to look at examples such as the portfolio letter press *Other Men's Flowers* (1994) to see where artists such as Chadwick, Lucas and Emin have collaborated in the past.<sup>469</sup> Instead of positioning Chadwick as a predecessor to Emin and Lucas, which is apart from anything else chronologically incorrect as both were active in London at the same time, it might be more accurate to consider these artists as existing simultaneously, thus allowing for the actual diversity of women's art practices at the time.

### **Philistine Pleasures**

In 'Spectres of the Aesthetic' (1996), Dave Beech and John Roberts attempted to articulate a theory for contemporary art that upheld pleasure as a critical position manifesting in what they saw as the character of the philistine.<sup>470</sup> What became known as the philistine controversy took place across *Art Monthly*, *Everything*, *Third Text* and the *New Left Review*, with contributions made by Roberts, Beech and Michael Archer supporting the "philistine mode of attention" and writers such as Stallabrass, Ellis and Stewart Home writing in opposition to Beech and Roberts.<sup>471</sup> While the focus of the philistine mode is not on gender specifically, but rather a more general notion of criticality in art, the debate provides a theoretical model that can be used to nuance the impolitical. I use it to show how several artworks of the YBA can be positioned closer to Apter's conceptualisation of the impolitical as a mode of incivility, discourtesy, and tactlessness.

In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Theodor Adorno dismisses the character of the philistine as unable to experience true aesthetic pleasure, given that philistines have no desire to step outside of their comfort zone for self-betterment,

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<sup>469</sup> *Other Men's Flowers* (1994) is a portfolio of 15 letterpress prints that included contributions by artists such as Sarah Staton, Stuart Brisley, Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Johnson, Sarah Lucas, Helen Chadwick, Gary Hume. The portfolio was curated by Joshua Compston and published by The Paragon Press to showcase contemporary art in London. Currently held at the Tate Archive; see also Jeremy Cooper, *No FuN without U: the Art of Factual Nonsense* (London: Ellipsis, 2000), 115.

<sup>470</sup> Dave Beech and John Roberts, 'Spectres of the Aesthetic', *New Left Review*, 218 (July-Aug. 1996): 102-27.

<sup>471</sup> Texts from this debate have been compiled in Dave Beech and John Roberts (eds.), *The Philistine Controversy* (London: Verso, 2002); see also Dave Beech, 'Chill Out: On and Off the Politics of Young British Art', *Everything*, 20 (May 1996), accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018, at <http://bak.spc.org/everything/e/hard/text/beece.html>; John Roberts 'Notes on 90s Art', *Art Monthly*, 200 (October 1996): 3-4; John Roberts, 'Mad For It! Bank and the New British Art', *Everything*, 18 (1996):15-19; John Roberts, 'Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art', *Third Text*, 35 (Summer 1996): 29-42; Julian Stallabrass 'Phoney War', *Art Monthly*, 206 (May 1997) 15-16; Stewart Home, 'From Arse to Arsehole: John Roberts and the Spectres of Philistinism' in *Disputations On Art, Anarchy and Assholism* (London: Sabotage, 1997), 15-24; Michael Archer, 'No Politics Please, We're British?', *Art Monthly*, 194 (March 1996): 11-14; Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 4-19.

and their joy needs no external validation.<sup>472</sup> But for Beech and Roberts this is exclusionary: the philistine, for them, is the spectre of aesthetics. What aesthetics has detached from art in the search for disinterest is, as far as Beech and Roberts are concerned, embodied pleasure that everyone experiences in some form, noting ‘[l]ike Odysseus strapped to the mast, the aestheticized body obtains its delights by immobilising and restricting itself’.<sup>473</sup> Predominantly geared toward understanding the YBA, their writing advocates for the potential benefits of an accessible art practice that holds hedonism and anti-intellectualism as a political position. Beech and Roberts propose that by allowing the categories despised by the disinterested viewer (libidinal pleasures such as the common, pornographic, abject, frivolous, or lazy) we might therefore create new modes of looking. While the debate does not attempt to intervene into the question of gender specifically, it provides a lens for interpreting the postfeminist return to the corporeal in contemporary art, in works by artists such as Lucas.

Given Beech and Roberts presented the philistine as an abstract concept defined as ‘[t]he revenge of the proletarian non-specialist spectator on postmodernism’s abstractly bodied theorist of pleasure’ the concept had often been coded as working class.<sup>474</sup> For *Bad Girls* curator Kate Bush, the philistine artists ‘...are working-class “bad” girls and boys who refuse to distance themselves from the “proletarian” energies and “alienated” pleasures of popular culture’ and this attitude could be used to interpret works by Taylor-Johnson, Emin and Lucas who by ‘annexing the common, rude, and entertaining elements of working-class popular culture in their art... produce work that resonates meaningfully with that culture’.<sup>475</sup> However, the problem with Bush coding the philistine as working class was that it opposed a refined bourgeoisie on one hand, with an unruly and pleasure-driven working class on the other, which in reality left neither room for undoing these class divisions nor considering the nuances of class that fall outside of this binary.

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<sup>472</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

<sup>473</sup> Beech and Roberts, ‘Spectres of the Aesthetic’, 102; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973; Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1947).

<sup>474</sup> Dave Beech and John Roberts, ‘Spectres of the Aesthetic’, *New Left Review*, 218 (July-Aug. 1996): 104.

<sup>475</sup> Kate Bush, ‘Young British Art’, *Artforum* 43, 2 (October 2004): unpaginated, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2019, at <https://www.artforum.com/print/previews/200408/young-british-art-7612>.

In 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class' (2000), Rita Felski noted the invisibility of the lower middle class in the confessional turn in literature and her writing provides a productive lens for interpreting the philistine mode with respect to both class and gender.<sup>476</sup> Felski unpacked the shame she felt in admitting her own identity as a member of the lower middle class, for which:

[t]he prevailing characteristic was an anxious display of refinement on a low income: an immaculately mown lawn, a carefully presented collection of knick-knacks and ornaments in a rarely visited front room, starched and fastidiously arranged lace curtains. These and similar items signalled cleanliness, respectability, and distance from the perceived grubbiness and disorder of working-class life [...] The purpose of culture was not to dwell on the unpleasant or distasteful aspects of life but to be positive, educational and morally uplifting.<sup>477</sup>

Felski's description of lower-middle-class structures of feeling directly contradicted the unruliness of the philistine mode. Given their reputation as reactionary and conservative-minded, representations of lower-middle-class life were largely invisible across contemporary art. Yet Felski notes that this was at odds with the reality of Thatcherite Britain 'as older forms of class polarization and class identification begin to dissolve [...] the lives of ever more individuals in the industrialized West are defined by occupations, lifestyles, and attitudes traditionally associated with the lower middle class'.<sup>478</sup> Felski noted that '[g]uilt is a sense of inner badness caused by a transgression of moral values', which it might be argued was what *Bad Girls* was performatively rejecting.<sup>479</sup> Arguably, the philistine mode might therefore be interpreted as nostalgia for traditional working-class ways of life, which were rapidly disintegrating in the new consumer-oriented meritocracy of the late 1980s and early 1990s. And for Felski, this held particular connotations for gender. The burgeoning lower middle class were gendered female in two ways:

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<sup>476</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, 115, 1 (2000): 33-45.

<sup>477</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, 115, 1 (2000): 40.

<sup>478</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, 115, 1 (2000): 34.

<sup>479</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, 115, 1 (2000): 39.

First, it contains large numbers of women, who are disproportionately represented in white-collar jobs, such as secretarial work. Divorce can also have an important effect on class status, causing women from middle- or upper-middle-class households to slide into the genteel poverty of the lower middle class. Second, many of the values and attitudes traditionally associated with the lower middle class are also identified with women: domesticity, prudery, aspirations toward refinement. (*Keeping Up Appearances*, a long-running British sitcom plays on the comic possibilities of this type of feminine gentility.) Whereas the working class is represented through images of a virile proletariat in left rhetoric, the lower middle class is often gendered female, associated with the triumph of suburban values and the symbolic castration of men.<sup>480</sup>

We might infer from Felski's writing that the obfuscation of lower-middle-class life went hand in hand with the romanticisation of the working-class male voice assimilated by cultural producers, such as Beech and Roberts, enforcing problematic stereotypes around the working class as a disobedient or unruly body politic.

In the article 'Bingo, or, the Calling of the Philistine' (1997) Beech locates a very specific person as possessing the philistine character - his mother.<sup>481</sup> He attempted to prove that using the term was not derogatory. He laid bare the tragic narrative of his mother's battle with cancer. Her pleasures in life during this period came from direct experiences, like playing bingo at a working men's club, chain-smoking cigarettes, drinking whiskey, and refusing to take her morphine prescription - most of which she knew were bad for her - in order to keep her bodily senses. She scoffed at the attempt to read a politics or value system into these actions, Beech quotes her as saying, 'Bloody idiots! They go to college and read all them books, and then they can't even see what's in front of 'em: we're just 'aving a laugh!'.<sup>482</sup> She basked in and enjoyed her alienation, not caring for the consequences:

The philistine can't claim the disinterest of the wise or the interests of the partisan radical but when popular pleasures are denigrated on behalf of these, the philistine

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<sup>480</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, 115, 1 (2000): 43.

<sup>481</sup> Dave Beech, 'Bingo, or the Calling of the Philistine', *MAKE* (April-May 1997): 16-17.

<sup>482</sup> Dave Beech, 'Bingo, or the Calling of the Philistine', *MAKE* (April-May 1997): 16.

represents a challenge to the extension of such “truths” to the contingencies of lived experience. It may be wise to run away from popular pleasures, it may be foolish to drink and smoke, it may be alienating to watch wall-to-wall TV and look forward all week to a night at the Bingo, but it is cold and cruel (and one dimensional) to think that philosophy and politics are the last word on pleasure [...].<sup>483</sup>

Manifesting the philistine in the character of his mother makes critique complicated, given that one would never wish to deny the value of someone’s last pleasures in life. Nevertheless, what appears to be key to the concept of the philistine in art is the desire to indulge in pleasures that we know are bad for both ourselves and society, just as Beech’s mother’s habits such as drinking, smoking and refusing to take her morphine were all in the name of a quick and easy thrill. In both the philistine and postfeminist sensibility there was a thrust toward the negation of the social in favour of individual pleasure. What the refusal of value systems here seemed to draw to the fore was perhaps something more critical for this debate than much of the literature thus far has allowed. For characters such as Beech’s mother, the continual cuts to the welfare system left her with little choice other than to enjoy the certain pleasures that she had. Perhaps, then, her *refusal* of politics speaks more to how she had been *let down* by politics.

An earlier essay by Roberts published in *Everything* and later in *Third Text* attempted to defend the philistine mode through its relationship with gender:

...the increased tolerance amongst women artists for the profane and illicit is perhaps where the voice of the dissonant philistine is at its strongest at the moment. Talking dirty - literally - and showing your bottom for the sheer delight of it has become a proletarian-philistine reflex against 80s feminist propriety about the body. Reinstating the word “cunt” as a mark of linguistic pride and embracing the overtly pornographic and confessional, have become a means of releasing women’s sexuality from the comforts of a “progressive eroticism” into an angry voluptuousness. A good indication of this is Tracey Emin’s unfazed presentation of her own sexual history, *Everybody I’ve Ever Slept With: 1963-1995*.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Dave Beech, ‘Bingo, or the Calling of the Philistine’, *MAKE* (April-May 1997): 17.

<sup>484</sup> John Roberts, ‘Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art’, *Third Text*, 35 (Summer 1996): 38.

This statement demonstrated how the application of the philistine mode was not only entwined with postfeminist sensibility, but the function of these two modes allowed for the remasculinisation of culture that Jones warns against in the article ‘Post-Feminism”: A Remasculinisation of Culture’ (1990).<sup>485</sup> Not only did describing Emin as “unfazed” by her own sexual history appear to be a misreading of her work - not to mention it being a history of sexual abuse and denied consent - but, to assume these artists are now somehow completely indifferent toward the exposure of their bodies for public consumption suggests a deep misunderstanding of female experience. Roberts’ statement revealed how the philistine mode in art held more consequences for female artists than it did for male artists, given it encouraged the erasure of sexual politics in these works.<sup>486</sup>

### **Gillian Wearing, *The Garden* (1997)**

In Gillian Wearing’s image *The Garden* (Fig 2.17, 1997) a group of women wearing oversized t-shirts printed with slogans such as ‘INCONSISTENT AND UNMOTIVATED BUT I’M FUN’ or ‘I May Not Be Brilliant But I Have GREAT BREASTS’ also conform to the philistine mode. These voices are purposely presented as playing “dumb” reproducing the stereotype of the rebellious teenager, perhaps illustrating the postfeminist shift from sexual object to sexual subject, given the phrasing on the t-shirts is written in the first person.<sup>487</sup> These phrases - whether performing to a masculine or feminine gaze - reduced the women to their sexual worth. But for advocates of the philistine mode this was intentional.

This philistine voicing could be found not just in art, but across other areas of popular journalism, too. Julie Burchill is a provocative writer who began her career with *NME* and *The Face*, then later founded the divisive

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<sup>485</sup> Amelia Jones, “‘Post-Feminism”: A Remasculinisation of Culture’ (1990) in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 496-506.

<sup>486</sup> This was particularly problematic for Ellis, who argues: ‘The deliberate absence of identity politics in much of the “young British artists” debate means that the traditional young white profile of the artist is enhanced. I detect a certain relief in John Roberts’ writing [...] that the few young women represented in this debate are not making overt reference to feminist thought (presumably the success of Black and gay artists and writers in addressing cultural hybridity are further examples of impossible earnestness, and also deeply un-stylish). This positive absence of debate around difference begins to assume an unsettling edge in the definition of “British”’; Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 14.

<sup>487</sup> This shift is discussed in Rosalind Gill, ‘Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, 2 (2007): 147-166.

*Modern Review*. Burchill speaks openly about her ‘slap-dash’, ‘scrappy’ and ‘born without the sensitivity gene’ approach to journalism that resulted in a number of libel cases, causing her to be sacked from a number of newspapers.<sup>488</sup> She is cognisant of movements like Wages against Housework and claimed to be a ‘militant feminist’ yet the protagonist of her book *Ambition* (1989), Susan Street, refers to feminists as ‘moustachioed milch cows who sit in the mud around airbases insisting that women are peaceful and loving and nurturing and that all the trouble in the world is caused by men’.<sup>489</sup> At the same time, Street expresses her frustration that ‘[i]sn’t it funny that when a woman acts like a human being, when she shows anger, pain and ambition, they call her a female dog?’.<sup>490</sup> Burchill casts Street as the bolshie “ladette” counterpart to her sensitive boyfriend who is ‘[f]air in both temperament and colouring, a basic blond dreamboat to be eaten up with the eyes and toyed with by the other senses’.<sup>491</sup> Street degrades her partner based on his “girlie” and sensitive nature and in doing so Burchill displays both the philistine incredulity toward her partner’s morality, at the same time as the postfeminist desire to reinstate women as possessing traits typically coded male such as independent thinking or the scopophilic gaze.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Apter’s understanding of the impolitical means ‘contrary to, or wanting in policy; unwise; imprudent; indiscreet; inexpedient; undiplomatic’.<sup>492</sup> The artworks considered in this section can be positioned as closer to Apter’s understanding of impolitics than Esposito’s, given that they purposely obstruct political readings. Rejecting ‘good taste... with obscene gestures’ were arguably what Ellis and Stallabrass interpreted as the apolitical dimension of the YBA.<sup>493</sup> Beech wrote ‘[t]he difference is that younger artists don’t see the body (or culture, or institutions, or whatever) as a battleground’.<sup>494</sup> The philistine mode might well be recognised

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<sup>488</sup> Mark Halliley (dir.), ‘When Toby Met Julie: The Story of the Modern Review’, BBC2, 60’00” (28<sup>th</sup> June, 2006).

<sup>489</sup> Julie Burchill, *Ambition* (London: Corgi, 1989), 142.

<sup>490</sup> Mark Halliley (dir.), ‘When Toby Met Julie: The Story of the Modern Review’, BBC2, 60’00” (28<sup>th</sup> June, 2006).

<sup>491</sup> Julie Burchill, *Ambition* (London: Corgi, 1989), 38.

<sup>492</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 84-8.

<sup>493</sup> Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018), 90.

<sup>494</sup> Dave Beech, ‘Chill Out: On and Off the Politics of Young British Art’, *Everything* (May 1996), accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018, at <http://bak.spc.org/everything/e/hard/text/beeceh.html>.

in the curation of *Bad Girls*, which sought to ‘reconcile politics with pleasure’.<sup>495</sup> The curators made no secret of wanting to move past ‘proscriptive feminism’, instead orienting themselves around an ‘unmediated enjoyment of materials’ and liberating pleasure they perceived had been prohibited by feminism.<sup>496</sup> Ellis’ critique of the YBA is a useful counter argument to Beech and Roberts’ argument; however, given the role of the affective quality of art and engagement with feeling is crucial in art given it allows ‘...us to deal with the physicality of a work and to engage with a sensuousness that feels and sweats, cries and caresses. The quality of irony by contrast leads to a disconnected - even false - experience both for artist and viewer’.<sup>497</sup> It becomes clear that both sides of the debate felt they were more sincerely representing the affective qualities of art. For Beech and Roberts, by playing the role of the philistine artists could allow access for the voices of those previously excluded from the world of fine art.

While the strategy of impolitics purposefully fails to transgress traditional social codes, it is important to recognise the reasons for which these artists and curators might have employed this strategy. The impolitical reveals a mode of thinking outside of the political’s formal arena, opening up places of entry for excluded modes of thinking. For example, in 1994, the year that the *Bad Girls* exhibition closed, women in the UK held fewer than 15% of ministerial positions in government.<sup>498</sup> In a study published in 1995, the UN noted that certain policy gaps prevent the equality of women, corroborating the evidence considered earlier in the UNESCO arts-specific study:

...governments do not consider much of women’s work to be economically productive and thus do not count it. If women’s unpaid work in subsistence agriculture and housework and family care were fully counted in labour force statistics, their share of the labour force would be equal to or greater than men’s. And if their unpaid housework and family care were counted as productive outputs in national accounts, measures of global output would increase 25 to 30 per cent.

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<sup>495</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (ed.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 3.

<sup>496</sup> Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (ed.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 3.

<sup>497</sup> Liz Ellis, ‘Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice’, *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 11.

<sup>498</sup> Division for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations Secretariat, *Worldwide Government Directory, 1994* (Washington D.C.: Belmont, 1994), unpagued.

Even when governments do consider women's work to be economically productive, they overlook or undervalue it. [...] Without good information about what women really do - and how much they produce - governments have little incentive to respond with economic policies that include women.<sup>499</sup>

What this suggests is that by the early 1990s, women still lagged behind men in terms of representation at a formal political level, as well as in economic reality. The impolitics of the artworks sketched across this chapter, therefore, provide a way of not only bearing witness to but attempting to reject the unchanging social codes woven across this society.

### **Sam Taylor-Johnson, *Fuck Suck Spank Wank* (1993)**

Thomas Ruff once insisted that photography 'can only show surface', severing the audience from a sensuous, embodied or psychological understanding of the sitter.<sup>500</sup> Arguably pitting itself against this attitude, the philistine mode attempted to reinsert not only anti-intellectualism into the realm of high art but also the pursuit of sensuality over the pictorial. 'The truth is', Roberts later stated in *Art Monthly*, 'playing dumb, shouting "ARSE" and taking your knickers down has become an attractive move in the face of the institutionalisation of critical theory in art in the 1980s'.<sup>501</sup> In his statement, Roberts was likely referencing a c-type print by Sam Taylor-Johnson entitled *Fuck Suck Spank Wank* (Fig 2.18, 1993). In the photograph, Taylor-Johnson stands in confident contrapposto in the centre of the frame. Her trousers are dropped to her ankles and her hands idle unperturbed at her sides. Given a pair of dark sunglasses conceal her eyes the viewer is left unsure of where her gaze rests. Her hair is tied up but unkempt. Her heeled shoes imply normative femininity, but which is also denied by the plain white underpants concealed underneath her baggy t-shirt. When asked about why her eyes are covered (and again in the image *Slut*, 1993)

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<sup>499</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 2.

<sup>500</sup> Thomas Ruff quoted in Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 148.

<sup>501</sup> John Roberts, 'Mad For It! Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art', *Third Text*, 35 (Summer 1996): 29.

Taylor-Johnson stated that she wanted to create both a confrontational and vulnerable image at the same time, whilst full disclosure of meaning is never given.<sup>502</sup>

A cabbage is visible on the studio kitchen counter next to the sunglasses. Much has been written on the sexual or uterine associations that cabbages have brought to paintings throughout history. For example, Colin Bailey wrote about the cabbage as erotic signifier in Northern Europe.<sup>503</sup> In works by sixteenth-century Northern European painters such as Pieter Aertsen's *Market Woman* (1567), women offered cabbage at market. The market seller's exchange of money for the displayed vegetable might be seen as analogous to the eliciting of the woman's own body for sexual encounter. Moreover, the layered folds of cabbage leaves might be said to echo the form of female genitalia. Bailey argued that Francois Boucher later deployed the vegetable in the laps of seated peasants in pieces like *Woman with a Cabbage* (1732-35) noting 'the cabbage as a cipher of burgeoning peasant sexuality [...]'.<sup>504</sup> The cabbage in Taylor-Johnson's photograph therefore carries an iconographic history potentially associated with female sexuality, class, or monetary exchange for sexual encounter, particularly when displayed next to the graphic reference on Taylor-Johnson's t-shirt. But using the iconography of the cabbage as interpretive frame has been denied by Taylor-Johnson. In an interview she recalled, 'I mean it was just like that, I was standing next to a fridge, and I was looking inside and there was this great big cabbage there', she denied any further interpretive logic by saying, 'it's just to throw you off the scent really'.<sup>505</sup>

Stallabrass notes that Taylor-Johnson flippantly included the cabbage in the corner simply so that the viewer might ask '[w]hat *about* the cabbage?' but that the joke, whether the audience understood or not, was actually in the fact that someone might ask in the first place, concluding that '[t]he work can be enjoyed on a number of levels, be found humorous, would shock some, but that seems to be it'.<sup>506</sup> Elsewhere, Dimitrakaki reads the words "Fuck"

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<sup>502</sup> Clare Carolin, 'Interview with Sam Taylor Wood', *Sam Taylor-Wood*, ex. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 2002), unpagged.

<sup>503</sup> Colin Bailey, "'Details that Surreptitiously Explain": Boucher as a Genre Painter' in *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Lee Hyde et.al. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 39-60.

<sup>504</sup> Colin Bailey, "'Details that Surreptitiously Explain": Boucher as a Genre Painter' in *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Lee Hyde et.al. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 50.

<sup>505</sup> Matthew Shadbolt, 'Sam Taylor-Wood Interview', *Matthew Shadbolt* (2<sup>nd</sup> Sept 1994), accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020, at <https://matthewshadbolt.com/sam-taylorwood-interview>.

<sup>506</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), 142.

“Suck” “Spank” “Wank” alongside the body of the partially undressed artist, implying a relationship between the two, and that somewhere here the audience is implicated by the imperatives on the t-shirt.<sup>507</sup> The graphic reference to sex in both the photograph’s title and Taylor-Johnson’s t-shirt coupled with her partial nudity have for Dimitrakaki connotations of contemporary pornography. This conjured the question of how the photograph strategised a labouring female body in service of capitalism’s visual culture, asking ‘[w]hat are we to make of this imbrication of the references to the mandates of a pornography industry and contemporary labour that bears such a clear gender dimension?’<sup>508</sup> Unlike Stallabrass, Dimitrakaki sets the artist’s intention aside to read this image as an enmeshing of material and visual practice specific to ‘when capital realised its global imperative not as a matter of mere geographical domination but also as a form of biopower organising specific forms of life and work, or more appropriately, of life *as work*’.<sup>509</sup>

Dimitrakaki recognises that Stallabrass played down the t-shirt’s associations with an LGBTQ+ activist group. Yet, she also avoids a full analysis of what bringing the knowledge of this hidden reference to queer activism might mean for the function of the image. Instead Dimitrakaki reads the picture as a pure aesthetic encounter not privileged to the knowledge of this hidden meaning, and in doing so shows how the politics of the t-shirt was extracted and dominated by a platitudinous offering up of the female body as sexual object. Dimitrakaki proposes that this voicing incites heterosexual porn. Based on this reading, it might be said that Taylor-Johnson betrayed the activist message on the t-shirt in service of what it fought against: the erasure of queer sexuality, which is often reproduced in the ways that critics such as Stallabrass have written about the photograph. This may be because the specific activist group was not recorded by Taylor-Johnson as integral to understanding the work, or again plays back into her refusal to position the work for the viewer, instead requiring them to interpret it freely. The same

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<sup>507</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 34.

<sup>508</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 34.

<sup>509</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 34.

slogan appeared on a t-shirt by Taylor-Johnson in the V&A's archive collection, but there was no record of its links with a gay activist group; the slogan was recorded instead as 'Sam Taylor-Wood 1993' (Fig. 2.19, 1993).<sup>510</sup>

One of the only critics to point to the t-shirt's actual origin was Michael Archer in the article 'Piss and Tell' (1993).<sup>511</sup> Here, he acknowledges that the slogan came from the activist group Queer as Fuck. The slogan's actual meaning was partly erased and trivialised in service of the artist's aims: symbolically but economically, given that Taylor-Johnson copyrighted the work as her own without reference to Queer as Folk. It might be said then that this image simultaneously distilled any political affiliation and rearticulated it in the form of an indefinite and impolitical mode. For many postfeminists, ridding the image of didactic associations actually allowed women greater freedom and control over their representation and lives in general.

While the abandonment of complicated questions around intersectionality were typical of postfeminism, it may be possible to reinscribe them through an analysis of the t-shirt's impolitics. While Stallabrass reads Taylor-Johnson's employment of sex-positive language as purely sensational, what he misses in doing so are the ways that she borrowed and reenacted the language of gay pride practices from the 1980s. This rhetoric had grown predominantly from protest marches across New York and London seeking to bring visibility to HIV, as well as the LGBTQ+ rights more broadly. By using sex-positive language the movement sought to reinstate symbols that had once been associated with shame and social stigma as symbols of dignity. This technique was often transposed by women in the 1990s through instances such as the *Bad Girls* exhibition or the rhetoric of the philistine or sexually promiscuous as modes of resisting labels of shame that had overwhelmingly been used to indict the female body throughout history.

### Conclusion

This chapter considered the London-based exhibition *Bad Girls*, by arguing that it actively denied links to past feminist art, implying that these references were no longer relevant to the lives of young women. This case study

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<sup>510</sup> 'T-Shirt', V&A, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020, at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O50789/t-shirt-taylor-wood-sam/>.

<sup>511</sup> Michael Archer, 'Piss and Tell', *Art Monthly*, 172 (Dec-Jan 1993/1994): 18-19.

opened a productive space for reinterpreting the politics of refusal active in this exhibition. I nuanced my synthetic conception of the impolitical (as emerging from two axes by Esposito and Apter) by analysing works such as Williams' *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?* or Chadwick's *Loop My Loop*. In doing so, what has become clear is that although the political referent in these works was concealed by the ways the artworks were curated. Upon closer analysis these artworks did seek to transgress certain social boundaries in service of gender equality by comparison. Therefore, not all works under the bad girls rubric should be treated as equally anti-transgressive, and certainly not apolitical as some scholars have implied. In the case of Chadwick's work, for example, when considering the piece in the context of her wider practice and in relation to the discourse of abjection, it became possible to see how this work was exploring the body as a site where the social, cultural and political contradictions are held in tension, destabilising the possibility for an essentialist feminist practice.

In this chapter, works that can be most directly applicable to the term "postfeminism" have been rethought through the impolitical, and this revealed to me that the impolitical dimension of *Bad Girls* could be found in the kind of language and framing devices used by curators that positioned them as a loss narrative. By applying the impolitical to *Bad Girls*, I have therefore been able to recoup the artworks in the exhibition from the postfeminist progress narrative (implying the exhibition exists in a time where feminism has been achieved and is no longer necessary) encouraged by their curatorial frame. Having recognised that it was not so much an inherent quality in these works that encourages the impolitics of *Bad Girls*, but rather the way these works were curated, this chapter then moved to consider what a firmly impolitical practice might look like by considering several works from the YBA grouping, which has arguably been more difficult to recoup from as an example of feminist loss.

Following Jones' association of the exhibition with a number of female artists from the YBA grouping, this chapter considered works by artists such as Lucas, Emin, Taylor-Johnson and Wearing that refuse feminist attachment in a similar manner to *Bad Girls*. Applying the notion of impolitics here was useful given it allowed this chapter to draw out those artworks that sat more comfortably under its categorisation than others - works such as Taylor-Johnson's *Fuck Suck Spank Wank* and Lucas' *Shine On* were considered to be examples of overt impolitics, for instance. It was argued that impolitics does not aim toward transgression, given it refuses, or remains undecided, in political commitment. Most artists across Chapter 2 were not participating in grassroots organising, activism or

collective action. Instead, they pursued individualised modes of art-making, which appeared on the surface as resistant to political positioning.<sup>512</sup>

The philistine controversy was used as a lens for understanding works by Lucas, Wearing, and Taylor-Johnson in particular - artists whom Ellis has noted 'leave us only as passive alienated observers'.<sup>513</sup> As a result, critics such as Stallabrass, Betterton, and Ellis, have dismissed these artworks as apolitical, given that the artists often refused to clarify the location of the political referent in the works.<sup>514</sup> By placing these artworks on Apter's impolitical axes - as examples of obstruction and tactlessness in art - I concluded that these artworks might be interpreted as reaching a point of capitulation at the persistence of gender inequality.

When considered together, Chapters 1 and 2 remind us that material inequality between sexes remains a constant throughout feminist time. While Chapter 1 argued that this directly feeds into return narratives like *Castlemilk*, which invoke the feminist past at the same time as affirming its relevance in the present, in Chapter 2 what became clear was that this material inequality was obscured by the rejection of feminism in the above case studies. Using employment statistics, auction records, and research provided by the Women's Art Library and UNESCO, this chapter considered the material context of the late 1980s and early 1990, which revealed that women were still far behind men in terms of financial success in the art world.

In conclusion, this chapter argues that postfeminist narratives of loss might be reinterpreted, allowing them to be rewritten using the more productive narratives of feminist return. Unpicking these impolitical examples of the rejection of feminism through a return narrative allow me to see why the material conditions of women might have led to a disillusionment with feminism in art. While it is clear that the mode of work presented in the bad girls phenomena differed substantially from that of *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, both were reacting to the socioeconomic

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<sup>512</sup> It could be argued that Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas' "The Shop" is an example of their collective organising toward marketable ends, which serves to undo the stereotype that these artists were working in isolated conditions; Jeremy Cooper, *No Fun Without U: the Art of Factual Nonsense* (London: Ellipsis, 2000), 73-5.

<sup>513</sup> Liz Ellis, 'Do You Want to Be in My Gang? An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998): 7.

<sup>514</sup> This chapter critiqued Stallabrass' writing for the ways he foreclosed his own conclusion about these works as one-liners, refusing to read the potential political connotations buried beneath the surface of the works. It was argued that Ellis also dismisses these works on aesthetic and moral grounds due to their refusal of political commitment, yet she provides a more useful critique for this analysis given she engages with the gendered dimensions of these works specifically.

reality of neoliberal transformation after a decade of Conservative governance that offered no significant material improvement to the lives of women.<sup>515</sup> ‘These issues are not particularly sexy – they are things like adequate provision for childcare’ one critic of *Bad Girls* noted, ‘even Riot Grrrls will eventually need someone to look after their babies while they go out rioting’.<sup>516</sup>

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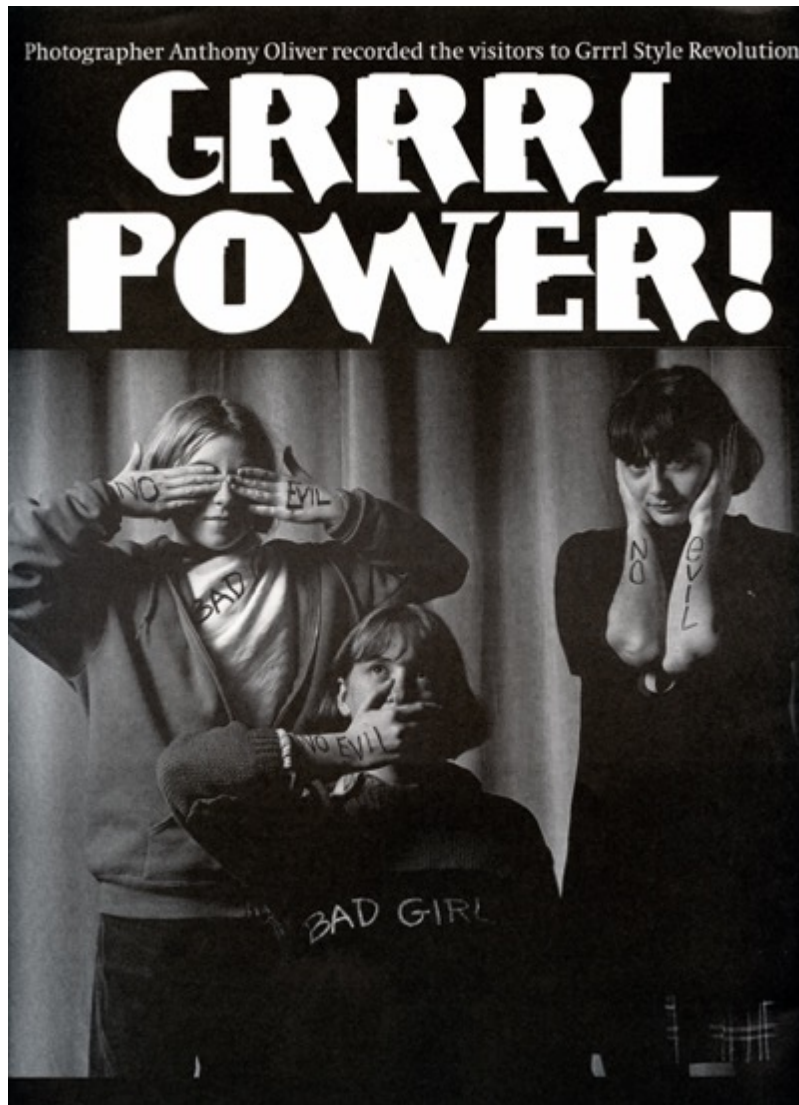
<sup>515</sup> Here neoliberal transformation is used in way intended by Angela Dimitrakaki and Nancy Fraser, considered in Chapter 1; Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History’, *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 97-117.

<sup>516</sup> Suzanne Moore et. al., ‘Who’s Bad? A Mixed Response to a Season of Bad Girls’, *Frieze*, 15 (March-April 1994): unpagged, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020, at <https://frieze.com/article/whos-bad>.

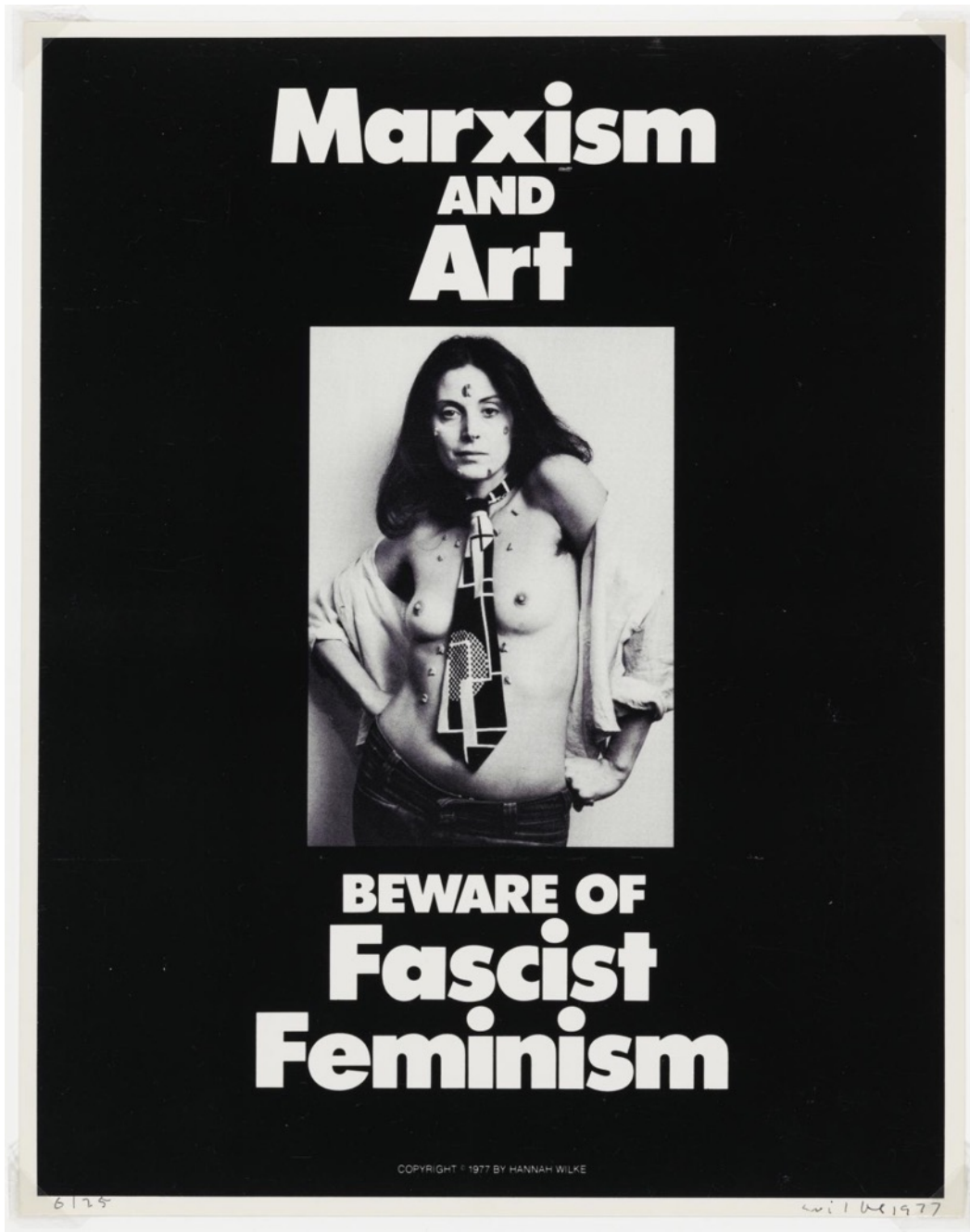
Illustrations



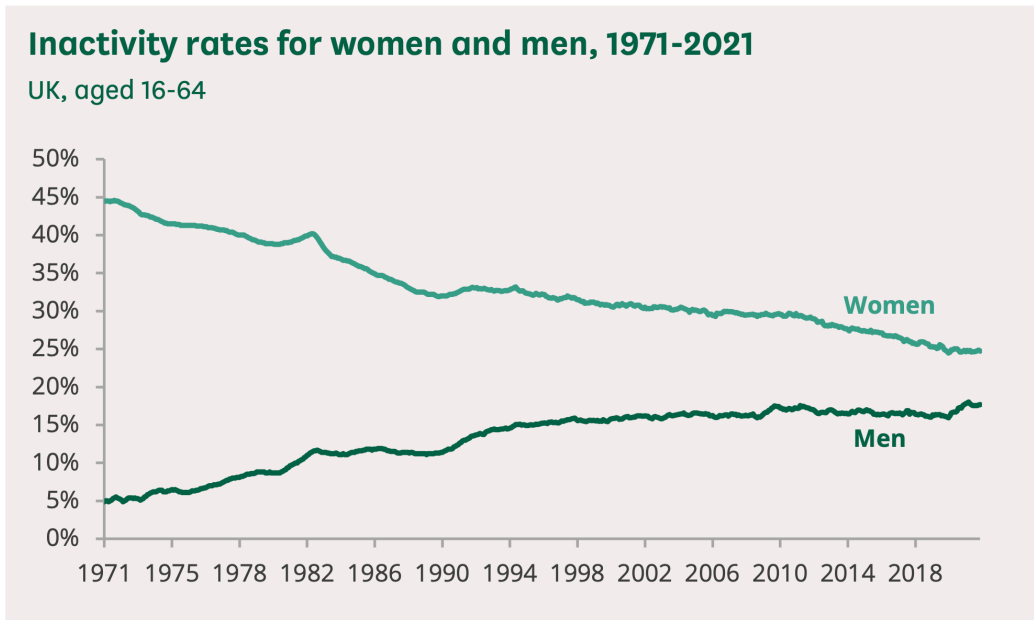
Fig. 2.1. Front cover of *Young & Modern*, August 1997 (Image: Young & Modern).



**Fig. 2.2.** *GRRRL POWER!*, 1993, Anthony Oliver, black and white photograph, 610 x 900 mm (Image: Anthony Oliver Archive).



**Fig. 2.3.** *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism*, 1977, Hannah Wilke, photograph by Les Wollam, lithograph on paper, 294 x 231 mm (Image: Tate Gallery Archive).



**Fig. 2.4.** Table showing economic inactivity rates for women and men in the UK 1971-2021 (Image: UK Labour Market Bulletin quoted in Susannah Irvine, Harriet Clark, Matthew Ward and Brigid Francis-Devine, ‘Women and the UK Economy’ in *Commons Library Research Briefing* (London: House of Commons Library, 4th March 2022): 14.)

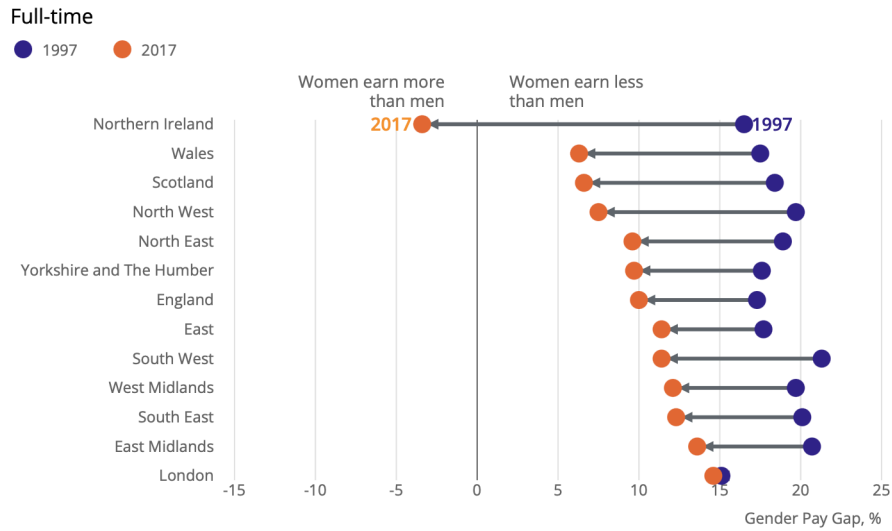
**Table 7**  
**Indicators on time use**

A. Time use of women and men in selected country studies

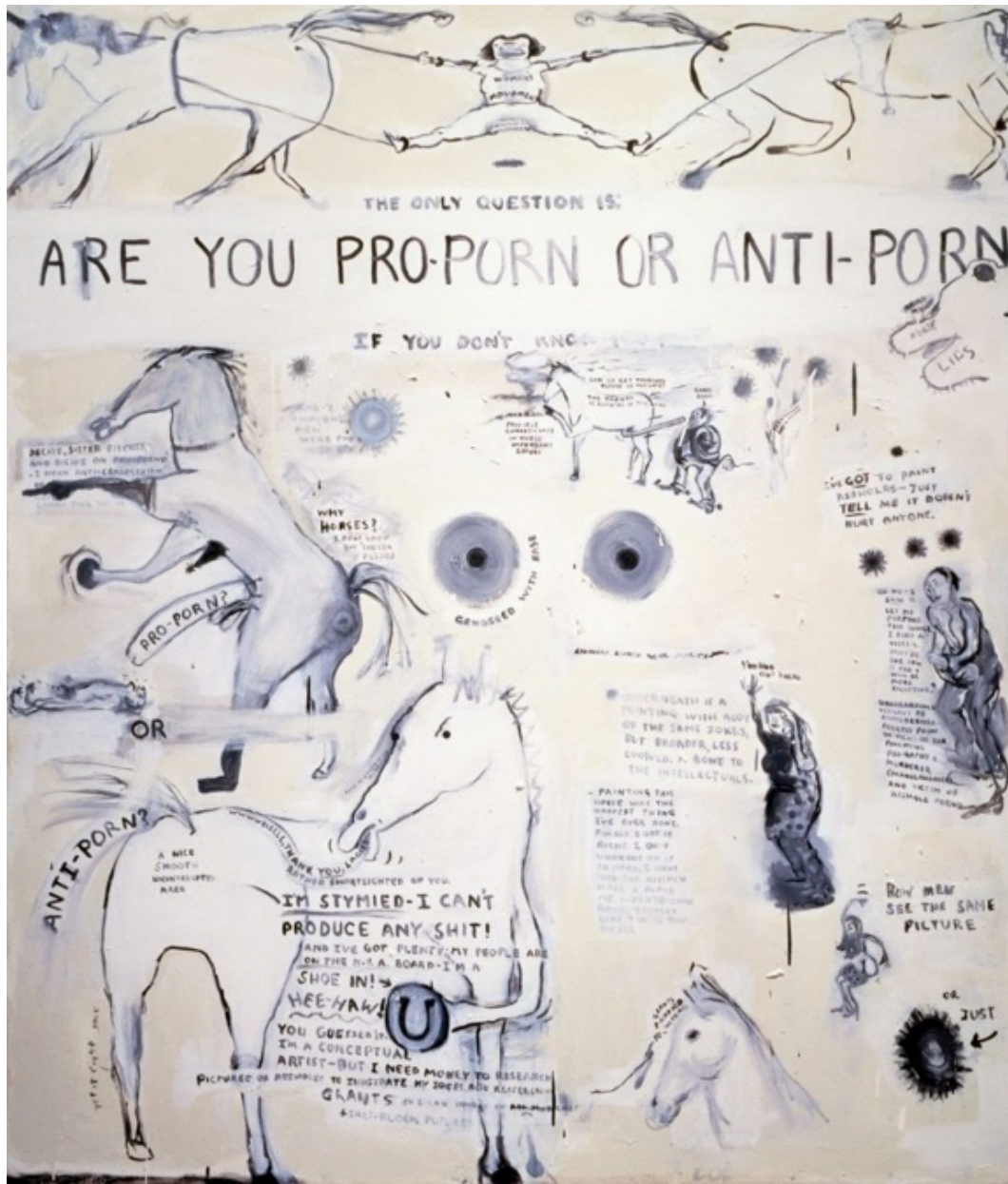
Country or area	Year	Time use in selected activities (hours per week)									
		Economic activity		Unpaid housework				Total		Personal care and free time	
		f	m	Household chores		Child care		f	m	f	m
<b>Northern America and Australia</b>											
Australia	1987	16.9	35.5	27.2	13.8	5.8	1.6	33.0	15.3	118	117
Canada	1971	18.8	41.2	29.5	8.9	6.2	1.5	35.7	10.4	114	116
	1981	17.2	30.7	23.0	11.1	4.3	1.5	27.3	12.5	124	125
	1986	17.5	32.9	24.6	12.1	4.3	1.4	28.9	13.5	121	121
United States	1965	18.7	48.3	32.1	8.8	5.7	1.3	37.8	10.0	111	109
	1975	16.7	37.6	27.6	9.6	4.4	1.3	32.0	10.9	119	119
	1986	24.5	41.3	29.9	17.4	2.0	0.8	31.9	18.1	112	109
<b>Western Europe</b>											
Belgium	1966	19.3	50.8	34.7	6.0	3.6	0.8	38.4	6.9	110	111
Finland	1979	21.8	30.0	22.5	10.8	3.0	0.9	25.6	11.7	122	125
France	1965	21.7	51.8	35.0	9.9	7.6	1.3	42.6	11.3	104	105
Germany*											
Federal Rep. of Germany	1965	13.3	42.4	39.3	10.2	4.9	0.9	44.2	11.1	111	115
Netherlands	1975	5.8	27.3	27.1	7.1	5.3	1.6	32.4	8.7	130	132
	1980	7.1	23.9	27.9	7.4	5.5	1.5	33.4	8.8	130	135
Norway	1972	14.4	40.0	32.8	5.7	4.4	1.2	37.2	6.9	117	121
	1981	17.1	34.2	25.1	7.1	4.8	2.0	29.8	9.2	121	125
United Kingdom	1961	16.5	45.7	31.3	4.3	2.6	0.4	33.9	4.8	118	118
	1975	17.2	39.6	27.1	4.9	2.4	0.6	29.5	5.5	121	123
	1984	14.1	26.8	26.4	10.3	3.6	1.1	30.0	11.4	124	130
<b>Eastern Europe and USSR</b>											
Bulgaria	1965	42.6	52.9	25.6	11.1	2.9	1.4	28.6	12.5	97	103
	1988	37.7	46.9	29.3	14.3	4.3	1.1	33.7	15.3	97	106
Czechoslovakia	1965	29.8	44.4	36.0	12.7	4.7	2.5	40.7	15.1	97	109
Hungary	1965	34.0	56.6	36.3	5.5	4.7	2.5	41.0	7.9	93	103
	1976	26.7	41.5	30.2	10.9	3.0	1.4	33.3	12.3	108	114
Poland	1965	30.5	52.2	33.5	9.7	5.3	2.7	38.9	12.4	99	103
	1984	24.9	42.2	30.5	7.7	4.4	2.0	34.9	9.7	108	116
Yugoslavia	1965	19.5	49.5	37.0	8.1	3.8	1.4	40.7	9.5	108	109
USSR	1965	43.0	53.2	32.3	14.0	3.6	1.4	35.9	15.4	89	99
	1986	38.5	49.0	25.7	14.6	4.4	1.5	30.1	16.1	99	103
<b>Latin America</b>											
Guatemala	1977	29.4	56.7	39.9	6.3	9.8	4.6	49.7	10.9	89	101
Peru	1966	15.1	52.1	36.0	5.6	4.5	0.5	40.5	6.1	112	110
Venezuela	1983	15.5	42.2	28.2	3.0	4.0	0.7	32.2	3.7	120	122
<b>Asia</b>											
Indonesia (Java)	1973	41.3	55.3	28.9	3.0	7.2	2.6	36.1	5.6	..	..
Nepal	1979	32.3	40.7	38.5	10.8	4.8	1.1	43.3	11.9	..	..

**Fig. 2.5.** Table showing indicators of time use between men and women in selected countries (Image: United Nations, *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1991), 101.)

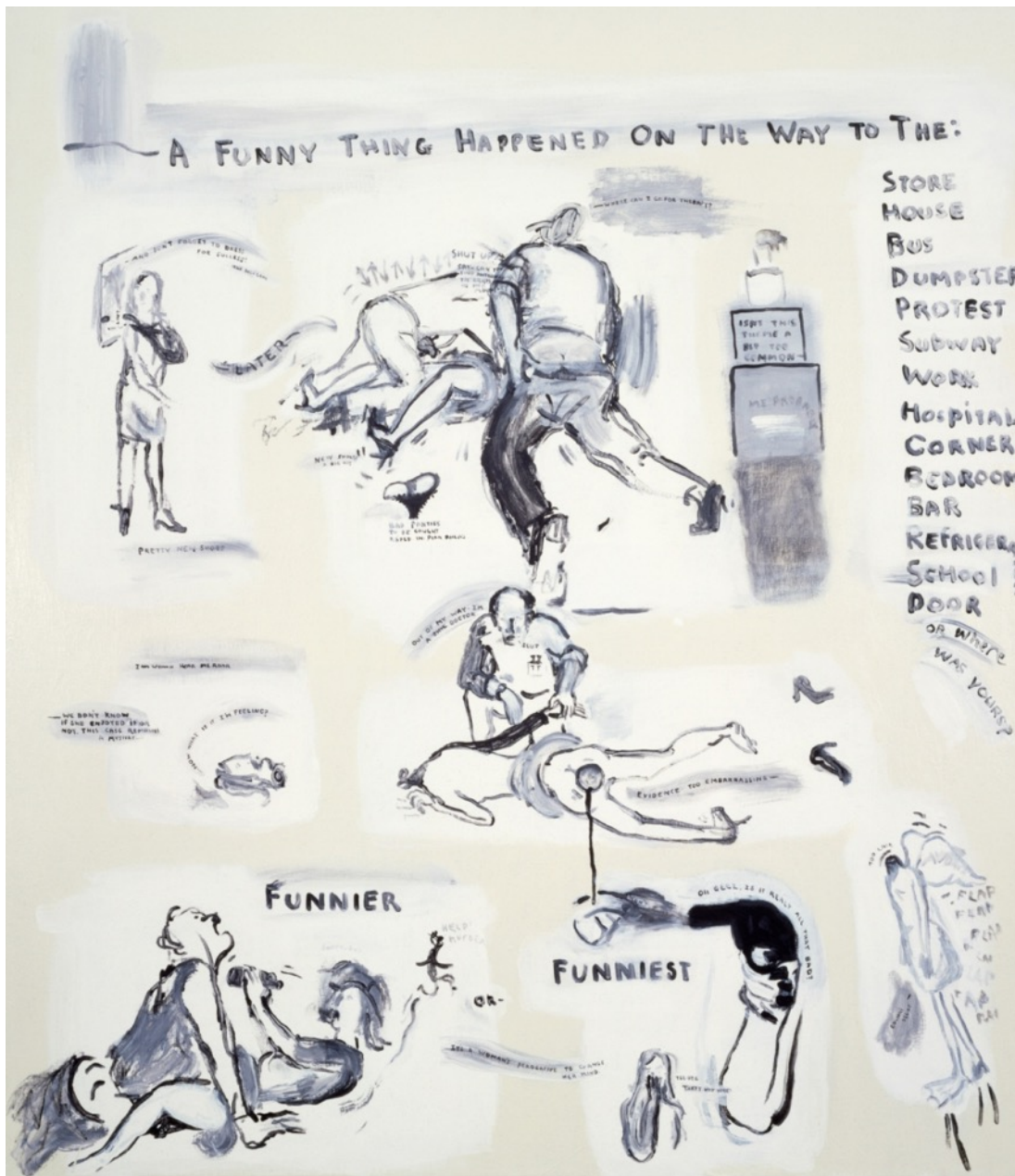
### Gender pay gap per hour by region and country, 1997 and 2017, UK



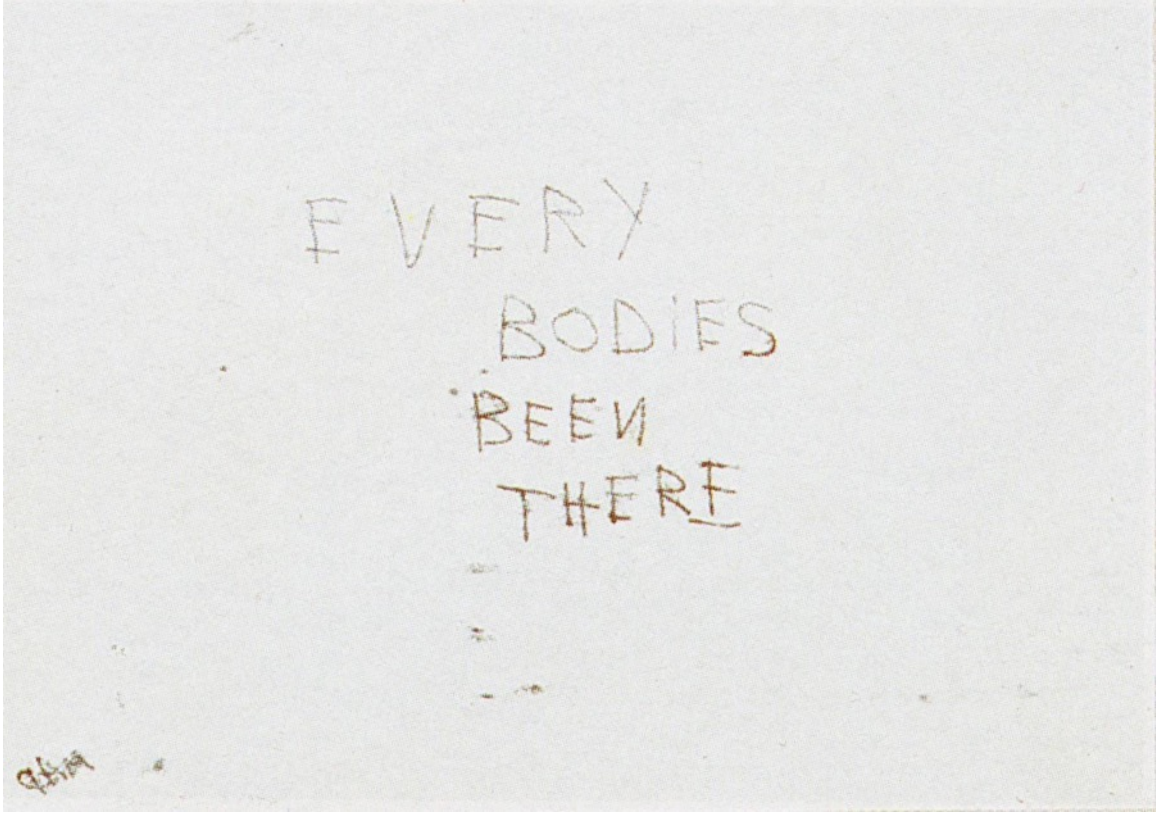
**Fig. 2.6.** Table showing gender pay gap in the UK 1997-2017 (Image: ‘London had the smallest gender pay gap 20 years ago, but now it has the largest’, *Office of National Statistics* (27th November 2017): unpagged. Accessed 19th March 2020, at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/londonhadthesmallestgenderpaygap20yearsagobutnowwithasthelargest/2017-11-27>.)



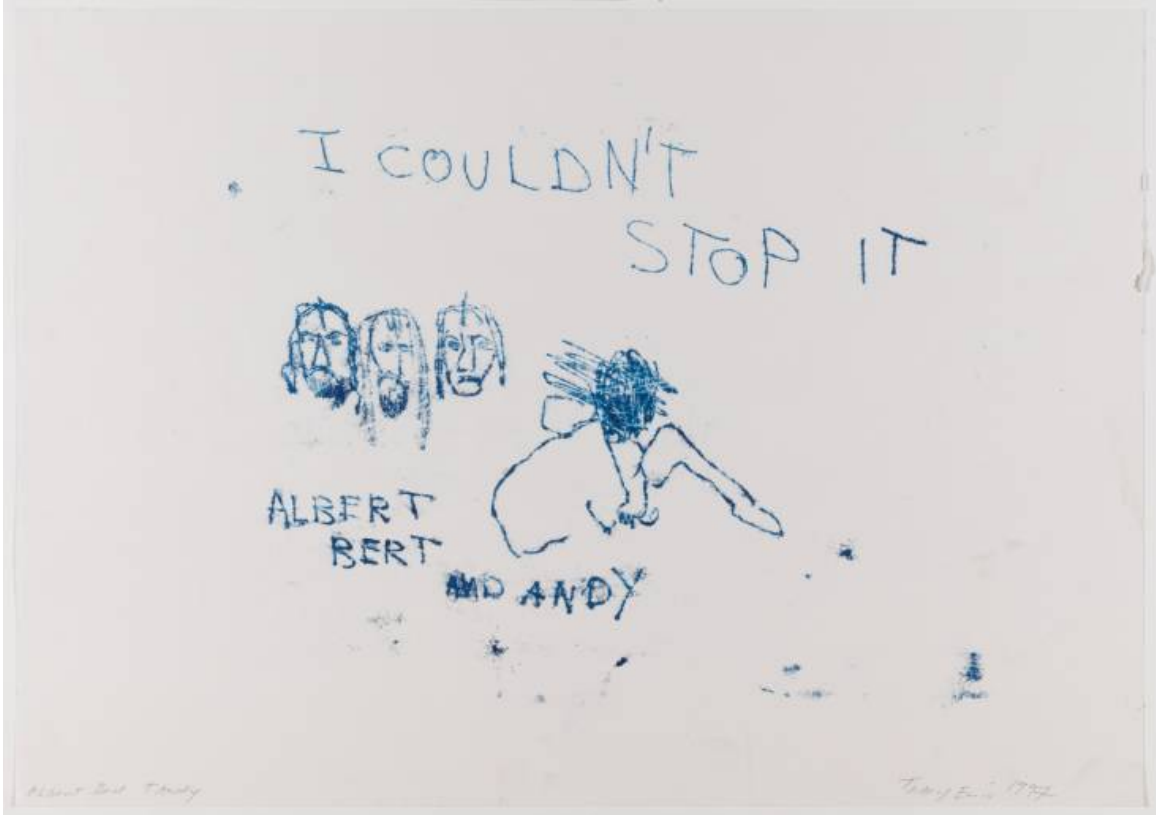
**Fig. 2.7.** *Are You Pro-Porn or Anti-Porn?*, 1992, Sue Williams, acrylic on canvas, 1829 x 1575 mm (Image: Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 49).



**Fig. 2.8.** A Funny Thing Happened, 1992, Sue Williams, acrylic on canvas, 480 x 420 mm (Image: Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 52).



**Fig. 2.9.** *Everybodies [sic] Been There*, 1997, Tracey Emin, ink on paper, 425 × 600 × 26 mm (Image: Tate Gallery Archive).



**Fig. 2.10.** *Everybody's [sic] Been There (2)*, 1997, Tracey Emin, ink on paper, 425 × 600 × 26 mm (Image: Tate Gallery Arc)



**Fig. 2.11.** *Untitled*, 1990, Rachel Evans, photograph by Lewis Mulatero, measurements unrecorded (Image: Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 33).



**Fig. 2.12:** Digital photograph from *The Blonde*, 1998, Joy Gregory, interactive website, dimensions variable (Image: INIVA Collection).



**Fig. 2.13.** Digital photograph from *The Blonde*, 1998, Joy Gregory, interactive website, dimensions variable (Image: INIVA Collection).



**Fig. 2.14.** *Loop My Loop*, 1991, Helen Chadwick, cibachrome transparency, glass, steel, electrical apparatus, 127 x 76 cm (Image: Kate Bush, Emma Dexter and Nicola White (eds.), *Bad Girls*, ex. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), 19).



Fig. 2.15. *Shine On*, 1991, Sarah Lucas, four photocopies on paper on wooden panel, four panels of 306 x 406 mm each (Image: Tate Gallery Prints and Drawings Room).



**Fig. 2.16.** *Summer*, 1998, self-portrait by Sarah Lucas, digital print on paper, 634 x 549 mm (Image: Tate Gallery Archive).



**Fig. 2.17.** *The Garden*, 1997, Gillian Wearing, screen print on paper, 651 x 889 mm (Image: Tate Gallery Prints and Drawings Room).



**Fig. 2.18.** *Fuck, Suck, Spank, Wank*, 1993, self-portrait by Sam Taylor-Johnson, photographed by Stephen White, c-type print, 1450 x 106 mm (Image: Private Collection).



**Fig. 2.19.** *T-Shirt*, 1993, Sam Taylor-Johnson, machine stitched and printed cotton, 630 x 600 mm (Image: V&A).

## CHAPTER 3. Progress and Loss Narratives in *Private Views*: Mapping Feminist

### Indeterminacy using Impolitics

‘Proletarians of all countries, who washes your socks?’

Rada Iveković (1996)<sup>517</sup>

In this chapter, I consider the double-bind created by artworks that are both “after” feminism and socialism. I use Estonia as a paradigm of postsocialist transformation by considering the reversibility of loss and progress narratives in *Private Views: Space Re/Cognised in Contemporary Art from Estonia and Britain* (Estonian Art Museum, Tallinn, 1998; Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaújváros, 1999). To understand how the show impacted the context in Britain, the publication *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia* (2000) funded by the Arts Council and published by the Women’s Art Library (WAL) will provide primary source material for this chapter, given the publication contains a number of texts by artists and writers working between the UK and Estonia.<sup>518</sup> The book includes essays written by exhibition participants such as the artist Pam Skelton and theorists Angela Dimitrakaki, Aoife Mac Namara and Katrin Kivimaa. Given the limited primary and secondary source material available, I also conducted interviews with Skelton, Dimitrakaki, Mac Namara, Susan Brind and

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<sup>517</sup> Rada Iveković, ‘Prvo na razliku? Paritet, kvote, da ili ne? Naputak o metodi’ [Difference and its Meaning? Parity, Quotas, Yes or No? Observations on Method], *Ženske studije*, 5-6 (1996), 7; quoted in Bojana Pejić, ‘Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks?’, *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*. ed. Ana Janevski et. al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 283-90.

<sup>518</sup> Pam Skelton interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023; Pam Skelton, et. al. *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia* (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000).

Mare Tralla who were all based in the UK at the time, as well as consulting documentary images of the exhibition from Skelton's private archive.<sup>519</sup>

While *Private Views* represented an indeterminacy around feminist politics, Dimitrakaki is careful to state that '*Private Views* was not a post-feminist show. If anything, it helped some of us at least see the contradictions post-1989 feminism would be facing'.<sup>520</sup> The exhibition provides a model for considering the potential synergies and hegemonies operating through transnational exchange, bringing to bear the ways that, discursively, women are constructed as subjects within a specific context responding to local concerns. Considering the double entanglement of art that is "after" both feminism and socialism provides a better vantage point from which to challenge postfeminism in British art. As I will argue, the interface with Estonia shows that the impolitical functions relative to particular political narratives. For example, in the former East, where the progress of Western feminism was simultaneously the loss of Marxist feminism. A television appearance on *Ars et vita* (1996) and interview with Tralla in *Private Views* are used to argue that her work had a political dimension that became impolitical (i.e. less overtly political) when transposed to a British context. The optic of the former East will therefore be used to show the potential reversibility of narratives of progress and loss.

### **Feminist Intonations in *Private Views* (1998-1999)**

The exhibition *Private Views* was first installed in the Estonian Art Museum in Tallinn, in 1998, and later travelled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Dunaújváros, Hungary, in 1999. A number of works from the show were also presented at small conferences in England and The Netherlands.<sup>521</sup> The exhibition had been proposed by curator Eha Komissarov to Tralla, whose is pertinent to this chapter given that she moved to London in 1996, but had grown

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<sup>519</sup> Tralla's practice will be considered in detail later in the chapter. She grew up in Tallinn, Estonia, where she studied painting at the Fine Arts School in Estonia (1990-1996) and later moved to London in 1996 to study for a Masters in Hypermedia at the University of Westminster. She lived in London until 2010 whilst actively participating in the Estonian artistic scene. Her work is known for utilising performance, digital software, the internet and video.

<sup>520</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>521</sup> This did not constitute a tour however; Pam Skelton et. al., 'Preface' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia* (London: Women's Art Library, 2000).

up and developed her art practice in Tallinn. Tralla organised the project alongside the UK-based artist Skelton and art historian Dimitrakaki, who was writing a PhD at Reading University.<sup>522</sup> *Private Views* brought together sixteen artists including Naomi Dines, Anu Juurak, F.F.F.F., KIWA, Mari Koort, Ene-Liis Semper, Liina Siib, Susan Brind and Marit Følstad. Skelton selected the artists based in Britain and Tralla selected those in Estonia. The majority worked across neoconceptualism and multimedia practice. All but one were women and all of the works dealt in some respect with the concept of space, whether physical or metaphorical. Unlike *Bad Girls*, the exhibition *Private Views* acknowledged its place within a feminist continuum to the extent that, as Althea Greenan stated in the exhibition catalogue, ‘questions raised by the persistence of feminism are aired’.<sup>523</sup> At the same time, however, the show revealed a ‘critique of the implications of feminism for women living in a post-communist state’ suggesting it sought to question the ways that feminist politics could translate across different geopolitical contexts.<sup>524</sup>

The exhibition emerged after a series of conferences and networks facilitated connections between artists in England and Estonia. The conference *LEAF* (1997) took place in Liverpool. It was set up to reflect on emerging networks of artists in Eastern and Western Europe, for example *Syndicate*, a mailing list disseminated via the early internet.<sup>525</sup> It was here that Skelton and Tralla connected for the first time, after which they organised two exhibitions together: *Virtual Vulgarities* (1997) and *Private Views* (1998).<sup>526</sup> In both of these exhibitions, Skelton notes the works shown ‘could all be seen as having been influenced by a variety of feminist positions. However, despite the context of the exhibition, most of the artists professed a reluctance to define their works as feminist in intent’.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>523</sup> Althea Green, ‘Preface’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et. al. (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 8.

<sup>524</sup> Althea Green, ‘Preface’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et. al. (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 8.

<sup>525</sup> *Liverpool East European Electronic Arts Forum (LEAF)* was organised by Iliyana Nedkova (Liverpool, April 1997).

<sup>526</sup> *Virtual Vulgarities* included works by artist such as Susan Brind Naomi Dines, Sonja Zelic, as well as Tralla and Skelton (International Biennale of the Feminist Art and Histories Conference, Reading University, 1997).

<sup>527</sup> Pam Skelton, ‘Shifting Subjects – Beyond the East/West Divide’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 13.

Skelton remembers her incentive as a London-based artist and educator for exploring these new networks asking ‘Were there, perhaps, comparisons to be made in relationship to interventions which had taken place in British art education and gender politics in the early eighties?’ for example through the radical interventions of the Women’s Liberation Movement that had created more significant opportunities and visibility for women in the art world.<sup>528</sup> At *LEAF* however, Skelton remembers noticing that these larger historical questions of power and gender were not prominent in many of the postsocialist presentations, but rather the talks focused on practical questions around opening up routes of communication and the establishment of independent artist-led organisations. One exception Skelton remembers was Tralla, who delivered a presentation entitled “Feminism: A Media Toy” in which she discussed the ways that Western feminist theory had emerged in Estonia, prompting exhibitions such as *Kood-eks/Code-Ex* (Tallinn, 1994) and *Est.Fem* (Tallinn, 1995).

In her lecture, Tralla argued that traditional canons of feminism were unsuited to the needs of Estonian women. Skelton remembers, ‘In her practice I perceived an interesting contradiction: although the formal aspects of the work could be seen as postfeminist, the effort to articulate a feminist critique was evident’.<sup>529</sup> The feminist intonations in *Private Views* guide this chapter’s analysis, setting up a framework for considering the importance of contextual specificity and hegemony that are unpacked in relation to the impolitical later in the chapter. I argue that my interface with the Estonian works allows us to return to the context in Britain to reinterpret, and inflect, the reductive nature of progress and loss narratives.

### **F.F.F.F, *F-Files* (1998)**

In the exhibition, a preoccupation with the representation of the body and identity seemed prevalent in the Estonian works to a greater extent than those from Britain. This was perhaps due to the import of new magazines, clothing,

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<sup>528</sup> Pam Skelton, ‘Shifting Subjects – Beyond the East/West Divide’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 11.

<sup>529</sup> Pam Skelton, ‘Shifting Subjects – Beyond the East/West Divide’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 11.

make-up and film that suddenly gave women the freedom to pick and choose new consumer identities. For critic Elza Ibroscheva, during the Soviet period,

[t]he female body presented the ultimate battleground where the aesthetics of the West and the new socialist ideologies came clashing, visually juxtaposing each other in terms of the way women dressed themselves in public, but also in the standards of acceptable body appearance that the two opposing ideologies celebrated.<sup>530</sup>

In *Private Views*, the artwork *F-Files* shows how identity was being renegotiated in postsocialist Estonia (Figs. 3.1 - 3.4, 1998). The piece was made by the group F.F.F.F. made up of Kristi Paap, Kaire Rannik, Berit Teeäär, Ketli Tiitsaar and Maria Valdma, who had all met whilst studying at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn.<sup>531</sup> The series of eleven photographs is humorous in staging absurd stereotyping of female identities: the artists dressed up as brides, businesswomen waiting in an airport lounge, mothers holding children, folk dancers, girls at a sleepover, or grungy teenagers dressed in black leather. The images show an irreverence toward the outdated ideal of the strong Soviet wife and worker. However, there is one image in *F-Files* that has a less playful tone. In the series' only black and white image, the women's faces are turned from the camera (Fig. 3.4). The characters this time are dressed as dumpster divers, rooting through a pile of household waste. While this image was staged, it was not an altogether uncommon sight in Estonia during economic transition. As one critic argued in 2001,

...the newly free Estonia is a tough country. It is tough facing the outer world, trying to be small but brave, ready to fight bigger enemies if needed to defend its

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<sup>530</sup> Elza Ibroscheva, *Advertising, Sex and Post-Socialism: Women, Media and Femininity in the Balkans* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 57-58.

<sup>531</sup> 'F.F.F.F', *React Feminism: A Performing Archive*, accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020, at <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=287&e=a&v=&a=%20F.F.F.F.&t=>.

independence. But it is also tough internally: towards non-Estonians, the old, children, women, the poor.<sup>532</sup>

The aggressive implementation of neoliberal economics into Estonia saw the introduction of flat-rate income tax favouring those on high incomes, a rise in unemployment from 4% to 15% across the 1990s, and the privatisation of state property - everything from electricity, to transport and water.<sup>533</sup> This had a particular impact on women, not least through the decision of the Estonian Government and Parliament not to ratify any of the gender equality conventions of European Social Charter in 2001, among them the basic workplace non-discrimination act. Iivi Masso notes how this new economic disparity was increasingly visible where 'poorer quarters turn to slums' and that 'in winter one can see the newest limousines rush by old tired ladies helplessly hitting ice with iron sticks, earning the tiny extra to their lousy pensions'.<sup>534</sup> Many of the socialist welfare policies that had once protected these groups had been removed, with few structures in place to compensate.<sup>535</sup> What *F-Files* exposes, then, is the financial and social precarity underpinning consumer capitalism, yet in the case of the works in *Private Views*, a materialist or Marxist interpretation of feminism is not wholly present, instead the Tallinn-based artists chose to examine gender predominantly as a question of identity and representation.

### **Mare Tralla, *her.space* (1998)**

Tralla deals with the renegotiation of identity in *her.space*, an interactive CD-ROM, displayed on a computer screen encased by old colourful fabrics (Fig. 3.5 - 3.6, 1998). To some viewers in the West, Tralla's work may have

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<sup>532</sup> Iivi Masso, 'Freedom Euphoria or Post-Communist Hangover? On Social Development of Estonia in 1990s' in *Nosy Nineties: Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art on 1990s*, eds. Sirje Helme and Johannes Saar (Tallinn: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2001), 24.

<sup>533</sup> Iivi Masso, 'Freedom Euphoria or Post-Communist Hangover? On Social Development of Estonia in 1990s' in *Nosy Nineties: Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art on 1990s*, eds. Sirje Helme and Johannes Saar (Tallinn: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2001), 24.

<sup>534</sup> Iivi Masso, 'Freedom Euphoria or Post-Communist Hangover? On Social Development of Estonia in 1990s' in *Nosy Nineties: Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art on 1990s*, eds. Sirje Helme and Johannes Saar (Tallinn: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2001), 28.

<sup>535</sup> Éva Fodor, 'Gender and the Experience of Poverty in Eastern Europe and Russia after 1989', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 35, 4 (2002): 369-82.

appeared postfeminist in form: provocative, vulgar, humorous and at times purposefully naïve. However, in a recent interview with Tralla she rejects the term postfeminist, stating instead that she believes her practice to be exploring both feminism and postfeminism simultaneously, given both discourses appeared to her at the same time after 1989.<sup>536</sup> The textiles she uses in the piece juxtapose the nostalgia of Estonian domestic space against new technologies imported by capitalism. While the Soviet regime made rapid technological advancements on a national and industrial scale, their uptake of individual home technologies such as the dishwasher and washing machine had remained much slower, and had often been associated with capitalist decadence.<sup>537</sup>

In the piece, Tralla clothes the screens in familiar fabrics, Tralla lessened the viewer's experience of the computer screen's strangeness, as well as marking the artwork's space as one of quite literal difference from the exhibition around it. The computer game beneath the fabric explores new formations of female identity. The aim of the "game" is to find the button to quit, but in doing so the viewer has to click through pages of acid-coloured graphics, illustrating different roles. The game presents the funny, frustrating and complex renegotiation of identity women faced in postsocialist Estonia, which saw the ideal figure of the 'heroine of socialist labour' replaced by the 'barbie doll'.<sup>538</sup>

The game presents clickable images of career paths that would have been expected of Soviet women: a builder, a steerswoman, a tractor driver or a milkmaid (Fig. 3.6, 1998). In the piece, Tralla dealt with her own coming to terms with false childhood heroines; in purposefully broken English she deconstructs the myth of the well-known cosmonaut Valentina by questioning why the USSR sent her into space: 'May-be because women were able to do crazy things in USSR, but may-be because she was used by propaganda to show for the West, that USSR is such a good place, where even woman can fly to cosmos'. Tralla's English performs her self-conscious difficulty to communicate on Western terms as well as showing her "reformed" understanding of the Soviet cultural

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<sup>536</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

<sup>537</sup> For an analysis of the ways that domestic technology was politicised in Cold War domestic spaces, see Susan E. Reid, 'Our Kitchen is Just as Good: Soviet Responses to the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959' in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, ed. David Crowley, ex. cat. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008), 154-63.

<sup>538</sup> Mare Tralla quoted in Yvonne Volkart and Faith Wilding, 'Feminism, Difference, and Global Capital', *Cyberfeminist International*, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, at <https://www.obn.org/nCI/report3.htm>. The conference took place in Rotterdam, 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1999.

imagination, such as: ‘I never had any questions about her and why did she go to the space’. According to Ibroscheva, these national identities were: ‘eradicated by the attempt of the Soviet regime to homogenize the Eastern bloc through careful ideological indoctrination’.<sup>539</sup> Across the 1990s postsocialist states tried to reconnect with their lost national identities, and Tralla’s piece arguably demonstrated this complex negotiation.

The second screen of Tralla’s work contains a map of what once were the borders of East/Central Europe and requires viewers to identify the new borders in this region correctly. However, as soon as the viewer has done so, in a cynical twist, the map is programmed to collapse and disappear from the screen - neither rewarding nor congratulating the viewer for their efforts, leaving them feeling as though they had wasted their time.<sup>540</sup> *Her.space* illustrates the impossibility of separating gendered identity from issues of geography and ethnicity for Estonian women. Moreover, these contemporary conceptualisations and renegotiations of “self” were issues distinct to those experienced in the British context. Pauline van Mourik Broekman interviewed Tralla for the *Private Views* publication, in which Tralla noted:

In my opinion British artists today don’t seem to want to deal with [history] in wide respects; they would rather concentrate on one small issue which is personally interesting to them. We generated history during our lifetime: most of the artists I know in Estonia changed something in society via their own, personal activities. Here [in Britain] the artists very often hasn’t had the experience of changing things in society.<sup>541</sup>

[...]

What I discovered to be difficult was finding any inspiration because, to me, the issues I saw artists dealing with in Britain weren’t “life-affecting” issues. They seemed somehow artificial. I found it very difficult to make any social comment,

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<sup>539</sup> Elza Ibroscheva, *Advertising, Sex and Post-Socialism: Women, Media and Femininity in the Balkans* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 14.

<sup>540</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Space, Gender, Art: Redressing Private Views’ *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 48.

<sup>541</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman ‘State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla’ *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 23.

even when I saw problems which touched me personally. I felt like a Martian [...] I managed to be very shocking in Estonia – my whole personality, my whole art was this “disgusting girl”, so I was perceived in that way. I don’t want to shock anybody anymore, because shocking here is a mere aspect of formality. There is no other language to make things visible.<sup>542</sup>

When considered through the lens of the impolitical, it could be argued that what Tralla perceived when she transposed her work into a British context was that asking wider social and historical questions in art had become somewhat ineffective. Van Mourik Broekman asks Tralla ‘You have mentioned in another interview that, before *Est.Fem*, you did not want to be seen as a feminist? Was that something you had in common with other women in Estonia?’ to which Tralla answers:

It was a very natural response at that time. The word carried over certain associations from Soviet time and some leading male critics used the word feminism as a negative term. Secondly, we can’t say that during the Soviet time none of the Western women’s liberation movements were known in Estonia. If you take the women’s magazines of the seventies and eighties, you can see lots of articles reporting on women protesting in nuclear plants, talking about equality in the workplace, and so on. All those things were there, but not the cultural theory. Very often these phenomena were explained from the point of view of Soviet reality - showing how “equal” women were in the Soviet Union. Like, for example, “in the West they still have to fight for the right to abortion,” or other things which were somehow very “natural” for women in the Soviet Union. But only those aspects of women’s equality were shown - nothing else than the workplace and peacekeeping. If you look at it like that, the idea of a feminist movement as

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<sup>542</sup> More on Tralla’s character of the “disgusting girl” below; Pauline van Mourik Broekman ‘State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla’ *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 24-25.

explained by Soviet propaganda, for post-Soviet women it belonged to an earlier time people wanted to move away from.<sup>543</sup>

Tralla suggests here that the meaning of feminism itself, whether Marxist feminism or otherwise, was generally understood differently in Estonia than in Britain. These nuances attributed to feminism could not be reduced to a binary of “east” and “west”. Attempting to draw an equivalence in impolitics across borders therefore ignores the ways that (feminist) politics is interpreted and utilised in different contexts. What the above example shows is that while Tralla saw her practice as explicitly political in Estonia, when she moved to the UK context she became more aware of her work’s depoliticisation.

### **Ene-Liis Semper, *Natural Law* (1998)**

With this in mind, it makes sense to consider what is arguably the most controversial work in the exhibition, Ene-Liis Semper’s *Natural Law* (Fig. 3.7, 1998). Dimitrakaki was invited to write an essay for the *Private Views* publication in which she concluded that the artists in the show ‘re/cognised more in each other’s private view of space (be it the body or any material residue of social relations) than they had perhaps formerly imagined’.<sup>544</sup> However, she alluded to differences in the way “the political” was conceptualised in the works:

Moving away from issue-based art (whatever the issues in Estonia and Britain might be) should be conflated with a self-conscious distance from the political. However, if the political needs to be redefined once more, as happened during the seventies in the West, this is a different issue.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman ‘State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla’ *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 20.

<sup>544</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Space, Gender, Art: Redressing Private Views’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 52.

<sup>545</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Space, Gender, Art: Redressing Private Views’ in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women’s Art Library, 2000), 40.

Dimitrakaki's statement here implied that Estonian artists had more work to do to renegotiate the political, and that for her, the irreverent, or as it could be argued impolitical, refusal to take this role seriously did not quite fit with the Estonian works. Several years later Dimitrakaki reflects on issues she felt were left unresolved by the show, particularly this expectation she had for the Estonian works.<sup>546</sup> She remembers being taken aback by the content of Ene-Liis Semper's video *Natural Law* during the exhibition. In the controversial work, Semper encouraged a group of puppies to suckle from her, whilst the mother dog can be heard howling in distress from another room. To Dimitrakaki, this work essentialises motherhood and disregards a necessary understanding of its gendered dimensions (as well as provokes questions about animal rights). While Dimitrakaki is aware that this view of the Estonian works contributed to problematically casting them as less "mature" than the British works, she nonetheless remembers feeling uneasy, given the controversial nature of the subject matter, that Estonian artists were repudiating a political reading of their work without having actually experienced a collective feminist movement, stating '[a]fter all, how could an Estonian woman artist move on to postfeminism in 1998 when the first feminist shows in Estonia took place only in the mid 1990s?'.<sup>547</sup> When interviewed recently, Dimitrakaki recalls:

The difference could not be understood in purely geographical terms, because there were differences within the same geography. I, for example, although educated in the West, did not align with neo/liberal feminism and certainly not with post-feminism. On the other hand, there were some geopolitical tendencies: I could practice Marxist feminism whereas the feminists of East Europe of that generation had been drawn, for the most part, to reject Marxism as a theoretical tool.

You are right to say that not all artists in the show wanted their work to be framed as feminist. This is precisely the function of hegemony. They were afraid of being "labelled" as something that was outdated or too "political", because we were entering a strongly anti-politics era. Feminists had been so attacked by the press, they were constantly ridiculed, and postmodernism had won anyway: there was an

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<sup>546</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Researching Culture/s and the Omitted Footnote' in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London; New York: Routledge, 2010 [2003]), 360-68, 364.

<sup>547</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Researching Culture/s and the Omitted Footnote' in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London; New York: Routledge, 2010 [2003]), 364.

antipathy to political commitment and everything had to be ambivalent, unfixed, and flowing. (However, all this would soon change, thankfully).<sup>548</sup>

Semper's work and Dimitrakaki's writing suggest that a consideration of the impolitical must account for specific material, social and economic context from which it emerges, to better understand the motivation for an artist's refusal of politics. If *Private Views* reveals an undecidability toward feminism on the part of Estonian artists, this mistrust of feminism was not replicated by artists such as Skelton or Brind, working in Britain.

Artists in Estonia felt the need to address gender through their work, to prove their legitimacy in global contemporary art, but on a local level feminism was seen less positively. Speaking about her experience of attempting to write a feminist entry in an art encyclopaedia, art historian Pachmanová recognises the pressure postsocialist artists came under from both local and international audiences:

[The] ambiguous attitude to feminism is exemplarily manifested by the experience of a Slovak art historian, Jana Oravcová, who was asked in the mid-1990s to write an entry about feminism for the encyclopaedia of post-war art. "I was standing in front... of a tough task since I... assumed that I will face a certain animosity on the side of Slovak women artists that I wanted to include into the entry," she later recollected. "My expectation was practically fulfilled when some of them strictly rejected to be mentioned in my text. Although Ilona Németh, for example, finally agreed that I could refer to some of her work as feminist, she - just like many others - argued that she "doesn't want to be identified with feminism", and also "doesn't want to switch from one minority into the other" (in her case Hungarian)." Furthermore, Oravcová pointed out that some women who refused to figure in the "controversial" entry later agreed to participate in some international exhibitions with an explicit gender agenda that were organized by Western curators.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>549</sup> Marina Pachmanová 'From Within, From Without: Configurations of Feminism, Gender and Art in Post-Wall Europe', *A Companion to Feminist Art*, ed. Hilary Robinson et. al. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 112-13.

This passage discloses a double bind: many postsocialist audiences were mistrustful of feminism because they equated it with globalisation during economic transition. While there was resistance to feminism on a local level, artists like Tralla saw that they needed to learn to speak the language of global contemporary art to succeed in an international market (more on this below). This is confirmed by Pachmanová, who argues ‘we - in the East - should learn how to speak for ourselves on the global level instead of... conforming to the Western feminist “idiom” (and thus playing the role of belated yet teachable “sisters”)’.<sup>550</sup> Dimitrakaki rightly argues that the resistance to feminism in postsocialist contexts took on a specific resonance during economic transition, where the dismissal of feminism by women still invested in gender equality ‘may well display an ignorance of the many currents of and ideological battles within Western feminism but may also be seen to express a resistance to the very process of transition’.<sup>551</sup>

**Pam Skelton, *ExerMedea* (1997); Susan Brind, *Out of Your Body – Out of Your Mind* (1998)**

Skelton contributed the video *ExerMedea* (Fig. 3.8, 1997) to *Private Views*. The film was projected onto a wall suspended within the exhibition space. The footage displayed the fragments of a woman’s body, performed by participant Karen Douglas. Her body is captured from below, creating a warped perspective and giving little information as to the setting around her. Her movements are slow and deliberate, but it is not immediately obvious what she is doing - only after observing the film for some time does it become clear that she is exercising. The sound of crashing waves can be heard and as the footage slows her movements become heavier. The text “oxygen=energy” emerges, laid over a sea, eventually bleached white by the light of the sun. Skelton describes the film:

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<sup>550</sup> Marina Pachmanová, ‘In? Out? In Between? Some Notes on the Invisibility of a Nascent Eastern European Feminist and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Art Theory’ in *Gender Check: A Reader*, ed. Bojana Pejić (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010), 49; elsewhere, Pachmanová has argued that by only showing Western feminist artists institutions such as the Rudolfinium in Prague perpetuated the sense that feminism did not exist locally. The Rudolfinium had only shown one solo exhibition by a local female artist, compared to 25 by men, yet they exhibited a number of female artists from the West, for example Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, Louise Bourgeois and Ana Mendieta. This Pachmanová argues placated the strong nationalist voices that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, who wanted to protect themselves from globalisation, associated with North Atlantic feminism; Marina Pachmanová ‘From Within, From Without: Configurations of Feminism, Gender and Art in Post-Wall Europe’, *A Companion to Feminist Art*, ed. Hilary Robinson et. al. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 112.

<sup>551</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘“The Gender Issue”: Lessons from Post-Socialism’ in *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 100.

*ExerMedea* is a video installation, which refuses to be positioned. It stands as a kind of contemporary myth of empowerment without a narrative. It is not about exercise although it uses images of the face and upper body of a woman exercising. It is not about the sorceress Medea although she is implicated in the work. Rather, *ExerMedea* is an experience of looking, imagining and repositioning self. There is an undoing or a remaking of gender norms, a display of watching, of being watched, a transformation and merging of identities. The woman is beautiful, she is handsome, she is powerful, she regards the camera and implicates the viewer as she enacts and repeats her movements. By investing the body with more oxygen energy is created and with it powerful identities are unleashed in an alchemical process of transformation which comes to stand as metaphors for invention. *ExerMedea* suggests a revolution of becoming, where the image of women is no longer one of lack.<sup>552</sup>

Skelton's work is clearly rooted in feminist politics and while her work exhibits certain elements of ambiguity that might be interpreted as impolitical, these quickly dissolve when we consider the ways that she explores the division of body and mind. Western philosophies of the body have traditionally conceptualised a division between body and mind.<sup>553</sup> Alison Jaggar notes that liberal philosophers assume that rationality is a facet all human beings possess and stems from an individual's mental capacity, taking precedence over the physical body - also known as normative dualism.<sup>554</sup> While this division was often attributed to men, women have historically been conceptualised as enmeshed in their bodily existence, suggesting that their rational facilities were less developed.<sup>555</sup> Liberal feminism is therefore grounded in the idea that women also possess an equal capacity for rationality but that this has not been recognised due to the lack of access to education, meaning intellectual attainments have been distorted or disguised.

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<sup>552</sup> Pam Skelton, 'ExerMedea', *Pam Skelton* (2023), accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2023, at <https://www.pamskelton.org/artworks/exermedea/>.

<sup>553</sup> For example: René Descartes, 'Meditation VI' (1641), in *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57-72.

<sup>554</sup> Liberal political theory was built on writing by dualist René Descartes and liberal philosopher John Locke; Alison Jaggar, 'Liberal Feminism and Human Nature' in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 28.

<sup>555</sup> Jaggar notes that modern philosophers such as Hume, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel have all argued that women possess less developed rational potential than men, but liberal feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft argued that this is not innate but due to lack in educational opportunity; Alison Jaggar, 'Liberal Feminism and Human Nature' in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), 26; see also, Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman*, ed. Kathleen Scherf et. al. (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 1997 [1792]).

During the second-wave, several feminist scholars challenged the notion of innate sexual difference at the heart of liberal philosophy.<sup>556</sup> In *The Second Sex* (1942) Simone De Beauvoir argued that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ by which she meant that all rationality was mediated by lived experience, of the sensory experiences that a perceiving subject encounter, which ultimately impact their sense of self.<sup>557</sup> Hélène Cixous’ ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1976) has also argued that subjectivity is created at the intersection of physical, sexual and intellectual process.<sup>558</sup> Skelton’s work might be interpreted as emerging from these feminist debates about the mind/body dualism, given that she connects the physical process of breathing - bringing oxygen into the body - to a powerful sense of self-identity. In Skelton’s work, we see this woman’s “becoming” by witnessing her exercise regime that creates an intellectual ecstasy represented on screen as the image of a vast ocean. Skelton has been careful to position the aims and motivation for the exhibition as ‘...my interest in working on this exhibition with Mare [Tralla], was all about my interest in East Europe and my interest in feminism. All the works in the show had a feminist or critical/issue based or political focus’ suggesting that whilst Tralla was purposefully undecided in her exploration of both feminist and postfeminist intonations, Skelton saw her practice as firmly rooted in feminist politics.<sup>559</sup>

Also working in the British context, Susan Brind’s *Out of Your Body – Out of Your Mind* (Fig. 3.9, 1998) concerns the ‘body as a space of phenomenological understanding’, emerging simultaneously with rational forms of knowledge.<sup>560</sup> The shared concerns of both Skelton and Brind’s work are perhaps because Skelton was tasked with selecting the British artworks for the exhibition. Brind’s work consists of four large photo installations and

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<sup>556</sup> Developing this strand of liberal feminist thinking further, Joanna Hodge has taken issue with Cartesian dualism, arguing that this conception of subjectivity is incorrect given the interdependency of mind and body; Joanna Hodge, ‘Subject, Body and the Exclusion of Women from Philosophy’ in *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, ed. Morwena Griffiths and Margaret Whitford (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988);

<sup>557</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973 [1949]), 301.

<sup>558</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, *Signs*, 1, 4 (1976): 875-93.

<sup>559</sup> Pam Skelton interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

<sup>560</sup> Susan Brind studied at Reading University and remembers being heavily influenced by feminist art historians such as Lucy Lippard, Griselda Pollock, Roszika Parker and Hilary Robinson. During our interview she noted that in this period she was trying to reconcile the conjuncture between a poststructuralist interpretation of the work with the phenomenological. She recalled that feminism formed the ‘deepest layer of the geology’ of her works, but that the more overt parts of her practice were pursuing how bodily experience impacts our consciousness - which is of course inflected by gender; Susan Brind interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

considers the relationship between culture and nature. Two smaller panels side by side show two halves of a book, split at the spine. On either side of the book hands can be seen flicking through the pages, captured with slow shutter speed giving a blurred, ecstatic fervour to their movement. On one side, the letters of the book are displayed in greater clarity, whilst the hand remains in softer focus. On the other, the letters of the text are in soft focus, but a description of rapture - a religious experience in which an individual exits both mind and body - can be deciphered. The third panel shows an inverted pyramid, alluding to the experience of rapture. The fourth panel is a photograph of the sky, which Brind remembers as trying to ‘represent nothing’ - a pure state of embodied ecstasy.<sup>561</sup> Brind recalls being interested in Saint Teresa of Ávila, who experienced ecstatic raptures that were feared by the church for their uncontrollability, often being upheld as a symbol of female embodiment threatening the patriarchal rationality of the church.<sup>562</sup> Brind’s image can therefore be interpreted as suggesting that ‘embodied experience surfaces at the limits of the rational intellect’.<sup>563</sup>

While *Private Views* took place in Tallinn and briefly in Dunaújváros, it was funded by The Arts Council, through a scheme initiated to support artistic interchange with Eastern Europe, suggesting that the UK Government had an active interest in fostering relationships with newly democratised states.<sup>564</sup> In recognising a liberal feminist strand in Brind and Skelton’s work, it is interesting to note how the government (whether this was a conscious decision on their part or not) supported bringing artworks with a liberal sensibility into states transitioning to capitalism; it could perhaps be argued that the government had a vested interest in maintaining the stability of new democracies through a form of soft power by preventing the return of Marxist feminism. Dimitrakaki remembers finding this cultural hegemony uncomfortable, given that the aims of the funding seemed contrary to the purposes of the artists and curators taking part. She states, ‘...cultural imperialism dictates that entities such as those of the former British Empire offer funding for doing this “influence” work. It is not presented as such. But this is what

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<sup>561</sup> Susan Brind interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

<sup>562</sup> Susan Brind interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

<sup>563</sup> Susan Brind interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

<sup>564</sup> Pam Skelton interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

has been the setting for such collaborations when set within capitalism' but on the other hand, '[t]o us, as artists and curators engaged in feminism, it was almost the opposite, like establishing a radical internationalism'.<sup>565</sup>

### **Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' (2000)**

In the *Private Views* publication Aoife Mac Namara, then lecturer in Visual Culture and Media at Middlesex University, contributed the article 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education'.<sup>566</sup> She acknowledges her perspective as an academic at a university institution thinking 'about the ways feminism is discursively produced in art and art education' in Britain and how this impacts the practices of female artists'.<sup>567</sup> Mac Namara argues that we must account for the ways that the structures of economic, social and political power are constructed by the education of artists and that these discursive models are geographically and historically specific.<sup>568</sup>

*Private Views* therefore 'offers an encounter between artists, audiences and those feminist theories which have developed in and around the art departments in Britain where artists like Pam Skelton and others have been active in their own work and in the education of students since the eighties'.<sup>569</sup> Mac Namara discusses Lubaina Himid's *A Fashionable Marriage* (Fig. 3.10, 1986) as an example of 'work that is both produced by and productive of the conflicts in the feminist art community in Britain' given that 'work like Himid's helps us map the places from which real, materially and historically located women have operated in Britain, not isolated in a community of women, or cloistered in art school, but as active cultural producers'.<sup>570</sup> Himid's large multigure installation

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<sup>565</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>566</sup> Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 72-83.

<sup>567</sup> Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 76.

<sup>568</sup> She recalls her own education at institutions across Ireland and Britain, where she became exposed to ideas that taught her art was not just about individual expression, but about intervention - requiring one to think of themselves as a cultural producer and to develop a sensitive knowledge of the way that society was organised; see Griselda Pollock, 'Art, Art School, Culture' in *The Block Reader in Visual Culture*, ed. Jon Bird (London: Routledge, 1996), 51; quoted in Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 74.

<sup>569</sup> Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 77.

<sup>570</sup> Aoife Mac Namara, 'Reading British Feminism, Art and Education' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 82.

satirises the art world in Britain by replacing characters in Hogarth's *Marriage a la Mode* (1743), reimagining "modern moral subjects" such as the castrato as an art critic, the Countess and her lover depicted as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and art funding bodies as literally "sitting on the fence".<sup>571</sup> When an *Unfashionable Marriage* was displayed at Pentonville Gallery in 1986 the popular press were unfairly critical.<sup>572</sup>

Himid has described her work as a process of writing herself and other Black artists 'into the history of British painting', a history that had also been largely overlooked by second-wave feminists.<sup>573</sup> In art history in Britain, the success of artists such as Mary Kelly and Yve Lomax, or historians such as Lisa Tickner and Pollock had been founded upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and the deconstruction of representation, language, and textuality. While these important second-wave critiques were the basis upon which pivotal works of visual culture were created in the 1970s and 1980s, these strategies had also created discursive models that acted to exclude non-white female experience.<sup>574</sup> In the essay 'Eyewitnesses, Not Spectators – Activists, Not Academics: Feminist Pedagogy and Women's Creativity' (1993) Val Walsh observes that 'Himid suggests, "Art is about dialogue and there are many entry points... If work addresses a particular audience this does not mean it excludes all other audiences."' In this conjunction of voice and audience, we create contexts in which our work can make sense to others'.<sup>575</sup> Mac

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<sup>571</sup> Elsewhere in Himid's artwork Hogarth's swooning woman in white is reimagined by a stack of white boxes displaying plates painted with vulvas referencing Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974-79), for which only one of the 39 plates had represented an artist of colour, Sojourner Truth. Two men with red lips embrace each other, labelled as "The Angst/Complacent School of British Painting" satirising the figurative painting by the New Glasgow Boys.

<sup>572</sup> For example, see Sarah Kent, 'A Fashionable Marriage', *Time Out* (3<sup>rd</sup> December 1986): 25.

<sup>573</sup> Alan Rice, 'Alan J. Rice Interviews Lubaina Himid', *Wasafiri*, 40 (2003): 23. See also: Griselda Pollock, "'How the Political World Crashes in on My Personal Everyday": Lubaina Himid's Conversations and Voices: Towards an Essay About *Cotton.com*', *Afterall* (Spring/Summer 2017): 20

<sup>574</sup> In 1999 Niru Ratnam summarised the situation: 'Black and Asian British artists have been making work about their ethnicity from the early 1970s onwards, reaching a climax in the mid to late 1980s, when "Black Art" was recognized as a loose movement and the subject of a number of group exhibitions. Artists such as Rasheed Araeen, Keith Piper, Eddie Chambers, Sonia Boyce and Lubaina Himid all made work whose didacticism recalled feminist strategies of the 1970s' Ratnam has argued that the success of an artist such as Anish Kapoor, who had kept his distance from "Black Art" only confirmed 'to its advocates that they had been part of a short-lived politically correct moment which had had only a superficial impact on the art world's structures'; Niru Ratnam, 'Chris Ofili and the Limits of Hybridity', *New Left Review*, 235 (1999): 154.

<sup>575</sup> Lubaina Himid, 'Mapping: A Decade of Black Women Artists, 1980-1990' in *Passion (Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity)*, eds. Lubaina Himid and Maud Sulter (Hebden Bridge: Urban Fox Press, 1993), 66; quoted in Val A. Walsh, 'Eyewitnesses, Not Spectators – Activists, Not Academics: Feminist Pedagogy and Women's Creativity' in *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 56.

Namara's essay provides a lens from which to better interpret the collaborative model used in *Private Views*, and specifically, what practitioners working in the context of art history in Britain gained from the project.<sup>576</sup>

What the resistance to certain feminist models of knowledge does is interrogate the assumption that a transnational feminist history is possible without recourse to the subjugation of a particular geography, in this case Estonia, to a hegemonic power. The fact that artists such as Tralla and Semper had questioned the use value of feminist politics in their work suggests the importance of critically challenging how these specific histories of feminist thinking are applied. What Mac Namara's text helps us see is that *Private Views* provides a nexus for these questions of hegemony and feminist narratives, asking how postfeminism tapped into, and co-opted, these sentiments of disavowal against feminism as a hegemonic narrative centred on a white subject. Once we unravel these moments of disaffection, critique, and refusal, we find a very rich panoply of political positions that are not usefully encapsulated by reductive terms like postfeminism, given that the exhibition, as I argue, was still very much engaged with feminist themes. Both exhibitions like *Private Views* and postcolonial artists such as Himid were bringing pressure on these hegemonic narratives in ways that were harnessed by wider postfeminist discourse, but which employed this pressure instead as a superficial media discourse.

### **Thinking Through the “Post” and “Former”**

In 1994, artist Shelly Silver travelled from the USA to Berlin to take up a residency on the Daad Künstlerprogramm, where she made the video essay *Former East/Former West* (Figs. 3.11 - 3.13, 1994). Shot with a Canon Hi8 camcorder two years after German reunification, the film documents residents of the newly unified city reflecting on notions of belonging, history, democracy, economy, and freedom. The footage captures fleeting and unrehearsed exchanges between the artist and Berlin residents.<sup>577</sup> Some interviews demonstrate a sense of optimism in drawing

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<sup>576</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, Katy Deepwell also provides an instructive critique of transnationalism with respect to body art emerging from the U.S.A. and Europe in the 1990s, see: Katy Deepwell, 'Pains and Pleasures: Women's Performance and Body Art in the 90s', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 14 (Spring 1997): 42; Katy Deepwell, 'Sassy or Not: Women's Body Art', *Siksi: the Nordic Arts Review*, 11, 4 (Winter 1996): 88-90; and the follow up debate featuring Kristine Stiles, Laura Cottingham, Tania Orum in Katy Deepwell, 'Mapping Feminism is Necessary', *Siksi: the Nordic Arts Review*, 12, 4 (Winter 1997): 88-89.

<sup>577</sup> Email exchange between Shelly Silver and Bea Cartwright, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020; Silver recalled that some participants felt more comfortable responding to the interview questions in their own home, rather than on the street - she noted that these tended to be

closer to liberal democracy, finally able to reconnect with family and friends on the other side of the wall. For others, there is little perceived change: ‘[w]e didn’t have to give anything up or change anything. We didn’t have to adapt’, one stated.<sup>578</sup> In some cases it is clear which side of the Berlin Wall the interviewee had lived, in other cases, it is difficult to discern. *Former East/Former West* illustrates that underneath the surface of stasis, the West has also been dealing with a seismic renegotiation of identity, economy and politics. Silver states that she intended to trace the points at which residents’ experiences and opinions overlap: ‘[i]n places it was already difficult to tell where the wall had been [...] What did East and West Berliners now have in common besides their language?’<sup>579</sup> What the work discloses is the question of whether there is something more universal to postsocialism, allowing both the east and west to be cast as “former”.

Posthumous terms such as postsocialist, former East or postcommunist, have all become accepted terms used to speak of the regions transitioning from socialism to liberal democracy.<sup>580</sup> While economic transition benefited democracy, the extreme deregulation of free markets, private property rights and price liberalisation placed new importance upon competition and accumulation. Over the course of the decade, countries that had been governed by actually existing socialism were expedited into the free market economy through a process that became

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participants who had grown up in East Berlin. This is likely due to the Soviet policy of censorship, which had prevented freedom of speech in the years leading up to 1989-1991.

<sup>578</sup> Shelly Silver (dir.), *Former East/Former West*, 62’00” (Berlin: Daad Künstlerprogramm, 1994), accessed with permission of director 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>.

<sup>579</sup> Shelly Silver (dir.), *Former East/Former West*, 62’00” (Berlin: Daad Künstlerprogramm, 1994), accessed with permission of director 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>.

<sup>580</sup> It is important to acknowledge that Bulgaria and Romania were among the most ideologically hard-line followers of Soviet doctrines, which goes some way in explaining why popular dissent movements like those seen in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia did not emerge there. This contrasted with a state like Yugoslavia that was open to Western influence throughout the Soviet period and where their economic liberalisation did not follow the five-year plan, allowing for the wider circulation of feminist ideas and consumer logic. Estonia’s economy and social fabric occupied a midground relationship with capitalism during the Soviet period, but writers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski have often positioned Estonia as a successful “paradigm” of neoliberal transformation given the country consolidated a liberal democracy and working market economy with relative ease after 1991. This also brought sudden and wide-reaching social inequalities, such as a high gender pay gap despite strong rates of education amongst women, making Estonia’s experience of transition comparatively extreme against other postsocialist regions; see also Zenonas Norkus, ‘Why Did Estonia Perform Best? The North–South Gap in the Post-Socialist Economic Transition of the Baltic states’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 38, 1 (2007): 21-42; Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘Polska Scena Obrotowa’, *Polityka*, 44, 29 (Oct. 1994): 234-242.

known as “normalisation”, underpinned by a policy of intensive economic shock therapy.<sup>581</sup> Terms such as normalisation, transition and reconstruction arguably placed postsocialist regions in a state of becoming. This rhetoric led to their conceptualisation as economically and culturally liminal spaces, neither quite east, nor west.

One of the most poignant of Shelly’s interview contributors was an individual who could be inferred had lived in East Berlin (Fig. 3.11, 1994). In her segment, she laments the end of what she remembers as ‘my GDR’, whilst also acknowledging that it fell short of its promises: ‘...my brothers and sister had work, their children were in kindergarten [...] everything wasn’t so expensive. I still wish for a better socialism’.<sup>582</sup> Her interview captures the economic precarity many residents were thrown into during the transition to the free market, when the safety nets and welfare benefits initially provided by the controlled state economy were suddenly removed. Later in the film, the contributor stated in response to one of Silver’s questions about transition that ‘capitalism: ...exploitation, homelessness, unemployment, that’s what it means to me’.<sup>583</sup>

The accelerated speed at which the economic shock therapy was implemented in East/Central Europe created dramatic changes such as spikes in unemployment, homelessness, and the large-scale privatisation of public assets bought up by a small number of wealthy individuals. Shelly’s interviews arguably illustrate what Dimitrakaki has defined as capital’s “global imperative”.<sup>584</sup> In *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (2013) she argues that as capitalism develops state welfare shrinks and this has the most significant material impact on the lives of women who carry more considerable burdens of social reproduction

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<sup>581</sup> These countries include Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Mongolia.

<sup>582</sup> Shelly Silver (dir.), *Former East/Former West*, 62’00” (Berlin: Daad Künstlerprogramm, 1994), accessed with permission of director 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>.

<sup>583</sup> Shelly Silver (dir.), *Former East/Former West*, 62’00” (Berlin: Daad Künstlerprogramm, 1994), accessed with permission of director 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>.

<sup>584</sup> Following materialist feminist Nancy Fraser, Dimitrakaki suggests that while the second-wave’s political project has been successful in bringing women into the workplace, capitalist accumulation continues to prevent the improvement of their material reality; Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, Artwork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 14.

labour when the state withdraws (explored through the “crisis of care” in Chapter 1).<sup>585</sup> Dimitrakaki’s point is supported if we look at statistics compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division showing that by 1999 women still spent significantly more hours completing unpaid work than men in Estonia - five hours per day versus three hours (Fig. 3.14).

In many Soviet regions women were actively encouraged into the workplace, abortion was legal, and childcare was provided for workers.<sup>586</sup> For example, research by the UN shows that women’s parliamentary representation in Eastern Europe and the USSR was far greater than in other developed countries between 1975 and 1987 (Fig. 3.15). As Edit András notes, ‘Socialism and its welfare policies did cut back gender-based economic discrimination, but this happened at the cost of the state appropriating the so called “women’s question” and degrading it to an economic one’, which often meant that certain social pressures still remained around sexual preference, domestic labour and the choice to have children.<sup>587</sup> Moreover, Katy Deepwell suggests:

While equality for women was understood as integral to official socialism, women still found themselves confronted with a “double burden” at work and at home, and feminism was often portrayed negatively as another ideology to be treated with suspicion, an import from the West, a concentration on individualism or even a regressive, bourgeois value.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>586</sup> It is worth noting the difference between the comparatively progressive Bolshevik years and the reactionary Stalinist regime. Decrees issued in the late 1910s and 1920s made it easier to divorce, with guaranteed child support outside of marriage. It was also sanctioned that married couples could live separately and a man could take a woman’s surname in marriage, but many of these decrees were recalled by Stalin in the 1950s; Anne Bobroff, ‘The Bolsheviks and Working Women 1905–1920’, *Soviet Studies*, 26, 4, (Oct. 1974): 540–67; Caimiao Liu, ‘Stalin’s New Soviet Woman’, *Sociology Mind*, 9 (2019): 247–257.

<sup>587</sup> Edit András, ‘Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past’, *n.paradoxa*, 11 (Oct. 1999): 5.

<sup>588</sup> Katy Deepwell and Agata Jakubowska (eds.), *All Women Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 4–5.

By 1989, dismantling existing socialism allowed for the open circulation of gender theory from non-Soviet countries, which had previously been either illegal or untranslated.<sup>589</sup> Literature examining the experience of gender in the Soviet period quickly proliferated.<sup>590</sup> Many years of sedimented feminist “waves” were openly disseminated in postsocialist regions at once. Despite this, research shows that after transition women’s parliamentary representation fell rapidly between 1987 and 1990.<sup>591</sup>

In the catalogue for the exhibition *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna/Warsaw, 2009-2010), art historian Marina Pachmanová notes how significant books on feminist theory published between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the time of her writing lacked reference to countries transitioning from socialism, recognising that these societies often met feminist discourse with mistrust.<sup>592</sup> This is corroborated by art historians Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, who in the later 1990s interviewed 85 female artists, concluding that for the majority ‘...understanding concepts of patriarchy and fighting male domination were just too overwhelming during perestroika’.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Some regions like Yugoslavia did have a greater openness to literature from the USA, France and Britain due to their non-aligned system. In October 1978, the conference ‘Drug-ca Žena: Žensko Pitanje – Novi Pristup?’ [Comrade Woman: The Women’s Question – A New Approach?] was held at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, making it the first feminist conference in a communist country. However, these events were rare and should not be taken to constitute a formal feminist movement; Bojana Pejić, ‘Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks?’, *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*. ed. Ana Janevski et. al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 287.

<sup>590</sup> For example, see Janet Elise Johnson et. al, *Living Gender after Communism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Nanette Funk et. al., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993); Magdalena J. Zaborowska, et. al. *Over the Wall / After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures Through an East-West Gaze* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>591</sup> United Nations, *The World’s Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1991), 33.

<sup>592</sup> Curated by Bojana Pejić, the exhibition *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna/Warsaw, 2009-2010) analysed the way that emancipation from socialist gender roles happened simultaneous to the growth of nationalisms and neoliberal policies, which brought with them new conceptualisations of gender in art; Marina Pachmanová, ‘In? Out? In Between? Some Notes on the Invisibility of a Nascent Eastern European Feminist and Gender Discourse in Contemporary Art Theory’ in *Gender Check: A Reader* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010), 37-54; many art historical revisions after 1989 were concerned with reconnecting regions with their “interrupted” modernisms, but very little emphasis was given to the way gender discourse functioned in these contexts. For a notable exception, see Edit András’ essay on the problems of reconnecting postsocialist art history with genderless modernisms: ‘A Painful Farewell to Modernism: Difficulties in the Period of Transition’ in *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, ed. Bojana Pejić, ex. cat. (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 115-126.

<sup>593</sup> The Baigells’ study reveals that ‘women artists simply did not respond to feminism in any of its potential manifestations’ and that biological determinism was still prevalent across Russia, Estonia and Latvia; a number of artists associated feminism ‘with hostility to men, with sexual deviance, with rejection of good manners, with separation of the sexes’ but overall ‘with virtually anything but a concern for equality and daily domestic problems’; Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Peeling Potatoes, Painting Pictures: Women Artists in Post-Soviet Russia, Estonia and Latvia: The First Decade* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 9, 6.

Comparing the resistance to feminism in artworks from Western and Eastern Europe, András' speech at the opening symposium of the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Stockholm, 1999) was careful to warn that '[m]oments of coincidence or concord between the two can create a mirage, a false sense of synchronicity potentially deluding both sides'.<sup>594</sup> Considering contemporary attitudes to feminism in postsocialist art, she observed a 'gender minefield' in East/Central Europe, noting that 'gender aspects appear in the [artworks] at times virtually concealed by various camouflage techniques, at other times openly to the point of brutality; yet, in self-reflection and statements of intention, gender is glaringly absent'.<sup>595</sup> Silver's documentary project illuminated the economic and social precarity of women living under economic transition, but András indicates that we must approach comparing the material conditions of women in different contexts with caution. While a particular repudiation of feminism might notionally appear similar to Britain, I argue that the division between what is visible to a Western viewer, and what the work actually signified in its original context is much more complex, given that postsocialist regions had not experienced the same history of feminist time.

Boris Groys proposes that the entire world 'currently finds itself in a condition one could term post-communist'.<sup>596</sup> The problem with his statement, however, is that it flattens the specificities of context. The transition from state socialism to capitalism did not simply see Eastern Europe and Russia join capitalist countries to share in the same economic reality.<sup>597</sup> With the term "postcommunism" Pejić questioned whether it was right to suggest that communism had ever been a living praxis, and whether "postsocialism" better represented actually existing

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<sup>594</sup> Edit András, 'Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past', *n.paradoxa*, 11 (Oct. 1999): 4; the exhibition project *After the Wall* took place at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 1999, considering how the legacies of communism manifested in art practice in Eastern and Central Europe (through visual art, video and photography) ten years after perestroika. The catalogue and accompanying essays have become important sources for understanding how the postcommunist landscape impacted notions of gender, the body, history, nationhood, consumerism and memory in artistic practice. The exhibition was funded by the Soros Cultural Central; Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999).

<sup>595</sup> Edit András, 'Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past', *n.paradoxa*, 11 (Oct. 1999): 7.

<sup>596</sup> Boris Groys, 'The Post-Communist Condition' in *Who If Not We Should at Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 Episodes on (Ex)Changing Europe?*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, ex. cat. (Amsterdam: Artimo/Gijs Stork, 2004), 164.

<sup>597</sup> Idealist claims such as Anda Rottenberg's suggestion that 'Yalta borders have been erased, the world is a global village today' capture the way that narratives of the end of history mapped onto postsocialist space, obscuring political frictions that continued to simmer; Anda Rottenberg, *Europe Unknown* (Krakov, 1991), 13; Robert Fleck also problematically flattened postsocialist experience with the statement that all art of the 1990s could be summarised as 'art after communism' in *Manifesta 2*; Robert Fleck, 'Art After Communism?' in *Manifesta 2: European Biennial of Contemporary Art* (Luxembourg: Casino Luxembourg, 1988), 268.

socialism. Terms such as “Central and Eastern Europe” left out the Baltic regions, but to come up with a new ‘...abstract expression [seemed] to create suspicion’.<sup>598</sup> Igor Zabel has proposed that the changeability of Eastern European identity cemented the West’s singular and coherent identity by comparison, arguing that:

Writers often speak about the “former East”, intending to stress that they speak about a region which used to be a different world, while now this difference is abolished. They never, however, speak about the “former West”; in this discourse, the West remains a firm cultural and political entity, while the “former East” has somehow lost its difference from the West without becoming identical to it.<sup>599</sup>

The recent research project *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (2009-2016) attempted to correct this imbalance but with limited success.<sup>600</sup> *Former West* was coordinated at the Basis Voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht, Netherlands, and events took place in Berlin, Istanbul, Prague, Madrid, Warsaw and London. The project comprised exhibitions, lectures, publications and interviews, and a web archive that positioned itself as a corrective to Francis Fukuyama’s narrative of the “end of history”.<sup>601</sup> As Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh noted in the project reader: ‘If the “former East” emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War in 1989, its western geo-political counterpart - blinded by the (seemingly default) victory of neoliberal capitalism - has widely failed to recognize the impact of these massive changes upon itself’.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Bojana Pejić, ‘The Dialectics of Normality’ in *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, eds. David Elliott and Bojana Pejić, ex. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 16.

<sup>599</sup> Igor Zabel, ‘We and the Others’, *Moscow Art Magazine*, 22 (1998): 27-35; Igor Zabel, ‘The (Former) East and Its Identity’ in *Who If Not We Should at Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 Episodes on (Ex)Changing Europe?*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, ex. cat. (Amsterdam: Artimo/Gijs Stork, 2004), 283-88, 285; first published as ‘Dialogue’ in *Arteast 2000+*, eds. Zdenka Badovinac and Peter Weibel, ex. cat. (Ljubljana: Folio Verlag, Bolzano/Vienna, 2001), 28-33.

<sup>600</sup> Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2016).

<sup>601</sup> The scope of the project was wide-reaching, its dialogue covered subjects from identity, nationalism, security, migration, labour, history and colonialism. Contributors were a cross-section of artists, theorists and historians including among others Homi K. Bhaba, Boris Groys, Rosi Braidotti, Jodi Dean, TJ Demos, IRWIN, Ernesto Laclau, Claire Bishop, Walter Mignolo, Irit Rogroff, Július Koller, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Edit Andrés; *Former West*, accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2018, at <https://formerwest.org/Front>.

<sup>602</sup> Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, ‘About’, *Former West*, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019, at <https://formerwest.org/About>.

By notionally equalising both former East and West, *Former West* actually allowed the West to better conceal its hegemony. Katarzyna Kosmala has suggested that due to its roaming format *Former West* was ‘less driven by institutional framings, working as self-organized creative units based on shorter term projects and mobilised by the visions of their co-ordinators’.<sup>603</sup> However, she does not consider the ways that funding bodies create institutional framing, regardless of the physical space they occupy; *Former West* was part-funded by the Erste Foundation, owned by the Austrian Erste Bank, a corporate collector of contemporary art in East/Central Europe. Erste have funded many exhibitions and research projects, including *Gender Check* (2009), *Patterns* (2010-2017) and *Tranzit* (2009-present).<sup>604</sup> While these endeavours do much to promote and share knowledge of East/Central European art, these funding initiatives are aimed at lending legitimacy to Erste’s collection. A case in point is the exhibition *Kontakt*, which contained works by pro-Western dissident artists such as Július Koller, Mladen Stilinović, KwieKulik, IRWIN and Sanja Iveković.<sup>605</sup> While Kosmala argues that the roaming nature of *Former West* allowed it to circumvent and question institutional control, Western hegemony still framed the project through its funding.<sup>606</sup> Marina Gržinić proposes:

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<sup>603</sup> Katarzyna Kosmala, ‘Sexing the Border, Literally? Utopian Tactics of Dealings With/Out Institutions’ in *Sexing the Border: Gender, Art and New Media in Central and Eastern Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 206; Katarzyna Kosmala, ‘“Through a Glass Darkly”: Performative Practice... Without Border, Without Name’, *Variant*, 41 (Spring 2011): unpagged, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020, at <https://www.variant.org.uk/41texts/kkosmala41.html>; see also, Kristin Orav, ‘The Role of Visualizing Failure in Estonian Art, 1987-1999: The “Winners’ Generation”’, *Signs and Society*, 3, 1 (Spring 2015): 109; for a more comprehensive critique, see: Miško Šuvaković, ‘The Ideology of Exhibition: On the Ideologies of Manifesta’, *platformaSCCA*, 3 (January 2002), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020, at <http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakoviceng.htm>; Anders Härm, ‘On the Genealogy of “Soros Realism”: The Making of International Eastern European Art (1989–2004)’, *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* 27, 3, 4 (2018): 7-30.

<sup>604</sup> ‘Protect Contemporary Culture’, *Erste Foundation*, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020, at <https://www.erstestiftung.org/en/activities/protect-contemporary-culture/>.

<sup>605</sup> ‘Mission’, *Kontakt Collection*, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020, at <https://www.kontakt-collection.org/>.

<sup>606</sup> Anders Härm’s has also recognised the problems with similar funding initiatives, such as the Soros Centres for Contemporary Art (SCCA), active from 1992-1999. Härm ironically calls the kind of art that comes from these programmes “Soros Realism”. The organisation was funded by the Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros through the Open Society Institute (OSI). The SCCA network provided financing for artwork and exhibition-making due to the lack of state funding and art market in post-socialist regions across East Central Europe; Anders Härm, ‘On the Genealogy of “Soros Realism”: The Making of International Eastern European Art (1989–2004)’, *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* 27, 3, 4 (2018): 7-30; Kristin Orav has also argued that these centres showed preference to artists inspired by Western art and new media, over those who worked in traditional local mediums; Kristin Orav, ‘The Role of Visualizing Failure in Estonian Art, 1987-1999: The “Winners’ Generation”’, *Signs and Society*, 3, 1 (Spring 2015): 109; for a more comprehensive critique, see Miško Šuvaković, ‘The Ideology of Exhibition: On the Ideologies of Manifesta’, *platformaSCCA*, 3 (January 2002), unpagged, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020, at <http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakoviceng.htm>.

In the case of Eastern Europe, the “former” means that processes of evacuation, abstraction and expropriation of its historical, social and political realities and practices are actually over. In the case of “former” Western Europe, a purely performative, empty, speculative gesture is implied. While the former East is today robbed completely of its history, we should say with David Harvey, expropriated and dispossessed of historical, theoretical and epistemological grounds (the Communism that is taken today as the future is dispossessed by its historical background in the former Eastern Europe), the West is just performing its dispossession. It plays with a speculative, not fictionalised format of itself (though it pretends to be fiction); the “former” presents a speculative matrix that offers the West the possibility not to be conscious of a proper historical and present hegemonic power, and therefore not responsible for it. This speculative character of the “former” Western Europe resembles perfectly the speculative character of present financial Capitalism and its crisis.<sup>607</sup>

What becomes clear is that the gesture of “forming” the West actually obscures the material and historical reality of the two regions. For Gržinić, ‘...the former Eastern European space is nonexistent’ - its culture, politics and society has been transfigured into a distant past memory.<sup>608</sup> In this section, an analysis of Silver’s *Former East/Former West* has revealed the importance of contextual specificity. A superficial reading of this artwork might have interpreted it as showing the mutual experience of postsocialism. However, when considering more carefully the material differences dividing gendered experience in the former East and former West, it becomes clear that Silver’s artwork highlights the ‘false sense of synchronicity’ that András warns against.<sup>609</sup> The former East/former

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<sup>607</sup> Marina Gržinić, ‘Video in the Time of a Double, Political and Technological Transition in the Former Eastern European Context’ in *Transitland: Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe 1989-2009*, Edit András, ed. (Budapest: Luwig Museum-Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009), 17-35, 19.

<sup>608</sup> Marina Gržinić, ‘Video in the Time of a Double, Political and Technological Transition in the Former Eastern European Context’ in *Transitland: Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe 1989-2009*, Edit András, ed. (Budapest: Luwig Museum-Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009), 17.

<sup>609</sup> Edit András, ‘Gender Minefield: The Heritage of the Past’, *n.paradoxa*, 11 (Oct. 1999): 4; the exhibition project *After the Wall* took place at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 1999, considering how the legacies of communism manifested in art practice in Eastern and Central Europe (through visual art, video and photography) ten years after the fall of the perestroika. The catalogue and accompanying essays have become important sources for understanding the way the postcommunist landscape impacted notions of gender, the body, history, nationhood, consumerism, and memory in artistic practice. The exhibition was funded by the Soros Cultural Central; Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999).

West optic has therefore helped show the potential reversibility of narratives of progress and loss, juxtaposing not just two geographical spaces, but two temporalities, with paradoxical implications for the triad of political, impolitical and apolitical deployed in Chapter 2.

### **Mare Tralla**

As noted earlier, Tralla grew up in Tallinn where she studied painting at the Fine Arts School in Estonia (1990-1996) and moved to London in 1996 to study for a Masters in Hypermedia at the University of Westminster. As an artist working across both the UK and Estonian contexts, her work is particularly informative for this study. She uses tropes such as irony, humour, vulgarity, and the resistance to political positioning. Yet, her artworks are created in dialogue with distinct histories developed through specific and local cultural models in Estonia. Tralla was involved in organising some of the first formal feminist exhibitions in Estonia from 1994-1998, including *Kood-eks/Code-Ex* (Tallinn, 1994), *Est.Fem* (Tallinn, 1995), *Private Views* (Tallinn, 1998) and *(Meta)Dialogue* (Tallinn, 1998).<sup>610</sup>

Tralla took part either as curator or exhibitor in most of these exhibitions, where she remembers ‘...trying out different ways of thinking about gender. We were experimenting with all of these new feminist ideas that we had recently been opened to. It was exciting, but we were also sceptical’.<sup>611</sup> What is interesting about these shows is that whilst exploring and critiquing certain aspects of gendered experience, they were resistant to overtly labelling themselves as feminist, given that, in the context of the dismantling of the Soviet regime, Marxist feminism in particular was associated with an outdated and anti-democratic theoretical model. Given she worked between London and Tallinn, Tralla’s work manifests different paradigms for approaching, locating, and investigating

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<sup>610</sup> In the following texts for example: Katrin Kivimaa, ed. *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*. (Tallinn: TLU Press, 2012); Lolita Jablonskiene, ‘“Just An Artist?” An Imaginary Exhibition Project’ in *Feminisms Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, ed. Malin Hedlin Hayden et. al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2010), 141-155; Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘“The Gender Issue”: Lessons from Post-Socialism’ in *Gender, Artwork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 71-106; of course, the fact that all of these exhibitions happened in Tallinn suggests that there is still a great deal of work to be done to consider Estonian localities outside of the capital, but for now is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>611</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

meaning - suggesting that any consideration of the impolitical must account for the local contexts in which an artwork is created.

London-based curator and artist Skelton observed that Tralla's work occupied a number of positions between feminism and postfeminism but fitted neither category neatly:

To many in the west Tralla's work would have appeared postfeminist in form: provocative, vulgar, anti-political and at times humorous. Yet her work traverses a line that is critical of western canons of feminist history due to their unsuitability to the needs of Estonian artists, whilst maintaining the importance of a feminist politics that engendered the critique of representation - a notion that was growing in importance across the new consumer society.<sup>612</sup>

Estonia was arguably one of the most successful countries at modifying for a quick return to the market economy. An operational representative democracy was established with relative ease through the Constitution that ensured freedom of speech, movement, political party support, and property rights, which was also made easier by the relative absence of friction between ethnic groups and low-level of corruption. But this success also brought with it a certain pressure to conform, as Masso states '[t]o be successful it is better not to be different. The search for group identities and request of group rights, popular elsewhere in the world, is alien to the Estonian society', he continues, '[h]ere, there are not many different ways to be on the right track. Differences just indicate distance from the standard of success'.<sup>613</sup> Women in postsocialist regions had to struggle against the image of failure - whether this was as a failure of the consumer transformation, or the image of themselves as backward or conservative nation on the world stage. Market-based economic reform had caused women's unemployment in Estonia to rise to 38.3%

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<sup>612</sup> Pam Skelton, 'Shifting Subjects – Beyond the East/West Divide' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Angela Dimitrakaki, et. al., ex cat. (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 10-18; this was also argued by Angela Dimitrakaki in the catalogue essay 'Space, Gender, Art: Redressing Private Views' in *Private Views* (2000), 40.

<sup>613</sup> Iivi Masso, 'Freedom Euphoria or Post-Communist Hangover? On Social Development of Estonia in 1990s' *Nosy Nineties: Problems, Themes and Meanings in Estonian Art on 1990s*, eds. Sirje Helme and Johannes Saar (Tallinn: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2001), 24; Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Vera Sheridan, *Life in Post-Communist Eastern Europe After EU Membership* (London: Routledge, 2012), 170.

exceeding that of men at 24.7%, which directly contested the new image of the booming entrepreneurial woman so crucial to postfeminist rhetoric that promoted the ‘modern woman as an emancipated, flexible and rich consumer’.<sup>614</sup>

Tralla resists this image of the new consumer woman in her artwork by playing the role of the “disgusting girl”.<sup>615</sup> During our interview, she remembered the time she went to a bar in Tallinn and someone shouted across the room to her: “you disgusting girl!”.<sup>616</sup> While being hurt by the words, she decided to use the label to describe herself, inhabiting it as part of her art practice to reclaim the misogynistic slur for her own use - meaning she purposefully acted and dressed in a shocking, obtuse or impolite manner. The visceral connotations of the label defy the new neoliberal woman’s body that was called upon to be clean and functional, as well as perform what the Western gaze expected of the Estonian artist whose identity was continually refined against the image of the Western woman.<sup>617</sup>

In 1996, Tralla appeared on an episode of the television programme *Ars et vita* [Art and Life] (Figs. 3.16 - 3.17, 1996) aired on the mainstream channel ERR in Estonia.<sup>618</sup> The art historian Harry Liivrand interviewed Tralla, alongside the artist Jüri Arrak, a non-conformist painter who came to prominence during the Soviet period.<sup>619</sup> Arrak wore a tired beige jacket with a denim button-up underneath, whereas Tralla appeared in a fluorescent floral skirt, heavy make-up, orange hairclips, bright pink earrings, and with her hair dyed yellow and blue. Arrak’s furrowed brow contrasted with Tralla’s open, irreverent body language. During the live interview, Tralla unbuttoned her black

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<sup>614</sup> Leyla Alyanak, ‘Baltic Blues’, *World Of Work: The Magazine of the ILO*, 31 (Sept. - Oct. 1999): 1-2; Zofia Łapniewska ‘First-World Aspirations and Feminism Translocation: In Search of Economic and Leftist Alternatives’ in *Solidarity in Struggle Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe*, ed. Eszter Kováts (Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016), 24

<sup>615</sup> Mare Tralla, ‘T.Est.Art’, *n.paradoxa*, 5 (Nov, 1997): 57-65; Katrin Kivimaa, ‘Stories of a “Disgusting Girl”’: Cyberfeminist and Trans/National, Techno-Laughter in Mare Tralla’s Art’, in Andreas Trossek (ed.), *Estonian Artists 3* (Tallinn: Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, 2007), 16-25.

<sup>616</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

<sup>617</sup> See also Raluca Voinea, ‘Geographically Defined Exhibitions: The Balkans, between Eastern Europe and the New Europe’, *Third Text*, 21, 2 (2007): 145-151; Mari Laaniste, ‘Conflicting Visions: Estonia and Estonians as Presented in the Cinema of the 1990s and 2000s’, *Studies on Art and Architecture*, 20, 3/4 (2011): 140-143.

<sup>618</sup> Lepik Kalev (dir.), *Ars et vita: Skandaalid* [Art and Life: Scandals], trans. Mirja Pitkäärt (ERR, 1996, 29’00”), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, at <https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/ars-et-vita-skandaalid>.

<sup>619</sup> Arrak’s artwork had been considered controversial in its use of folklore, myth, religious imagery and modernist tropes, which were all against the officially sanctioned socialist realist aesthetic, but by the 1990s this was widely accepted practice.

blouse, removed it, and put on a frilly blue blouse she had been carrying in a shopping bag (Fig. 3.17, 1996). Unsure of how to react, Liivrand and Arrak attempted to ignore her and keep talking, looking increasingly uncomfortable.

By disrupting the interview, Tralla refused to play the role of the polite guest by later stating, ‘I would love to see [an artist] biting somebody on the street. We need this feeling to understand that life is worth living’.<sup>620</sup> Playing up the character of the “disgusting girl” Tralla presented her body as uncontrollable in the television appearance, her naked flesh quite literally spilling out into the public arena, invoking the viewer’s discomfort but also refusing for it to be viewed as an open invitation to consume her body pleasurably. Masha Gessen has pointed out that ‘for decades, the media bore the responsibility for enforcing the myth of the gender-undifferentiated wonder of the brave new world’, while this ‘myth of the genderless-ness’ of socialist citizens was intended to encourage equality, it actually led to a depoliticisation of the body in the media.<sup>621</sup> Adriana Băban has argued that this led to a particular kind of control:

Under communist rule, even beauty and desire were proclaimed indecent and harmful. As a result of this puritan-like ethic, the nude body disappeared from paintings, décolletage from TV, and love scenes from movies. Eroticism among married couples was replaced by the glorification of the “woman-mother” and a communist cult of maternity. Adolescent sex education, called “sanitary education,” was reduced to instruction in hygiene and physiology.<sup>622</sup>

During transition to the libidinal economy of capitalism, a sudden influx of overtly sexualised images of women were used to sell products but there was little critical discourse for reappraisal. As the proliferation of advertising campaigns, television programmes and print media grew across the new free market, so too did the exploitation of

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<sup>620</sup> Lepik Kalev (dir.), *Ars et vita: Skandaalid* [Art and Life: Scandals], trans. Mirja Pitkäärt (ERR, 1996, 29’00”), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, at <https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/ars-et-vita-skandaalid>.

<sup>621</sup> Masha Gessen ‘Sex in Media and the Birth of the Sex Media in Russia’, in *Post-Communism and the Body Politics*, ed. Ellen Berry (New York: New York University, 1995), 199.

<sup>622</sup> Adriana Băban, ‘Women’s Sexuality and Reproductive Behavior in Post-Ceausescu Romania: A Psychological Approach’, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics and Everyday Life After Socialism*, eds. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 239.

the female body for commercial ends, bringing its image in line with the postfeminist discourse considered in Chapter 2 but at rapid speed:

In the mid and late 1990s, the pages of the new publications as well as the old, hard-liner ideological bastion of gender norms, such as *Zhenata Dnes*, switched their attention to women's most valued attributes in the conditions of the market - their bodies and their beauty. Articles detoured from their previously ideologically constraining tone, moralizing about the duties and responsibilities of women to others - family members, social groups, party delegates - into the indulgent sphere of self-care, where the sole benefactor of the woman's desire to improve is the woman herself.<sup>623</sup>

For artists like Tralla in Estonia, this new libidinal economy brought a visual culture that implicated the female body in a 'more sexualised way than ever before'.<sup>624</sup> In 1995 she created the video *This Is How We Gave Birth To Estonian Feminism* for the exhibition *Est.Fem*, which responded to this experience.<sup>625</sup> The video comprised footage of pornography taped from the antennae of a communal house television, by a tenant who had hacked into a satellite channel. She layered text from her childhood Soviet pioneer diaries from 1977-1981 over the footage, mixed with photos of Tralla's mother as a Soviet flower girl taken during a ceremony commending work heroes, where she passed bouquets to men. In this work, the images of national pride were juxtaposed with the new sexualised role of the female body during economic transition to shocking effect.

Tralla remembers being taken aback by seeing the sudden and overt objectification of the female body during the years of transition. Similarly, writer Anikó Imre recognises the difficulty in navigating the politics of these overly sexualised images '[t]he shock over the unbearable lightness of being was overwhelming for someone

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<sup>623</sup> Elza Ibroscheva, *Advertising, Sex and Post-Socialism: Women, Media and Femininity in the Balkans* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 115-16.

<sup>624</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

<sup>625</sup> The institution Ars Baltica created a digital archive of information about a symposium accompanying *Est.Fem*, often considered to be one of the first feminist exhibitions in Estonia: 'Media & Ethics of the Contemporary Critique', *Ars Baltica* (1996), accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020, at <http://neoscenes.net/projects/me/program.html>

unequipped with any kind of advertisement literacy'.<sup>626</sup> What is interesting about Tralla's practice, particularly as it existed in the 1990s, was the way it explored what can be considered to be feminist problematics (the objectification and monetisation of the female body, the subservient role of women within both a capitalist and Soviet patriarchy, etc.) but with a reluctance to directly align herself with a feminist politics. Tralla notes 'We have this saying during Soviet times women were more equal than equal. My thinking on feminism's difficult position is that it is largely indebted to this Soviet experience'.<sup>627</sup> When discussing this reluctance, she has stated:

In the late eighties, there were women artists who had dealt with female sexuality and other more internalised questions, but those dealing with social issues were still quite rare: people would try not to deal with politics in their work. For the younger generation which took part in *Est.Fem* it became like a testing ground; it really opened a door for them because it was a completely unused area. It wasn't like we all really believed in feminism, but it was a combative way of expressing different ideas...<sup>628</sup>

As argued above, there was a clear material and cultural necessity for a feminist politics in postsocialist Estonia yet Tralla recalls, along with her peers, approaching feminism with caution: '...there was suspicion about what feminism could actually achieve and whether it correctly represented us as Estonian women. We were interested in the issues it raised, sure, but did not feel wholeheartedly that it could work for us'.<sup>629</sup> While this was true of the first years of transition, it is worth noting however that in recent years she has much more openly identified her practice as feminist - for example, her website states that her video *Unforgettable Hits* (2006) is '...a feminist critique of the

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<sup>626</sup> Anikó Imre, *Identity Games: Globalization and the Transformation of Media Cultures in the New Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>627</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla' *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 20.

<sup>628</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla' *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 20.

<sup>629</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

dominant ideals of gender roles in Estonia and Eastern-Europe at large' suggesting that Tralla's own development as an artist might be viewed in the trajectory of a progress narrative.<sup>630</sup>

In her interview with van Mourik Broekman, Tralla discussed how the feminist problematic was received and used by Estonian artists, as well as the potential tensions it held as a Western export.<sup>631</sup> Tralla recalled experiencing much of feminist theory simultaneously: 'I saw VNS Matrix's work in Helsinki in February 1995; I don't think I had really read many books before then which dealt with feminist theory'.<sup>632</sup> She had gone to Finland to research for *Est.Fem*, which she co-curated with Reet Varblane and Komissarov. Tralla noted Komissarov stating 'We have to deal with that [feminism]. It will go very well in the West. We could use it to break into the art world'.<sup>633</sup> While feminism had become an entrenched part of the academy underpinning global contemporary art, Skelton noted in the vein of a loss narrative that in the UK these were '...fallow years, a decade of retrenchment where once radical strategies and interventions became absorbed into either the academy or the mainstream or both'.<sup>634</sup>

Returning to Tralla's appearance on *Ars et vita*, a comparable example from the London context can be found in Tracey Emin's 1997 appearance on the television special *Is Painting Dead*, broadcast on Channel 4 (Figs. 3.18 - 3.19, 1997).<sup>635</sup> The special aired live after the Turner Prize ceremony. Emin appeared at the debate intoxicated, interrupting other speakers, swearing, smoking and slurring: 'I want to be with my friends. I'm drunk. I want to phone my mum. She's going to be embarrassed by this conversation. I don't care. I don't give a fuck about

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<sup>630</sup> 'Unforgettable Hits', *Mare Tralla* (undated), accessed 16<sup>th</sup> November 2021, at <https://www.tralla.net/gallery/unforgettable-hits/>.

<sup>631</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview With Mare Tralla' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*, ed. Pam Skelton et. al. (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 18.

<sup>632</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla' *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al. (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 18.

<sup>633</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla' *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 18.

<sup>634</sup> Pam Skelton, 'Shifting Subjects – Beyond the East/West Divide' in *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 10.

<sup>635</sup> Rena Butterwick (dir.), *Is Painting Dead*, 65'00" (Channel 4, 1997); the roundtable brought together artists, critics and curators including Norman Rosenthal, Karen Wright, Waldemar Januszczak, Matthew Collings, Richard Cork, Jane Harris, Martin Maloney, Roger Scruton and David Sylvester.

it'.<sup>636</sup> Surrounded by men wearing suits and bowties musing on the state of contemporary art, Emin became visibly agitated, eventually standing up and declaring 'You people aren't relating to me now' over muffled interference as she ripped her microphone off.<sup>637</sup> Eventually, Emin announced she was going to return to the Turner Prize party, and walked off set. In both Tralla and Emin's television appearances we see the collapsing of boundaries between art and artist. In my interview with Tralla, she mentioned that her act was not premeditated but felt like the natural thing to do at the time.<sup>638</sup> With Emin, there is no evidence to suggest that her move was premeditated, and it certainly does not appear that way in the recording; she later apologised for the appearance saying she had been heavily affected by the medication she was on for a broken finger.<sup>639</sup> What joins Tralla and Emin's television appearances is that the artists both seized control of their airtime by doing something shocking to pierce the unwritten decorum of the event, pushing the boundaries of what the programme producers had expected of them, refusing the role of "polite guest".

Chantal Mouffe's *On the Political* (2005) recognises the importance of conflict in political life for resisting the postpolitical.<sup>640</sup> She reimagines antagonism (conflict between enemies) as "agonism", meaning a conflict between adversaries who have mutual respect for each other's legitimate differences. We might view Emin's refusal of her adversaries' legitimacy as a symptom of her feeling unwelcome or excluded from the debate. Instead of viewing her drunken refusal to engage in debate as naïve or immature, we could render her actions as impolitical, particularly with respect to Apter's conceptualisation. It could be that Emin's appearance actually represented the debate's failure to carve an agonistic political arena for the artist, leading to her ultimate rejection of it.

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<sup>636</sup> Rena Butterwick (dir.), *Is Painting Dead*, 65'00" (Channel 4, 1997); the nominees for the 1997 Turner Prize were Christine Borland, Angela Bulloch, Cornelia Parker and Gillian Wearing, who won with the video installation *60 Minute Silence* (1996).

<sup>637</sup> Rena Butterwick (dir.), *Is Painting Dead*, 65'00" (Channel 4, 1997).

<sup>638</sup> Mare Tralla interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

<sup>639</sup> 'Tracey Emin: Artists' Biography', *Caroline Wiseman Modern & Contemporary*, undated, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021, at <http://www.carolinewiseman.com/work/tracey-emin-st-anthony/works>.

<sup>640</sup> Mouffe argues that conflict must be negotiated in parliamentary debate, as so to avoid the existential threat of the political descending into violence and one of the consequences of the 'negation of the ineradicable character of antagonism' such as the populist right-wing resurgence caused, she argues, by denying voters a wide range of democratic identities; Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

Perhaps Emin saw the interview as a set-up: she had been invited to perform the philistine role for the enjoyment of viewers, but ultimately her opinions would be precluded by the expertise of the other male participants around her, causing her to claim ‘you people aren’t relating to me now’ as she storms off.<sup>641</sup> Conversely, it could be argued that Tralla treats the other men in the television debate as adversaries. By remaining in the interview and continuing to answer the interviewer’s questions, regardless of the fact that Arrak was afforded the majority of airtime, she forges an agonistic relationship with them, accepting them as legitimate opponents even while disagreeing with them. In Emin’s appearance, she takes charge of her image by finally refusing to continue the conversation, blocking the television programme from showing and manipulating the way she comes across on camera.

For artists like Tralla, this new libidinal capitalist economy sexualised the female body for profit, but the interesting thing about her television appearance was that she did not present her body as intentionally sexualised. A comparable example from the London context might be Jemima Stehli’s series *Strip* (1999), in which she invited several curators, writers and collectors to participate in an artwork with an “undefined outcome”. When they arrived on set, Stehli asked them to sit in front of the camera as she undressed in front of them, capturing their awkward and uncomfortable reactions. The work has often been dismissed as postfeminist and degraded negatively by the press as self-indulgent, or ignorant of the sexual politics it invoked.<sup>642</sup> In the context of postsocialism however, the changing image of the naked body in public brought with it implicitly political connotations: a comparison might be drawn with Hajnal Németh’s *Striptease or Not* (Fig. 3.20, 2001) a short video held in the Transitland Archive. In the work, Németh parodied the act of stripping, removing her underwear while keeping her t-shirt on. The single-shot film took place on the busy Lágymányos Bridge over the Danube in Budapest, a well-known pick-up spot for sex workers. The camera was positioned to capture cars rushing past behind her, quite literally “stripping” the scene of any intimacy normally associated with the act. For the critic Andrea Bordács ‘...the very essence, the arousal of

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<sup>641</sup> Rena Butterwick (dir.), *Is Painting Dead, 65’00”* (Channel 4, 1997).

<sup>642</sup> Sally Miller, *Contemporary Photography and Theory: Concepts and Debates* (Abingdon: Bloomsbury 2020), 132.

desire, does not take place in this wholly asexual setting'.<sup>643</sup> Both Németh and Tralla explore the potential for displaying the female body in public with its sexual connotations removed, questioning the status of the representation of the female body in the new libidinal economy, and whether or not it is possible to separate it from its new overtly sexual role.

Communist regimes had considered pornography to be an exclusively Western phenomenon and interpreted it as a sign of moral decay caused by the capitalist mode of production, so for many, 'sexual liberation became semantically associated with liberalization and progress' and naked female bodies functioned as symbols of progressiveness.<sup>644</sup> Returning to Tralla's television appearance, we could infer that the naked female body would have had a heightened political dimension to Estonian viewers purely by its presence, given that for years it had either been negatively associated with capitalist moral decay, or the simple utilitarian function of bearing children. Emin and Tralla both therefore employ an impolitics as a means of navigating their representation in the media, and ultimately to retain control of their image, but it has been harder for me to position Tralla's television appearance as impolitical. For Tralla, the power of the sexual image had not been passed back to women during transition, but had been newly weaponised in service of capital through the proliferation of sexualised visual cultures. Returning to Tralla's statement considered earlier:

I found it very difficult to make any social comment, even when I saw problems which touched me personally. I felt like a Martian [...] I managed to be very shocking in Estonia – my whole personality, my while art was this “disgusting girl”, so I was perceived in that way. I don't want to shock anybody anymore,

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<sup>643</sup> Andrea Bordács, 'Játszd újra, szem! (Németh Hajnal képi világa) [Play it again, szem! (Hajnal Németh's visual world)]', *ÚM*, 6 (2002): 12.

<sup>644</sup> Writing about the specific context in Yugoslavia, Biljana Žikić has argued that the country had a less conservative approach to sex given its market-oriented economic policy, and relatively open border and labour policy. Žikić considers *Start* magazine (1969-1991) as an example of a "hybrid" publication that that 'combined the characteristics of a tabloid newspaper, with erotic and pornographic elements, with those of a high-brow magazine containing progressive, emancipatory and critical analysis of current affairs', suggesting that the nude images that did exist in the cultural imagination were often appropriated toward socialist ideological ends; Biljana Žikić, 'Dissidents liked Pretty Girls: Nudity, Pornography and Quality Press in Socialism', *Medijska istraživanja*, 16, 1 (2010): 53-54; 53-71.

because shocking here is a mere aspect of formality. There is no other language to make things visible.<sup>645</sup>

This interview response corroborates that whilst Tralla and Emin conducted superficially similar actions on live TV, the context means their political connotations are different. Playing the character of the disguising girl did not hold the same controversial connotations in London as it did for Tralla in Tallinn. Therefore, the impolitical that emerges from the specific locale of political capitulation in Britain does not translate in precisely the same way in Estonia, even if impolitical notions can be interpreted in specific artworks.

### Conclusion

When asked about what she learned from her experience with *Private Views*, Dimitrakaki felt that the exhibition revealed how any attempt at transnational curation inevitably becomes a question of hegemony.<sup>646</sup> Discussing the exhibition's impact on art history in Britain she stated *Private Views* '...did not have much *immediate* impact in the UK. But impact in the arts is slow and can take decades. I think today it can provide very useful knowledge about how the West, through feminism, approached the idea of New Europe'.<sup>647</sup> Indeed, the lack of press or publication about the exhibition suggested that the exhibition had a limited impact on art history in Britain at the time. However, the exhibition stands as an important historical example of exchange between Eastern and Western Europe, highlighting the difficulties with using a term such as "impolitical" transnationally, and without a contextually specific understanding of the social, economic and political factors influencing artistic production and curation.

In the essay "Five O'Clock on the Sun" Three Questions on Feminism and the Moving Image in the Visual Arts of Non-Western Europe' (2005), Dimitrakaki questioned how we can compare feminist art from different

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<sup>645</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman 'State of Play: An Interview with Mare Tralla' *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia*. ed. Pam Skelton et.al (London: Women's Art Library, 2000), 24-25.

<sup>646</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

<sup>647</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki interviewed by Bea Cartwright, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

contexts.<sup>648</sup> Rather than reducing the debate down to irreconcilable localities, she argued that they could all still speak to a bigger picture given that ‘...what is politically important is not *where* the histories of Estonian, Hungarian, and Greek women film and video artists will be written but *how*: their projected strangeness can be recast to disrupt the smooth flow of current hegemonic discourses’.<sup>649</sup> With this in mind, it is possible to return to the differences observed in the impolitics at play in these artworks and interpret them as historically specific objects, emerging from discourses with conflicting meanings and values.

It was argued that drawing a direct equivalence in impolitical tactics (as was the original intention of this chapter) actually reproduced cultural hegemony by depoliticising the context of postsocialist Estonia. Upon further exploration of artists such as Tralla, it became clear that this methodology ignored the particular reasons for Tralla’s indeterminate relationship with feminism in the 1990s. While her artistic and curatorial practice had been key to the development of feminist discourse in Estonian art history during the period, she was also interested in exploring how and why artists (including herself) also felt resistance to feminism. When unravelling these ostensible moments of feminist disaffection or refusal, this chapter has uncovered an array of political positions that are not usefully encapsulated by the term postfeminism, but are still very much engaged with feminist themes.

The WAL essay collection was used as a primary source, alongside recent interviews with participants, to understand the exhibition’s impact on the artists who took part. An analysis of works such as *F-Files* and *her.space* suggested that the Estonian works were motivated by an exploration of representation and female identity. Works such as the particularly controversial *Natural Law* suggested a refusal of feminist discourse. While this initially seemed uncomfortable to a writer like Dimitrakaki, through her writing I learned that it is important to pursue and understand why these artists might have been motivated to refuse feminist politics in the first place. Works emerging out of the British context such as *ExerMeda* and *Out of Your Body – Out of Your Mind* seemed anchored to second-

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<sup>648</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, “‘Five O’Clock on the Sun’ Three Questions on Feminism and the Moving Image in the Visual Arts of Non-Western Europe”, *Third Text*, 19, 3 (May, 2005): 269-82.

<sup>649</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, “‘Five O’Clock on the Sun’ Three Questions on Feminism and the Moving Image in the Visual Arts of Non-Western Europe”, *Third Text*, 19, 3 (May, 2005): 272.

wave feminist discourse in a much more straightforward way, given their exploration of the liberal feminist division of mind and body that had been an important debate in the 1970s.

This chapter has attempted to avoid capitulating to narratives of belated development whilst also recognising how this exhibition created a space for potential frictions and antagonisms to emerge and be questioned. As became clear in this chapter, the politics of time created by linguistics of the “post” and the “former” inflect these objects in unique ways. Earlier in the chapter it was argued that these terms block the concept modified by their prefix from being interpreted as a politically dynamic space, concealing the ways that hegemonic forces continued to operate, as in the case of the exhibition project *Former West*. There remains future scope to expand this analysis into other regions of the “former West” such as France or Italy, or to other previous members of the Soviet Bloc.

Using *Private Views*, the collaboration between artists and curators in Estonia and Britain has allowed me to map the impolitical across contexts. I unravelled the linear models of feminist “waves”, as well as progress and loss narratives, by showing their incommensurability with non-Western space, where artists based in Estonia did not experience the same history of feminist time as the participants based in Britain. Any observation of a continuum of feminist thinking must therefore remain sensitive to contextual specificity. The interface with Estonia in this chapter has shown that the impolitical functions relative to specific political narratives, for example in the former East, where the progress of Western feminism was simultaneously the loss of Marxist feminism, and political artwork might become merely impolitical in a British context. The impolitical therefore offers itself as a valuable, but also bivalent, critical term potentially inflecting narratives of both loss and progress.

## Illustrations



**Fig. 3.1.** *F-Files* displayed at *Private Views*, 1998, artwork by F.F.F.F, photographed by Pam Skelton, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive).



**Fig. 3.2.** *F-Files (No. 2)* displayed at *Private Views*, 1998, artwork by F.F.F.F, photographed by Pam Skelton, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive).



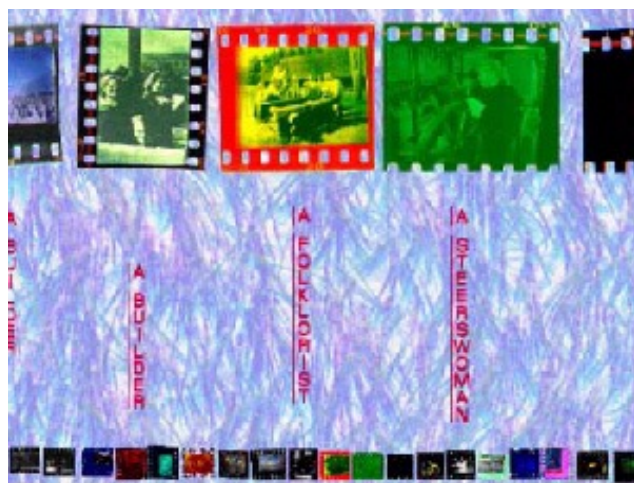
**Fig. 3.3.** *F-Files (No. 9)* displayed at *Private Views*, 1998, artwork by F.F.F.F, photographed by Pam Skelton, 102 x 152 mm (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive).



**Fig. 3.4.** *F-Files (No. 10)*, 1998, F.F.F.F, digital photograph, 500 x 602 mm (Image: Art Museum of Estonia Digital Collection).



**Fig. 3.5.** Installation view of *her.space* displayed at *Private Views*, 1998, installation by Mare Tralla, photographed by Pam Skelton, textiles and computer screens, dimensions variable (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive).



**Fig. 3.6.** Still taken from *her.space*, 1998, Mare Tralla, computer software game, dimensions variable (Image: Mare Tralla, 'T.Est.Art.', *n.paradoxa*, 5 (Nov. 1997): 59.).



**Fig. 3.7.** Installation view of *Natural Law* displayed at Private Views, 1998, video by Ene-Liis Semper, photographed by Pam Skelton, 18mm film, 6'3'' (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive).



**Fig. 3.8.** *ExerMedea*, camera and direction by Pam Skelton, 1997, 8' 55" (Image: 'Exermedea', Pam Skelton, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022, at <https://www.pamskelton.org/artworks/exermedea/>)



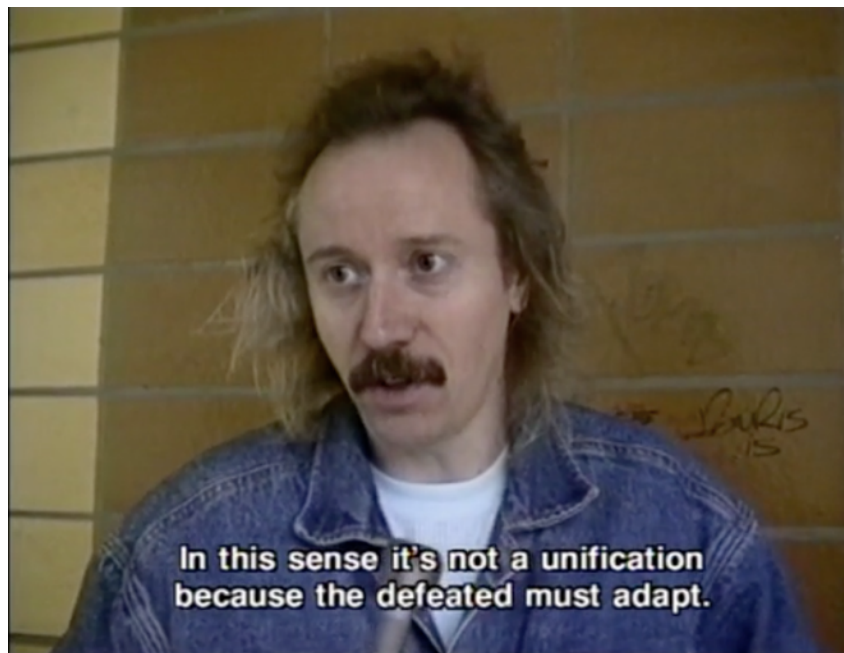
**Fig 3.9.** *Out of Your Body – Out of Your Mind* displayed at Private Views, detail, Susan Brind, 1997, photo installation, dimensions unrecorded (Image: Pam Skelton personal archive)



**Fig 3.10.** Installation view of *A Fashionable Marriage* at Pentonville Gallery, Lubaina Himid, 1986, mixed media, photographer unrecorded, dimensions variable (Image: 'A Fashionable Marriage', *Lubaina Himid*, accessed 27th Nov 2022, at <https://lubainahimid.uk/portfolio/a-fashionable-marriage/>)



**Fig. 3.11.** Film still from *Former East/Former West*, 1994, Shelly Silver (dir.), 8mm film, 62'00" (Image: 'Former East/Former West', Shelly Silver, accessed with password on 7th December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>).

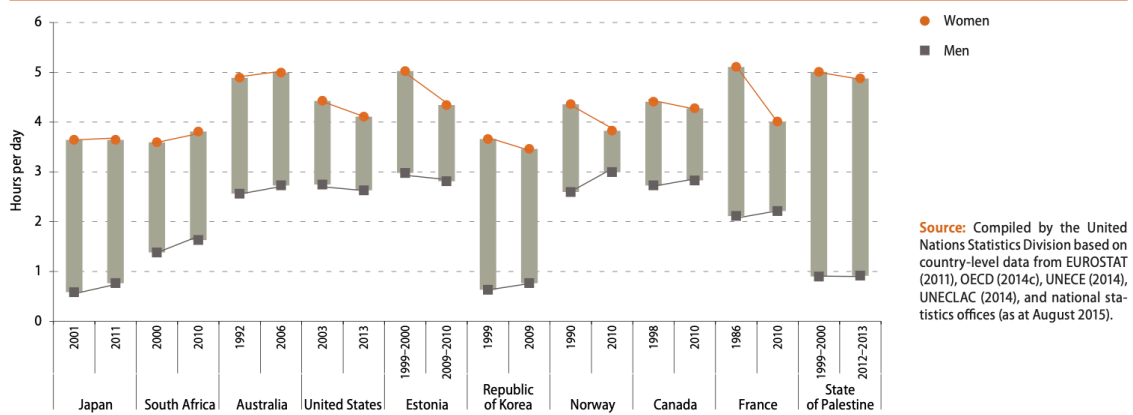


**Fig. 3.12.** Film still from *Former East/Former West*, 1994, Shelly Silver (dir.), 8mm film, 62'00" (Image: 'Former East/Former West', Shelly Silver, accessed with password on 7th December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>).



**Fig. 3.13.** Film still from *Former East/Former West*, 1994, Shelly Silver (dir.), 8mm film, 62'00" (Image: 'Former East/Former West', Shelly Silver, accessed with password on 7th December 2020, at <http://shellysilver.com/former-eastformer-west>).

**Figure 4.23**  
Trends in time spent on unpaid work per day, selected countries

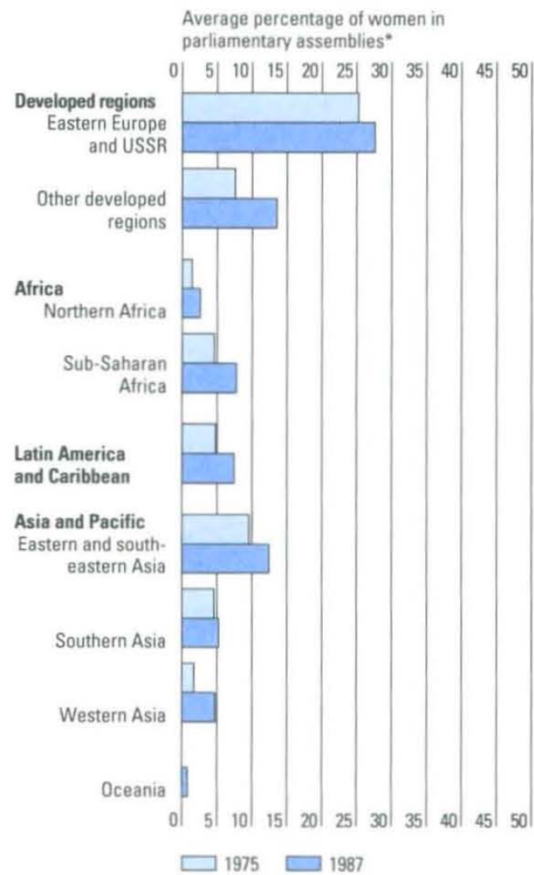


Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division based on country-level data from EUROSTAT (2011), OECD (2014c), UNECE (2014), UNECLAC (2014), and national statistics offices (as at August 2015).

**Fig. 3.14.** Table representing the time women spend on unpaid work in selected countries (Image: ‘Time Spent on Unpaid Work Per Day’, *United Nations Statistics Division* (August 2015), accessed 20th November 2022, at <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757>.)

2.2

**Women's parliamentary representation, though improved, is still very low in most regions**



\* Unicameral assembly or lower chamber of bicameral assembly.

Source: Prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Distribution of seats between men and women in national assemblies", Reports and Documents, No. 14 (Geneva, 1987).

**Fig. 3.15.** Table representing women's parliamentary representation in selected countries (Image: United Nations, *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1991), 32.)



**Fig. 3.16.** Still from *Ars et vita* [Art and Life], 1996, Lepik Kalev (dir.), 29'00" (Image: ERR Archive, Tallinn).



**Fig. 3.17.** Still from *Ars et vita* [Art and Life], 1996, Lepik Kalev (dir.), 29'00" (Image: ERR Archive, Tallinn).



**Fig. 3.18.** Still from *Is Painting Dead*, 1997, Rena Butterwick (dir.), 65'00" (Image: Channel 4).



**Fig. 3.19.** Still from *Is Painting Dead*, 1997, Rena Butterwick (dir.), 65'00" (Image: Channel 4).



**Fig. 3.20.** Still from *Striptease or Not*, 2001, Hajnal Németh (dir.), digital video, 3'00" (Image: Transitland Archive).

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to consider how the notion of postfeminism in Britain could be challenged using three case studies from the 1990s. Across *Castlemilk Womanhouse* (1990), *Bad Girls* (1993-1994) and *Private Views* (1998-1999) the interrelationship between social reproduction, political undecidability and feminist histories has been considered, read through Hemming's notion of "feminist storytelling" as a way of unfixing, and reinterpreting, narratives of progress, loss and return.<sup>650</sup> The Introduction opened by reflecting on Amelia Jones' account of feminist art in Britain during the late twentieth century.<sup>651</sup> In Jones' history, Marxist and radical approaches to feminist art in the 1970s were transformed into a focus on identity politics in the 1980s, which then fragmented into a multiplicity of deconstructivist critiques during the 1990s. By applying Hemmings' progress and loss narratives to Jones' helpful example of feminist storytelling I was able to position Jones' argument as one of the multiple histories of feminist art-making that can operate at any given moment in time. As I learned from Hemmings, it is important to be sensitive to the ways these narratives operate, given that if unchallenged, they can embolden postfeminism by positioning gender equality as already achieved, or as a struggle that is no longer relevant.

I argued that Mary Evans' articulation of the material conditions of women counters loss and progress narratives, aligning with Hemmings' belief that feminist theorising must continually transform in order to resist the persistence of gender inequality.<sup>652</sup> This allowed me to position Evans' writing as an example of a "return" narrative. Before considering each case study individually, the Introduction analysed how terms such as postfeminism imply a state of inertia being "after" or "beyond" feminism. It was argued that posthumous terms such as this conceal the fact that the real (and multiplicitous) demands of feminist politics have not been met and

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<sup>650</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>651</sup> Amelia Jones, 'An "Other" History: Feminist Art in Britain Since 1970' in *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art*, eds. Duncan McCorquodale, Naomi Siderfin and Julian Stallabrass (London: Black Dog 1998), 168-177.

<sup>652</sup> Mary Evans, *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

will continue to change, for example in Britain where the material conditions for gender inequality are exacerbated by privatisation, deregulation, and the erosion of the welfare state.<sup>653</sup>

With this material framework in mind, I took a non-linear approach to time in Chapter 1 using *Castlemilk Womanhouse*. This chapter complicated narratives of feminist waves by arguing that multiple strands of feminist thinking exist at any given moment. I proposed that *Castlemilk Womanhouse* is a reminder of the perseverance of feminist exhibition-making, even when examples such as this were not always the most visible or media-friendly. What became clear from reading this exhibition through Hemmings' writing was that the linear stories of feminist time found in loss or progress narratives could be countered by a project such as *Castlemilk Womanhouse* given that it was synchronic with the growth of postfeminist media culture at the time.

Using recent materialist feminist writing on social reproduction by Angela Dimitrakaki, Nancy Fraser, Kirsten Lloyd and Tithi Bhattacharya, Chapter 1 argued that the community project emerged as a response to the material conditions of women on the Castlemilk Estate in 1990.<sup>654</sup> By taking into account the wider networks of activism that emerged in Glasgow at the time, I established that economic and cultural regeneration through projects such as the European City of Culture concealed the persisting "crisis of care" in the domestic sphere - demands such as adequate housing, childcare and local amenities. Castlemilk revealed the collective power of feminist organising in resisting the lived realities of women on the estate. This was deduced through works such as Claire Barclay's *Bathroom Installation* or Annie Lovejoy's *A Sense of Purpose*, which illustrated the reparative human connections that the project sought to restore when faced with the relentless rhythms of wiping mould, changing nappies, or chopping vegetables. By exploring the project's anachronic attachment with past feminist art projects, Chapter 1 dislodged potential narratives of *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as belated or derivative.

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<sup>653</sup> Alison Jaggar's writing was used in the Introduction to highlight the multiple forms of feminist theorising that exist at any given moment; Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983).

<sup>654</sup> For example, Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 97-117; Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, 'Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History: An Introduction', *Third Text*, 31, 1 (2017), 1-14.

Elizabeth Freeman's notion of temporal drag allowed me to reinterpret the historical genealogy of the project as separate from the CalArts' *Womanhouse*, instead foregrounding the material conditions of women in Castlemilk.<sup>655</sup> Hannah Hamblin also recognised the focus on domestic labour present in the Castlemilk artworks, and picking up where her research left off, this chapter read the demands for social reproduction in the Castlemilk works using the community group *Hackney Flashers* as a cognate reference.<sup>656</sup> Overall, what became clear from my research in this chapter was how the Castlemilk case study resisted linear conceptions of feminist history implied by progress or loss narratives. By reinterpreting this exhibition as a return narrative (as both attending to the past and considering the material conditions of its present), this chapter revealed how such an approach allows us to recover feminist histories running counter to the story of postfeminism in art history.

Chapter 1 needed to consider the existing feminist attachments in art and exhibition-making during the early 1990s in Britain because this set up a non-linear historical foundation from which to read the notion of feminist detachment that emerged more visibly in Chapters 2 and 3.<sup>657</sup> This provided a framework from which I developed my synthetic conception of the impolitical, which was tested as an analytical tool for retrieving seemingly apolitical works that have been positioned by curators, writers, or arts themselves, as postfeminist.<sup>658</sup> Chapter 2 used Roberto Esposito's idea of the impolitical as a way of exposing the limits of the political, together with Emily Apter's understanding of the impolitical as a mode of action outside of the political's formal arena, specifically relating to the impolite.<sup>659</sup> It became clear that the works in the exhibition *Bad Girls* could be read more successfully through

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<sup>655</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>656</sup> Hannah Hamblin, 'Castlemilk Womanhouse: History, Labour and Feminism' (Unpublished thesis: University of Edinburgh, 2014); Hannah Hamblin, 'Los Angeles, 1972/Glasgow, 1990: A Report on Castlemilk Womanhouse' in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, eds. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 164-182.

<sup>657</sup> By only focusing on exhibitions that have been labelled as "postfeminist" the thesis would have been in danger of erasing the actual politics of feminism that continued to exist in art and exhibition-making during the period, hence the importance of including *Castlemilk Womanhouse* as a case study.

<sup>658</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999); Rosemary Betterton, "'Young British Art' in the 1990s", *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*, eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Barbara Pollack, 'Babe Power', *Art Monthly*, 235 (April 2000), unpagged, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, at <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/babe-power-by-barbara-pollack-april-2000>.

<sup>659</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Categories of the Impolitical*, trans. Connal Parsley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015 [1988]); Emily Apter, *Unexceptional Politics: On Obstruction, Impasse, and the Impolitic* (London: Verso, 2018).

Esposito's axis of the impolitical, whereas artists such as Gillian Wearing, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Sam Taylor-Johnson fitted more comfortably with Apter's. I concluded that Emin, Lucas and Taylor-Johnson operated using an overt form of impolitics (these modes celebrated ostensible liberation using political and critical detachment), with *Bad Girls* positioned as less so, given the curation still constituted attachment to female liberation and the transgression of social boundaries, despite feminist histories themselves being refused by the curators. Using employment statistics, auction records, and research by the Women's Art Library, United Nations and UNESCO, Chapter 2 considered London's material context in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where I concluded that the impolitical could be understood as a reaction to socioeconomic conditions following a decade of Conservative governance, which offered no radical material improvement to the lives of women.<sup>660</sup>

What emerged from this research was that women were still far behind men in terms of material success in the art world, yet the methodology and politics of the bad girls phenomenon differed substantially from that of *Castlemilk Womanhouse*, because it discouraged women from thinking critically about their material and economic conditions. Considering the involvement of artists such as Helen Chadwick in Chapter 2, it became clear that not all artists in *Bad Girls* could be read using the impolitical, given that Chadwick's *Loop My Loop* kept pushing back against a politics of refusal when applied. By rethinking works that are the most directly applicable to the term postfeminist through my synthetic concept of the impolitical, I learned that the refusal of feminist politics existed more in the language and framing devices used by curators that positioned them as beyond feminism, rather than as an inherent quality in the work. By testing the impolitical as a means of explicating artworks in Chapter 2, I was, therefore, able to reinterpret reductive stories of postfeminist art, recuperating these works from narratives of feminist loss.

Finally, Chapter 3 mapped the impolitical through space following Dimitrakaki's belief that '[u]ltimately what is politically important is not where' histories of art will be written 'but *how*: their projected strangeness can

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<sup>660</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', *New Left Review*, 56 (2009): 97-117.

be recast to disrupt the smooth flow of current hegemonic discourses'.<sup>661</sup> *Private Views* was used as a case study in Chapter 3 because it facilitated collaboration between Britain and Estonia, bringing together artists including Mare Tralla, Ene-Liis Semper, Pam Skelton and Susan Brind.<sup>662</sup> What became clear through my analysis were the different discursive and geopolitical paradigms from which each artist worked, showing that the notion of the impolitical must account for the different narratives (and cultural contexts) politics emerge from.<sup>663</sup>

What the interface with Estonia in Chapter 3 therefore showed was that the impolitical functions relative to specific political narratives; in the postsocialist context, the progress narrative of Western feminism was simultaneously the loss narrative of Marxist feminism.<sup>664</sup> Works by Tralla were proven to shift between being understood as impolitical, or explicitly political, depending on the paradigm from which the viewer is located. Postsocialist space was taken as an extreme example of economic transformation, which, as it was argued, created a specific context for the resistance of feminism. From my interviews with Tralla, Skelton, Dimitrakaki and Brind, as well as artworks from Britain such as *Out of Your Body – Out of Your Mind*, I deduced that artists in Estonia were much more resistant to the notion of Marxist feminism than they were liberal feminism. The impolitical in Chapter 3 therefore emerged as a bivalent critical term, inflecting narratives of both loss and progress, unpicking the reductive linearity of postfeminism. This chapter also opened a space to consider the interrelation of postfeminism with art historical discourses such as postcolonialism; future study could productively analyse the

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<sup>661</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, "Five O'Clock on the Sun" Three Questions on Feminism and the Moving Image in the Visual Arts of Non-Western Europe', *Third Text*, 19, 3 (May 2005): 272.

<sup>662</sup> Pam Skelton et. al., *Private Views: Spaces and Gender in Contemporary Art from Britain and Estonia* (London: Women's Art Library, 2000).

<sup>663</sup> This is true even of a comparison between the geopolitical contexts of London and Glasgow.

<sup>664</sup> What I argued was that *Private Views* revealed how hegemony functions in the context of exhibition-making - for example, works in the show that engaged a feminist politics arguably did so through using a liberal feminist perspective rather than a Marxist feminist perspective. The exhibition was funded by the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, the British Council and the Arts Council among others, all of which had a vested interest in shoring up European exhibition-making against a potential return of Marxism, given the British Council and Arts Council are ultimately funded by the UK government and the Soros Center was a pro-democracy autonomous regional program of the Open Society Institute (OSI). It is interesting to note that number of year later in 1993 the Arts Council also funded *Bad Girls* - if we are to afford the most generous interpretation of this exhibition as feminist, it is arguably conforming to a liberal feminist politics suggest this bias existed within government funding and there is future scope to explore this line of argument (though it is my position in this study that *Bad Girls* was curatorially framed in a manner that refused feminist politics).

ways that some black artists in Britain during this period were resistant to second-wave feminist discourse as a hegemonic narrative that excluded some women on grounds of ethnicity.<sup>665</sup>

The interpretation of time across this thesis provided the context for the development of the impolitical, which, it has been argued, is often relevant to postfeminist art-making. What was at stake in this thesis was the potential for reanimating certain artworks by interpreting them not as apolitical, but as an impolitical refusal of the political. This thesis contributed a model for how we might approach these elements of feminist detachment in art in future as so to avoid dismissing and depoliticising them, as apolitical.<sup>666</sup> As I argued, postfeminist discourse presented itself as being beyond feminism, ingraining a present-day way of viewing the world that separated women from a material understanding of their conditions in both the past and future. But by moving past the rhetoric of “endings” fossilised by posthumous terminology I reintegrated feminist time into these artworks. And in pursuing these case studies through the interconnected stories of loss, progress, and return, the impolitical emerged as a useful tool for reassessing their political capaciousness. To conclude, challenging postfeminist aesthetics is therefore possible when we ‘intervene by experimenting with how we might *tell* stories differently rather than telling different stories’.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> For example, this could be done by analysing texts such as Maud Sulter’s *Passion: Discourses on Black Women’s Creativity* (London: Urban Fox Press, 1990) or artworks considered earlier such as Joy Gregory’s *The Blonde* (1998), held in the InIVA collection.

<sup>666</sup> The impolitical could potentially be used to read recent art practices such as those by Amelia Ulman (*Excellences & Perfections*, 2014) or Penny Goring (particularly her Tumblr art or *Anxiety Objects*, 2017) who might both be critiqued for the ways they perform/reflect contemporary postfeminist culture. Upon closer inspection, these art practices reveal a critique of the persistence of gender inequality in contemporary society through their material conditions and beauty standards, though this political referent is at times obscured by a tactics of political detachment.

<sup>667</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 16. Emphasis my own.

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