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Faith Wilding and the Enfleshing of Painting

Amelia Jones

Faith Wilding's dynamic career has spanned the second and third waves of the feminist art movement - crossing over the supposedly incompatible politics and imagery of so-called "1970s" (or "essentialist") and "1980s" ("anti-essentialist") feminist art discourses, reasserting its importance in the hybrid 1990s. Not only is her work thus fascinating for the complex story it tells us about the continually shifting ideological terrain of feminism and the visual arts, it is also profoundly compelling in its various modes of putting-into-flesh (fleshing out) women's experiences in the increasingly intensively technologized regime of contemporary life. To this extent, Wilding could be said to elaborate - performatively, visually, corporeally - what Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) has called the "flesh machine" of Pancapitalism: the third machinic map that is surpassing the "intersecting liquid maps" of the modernist war and sight machines.

For CAE, a group of artist-writer techno-activists with whom Wilding has recently collaborated, the flesh machine is 'a heavily liquid network of scientific and medical institutions with knowledge specializations... combined with nomadic technocracies of interior vision and surgical development.'¹ Because the flesh machine produces our bodily subjectivities through imaging technologies that 'claim to make 'the natural' newly visible" and that have in recent years focused increasingly frequently on making visible the medicalized bodies of women',² Wilding's performative, interventions into its realm of visibility -- as a feminist visual artist -- are particularly effective in interrogating this "machinic map." Across three decades, Wilding's work has explored the sexual/reproductive flesh of women's bodies, tracing the transmutation of this flesh, previously believed to be "authentic" repository of

feminine subjectivity, into the denaturalized flesh machines of Pancapitalism. Wilding simultaneously marks the sexualization that determines the flesh machine's operative contours and the medicalization through which the flesh machine conditions the experience of women's bodies.

Waiting...Wombs

In 1972 Wilding performed a piece called *Waiting* at Womanhouse, the epochal collaborative project involving the full-scale renovation of a run-down house in Hollywood and its refiguring into a feminist installation. In *Waiting*, seated on a chair with her hands passively lying in her lap, Wilding rocks back and forth and chants a litany of anticipated acts that narrate the forced passivity of a woman's life in patriarchy: 'Waiting for someone to feed me.... to change my diaper.... to put me on the toilet.... Waiting to grow up.... for my breasts to develop.... to have a boyfriend.... Waiting for my wedding night.... for sex.... for my baby to come.... Waiting for menopause.... for my body to break down.... Waiting for sleep. Waiting....'³



Faith Wilding *Waiting* (1972). Courtesy of artist

This simple but dramatically effective piece encapsulates the primary ideas associated with early 1970s feminism and ironizes Wilding's own patience: she has given up waiting for a masculinist art world to recognize her creative achievements, creating instead her own alternative audience among younger generations of artists just now learning about the rich history of the feminist art movement.⁴ Wilding uses her own body performatively to engage the spectator in a metaphorically rhythmic and repetitive narration of a woman's life experience as viewed through the passionately feminist lens of earlier manifestos such as Betty

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) -- manifestos that defined patriarchy and, by extension, individual men as violent oppressors of women. Wilding's swaying body and monotonous voice seems to provide a kind of guarantee of the simultaneous authenticity and degradation of women's experience. Her feminist subject is profoundly embodied, a universalized "woman"; she is performed in a seemingly unmediated fashion -- without apparent technological intervention.

As an extension of such performance works, during this period Wilding also produced paintings and drawings the iconography of which was typical of particularly that part of the early 1970s feminist art movement located in Southern California and

Faith Wilding *Womb Room* (1972) Courtesy of artist



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institutionalized within the Feminist Art Program (founded at California State University, Fresno and then moved to California Institute of the Arts near Los Angeles). The iconic quality of this early work is not surprising given that Wilding was a founding member of the FAP.⁽⁵⁾ Paralleling her contribution to Womanhouse, the crocheted, room-sized web-like environment her called *Womb Room*, Wilding experimented at length with cunt or “central core” imagery, which strategically put up front a primary signifier of that part of women’s experience that had been the most aggressively veiled or prohibited by castration-anxious masculine subjects: women’s sexual pleasure.

Wilding’s *Peach Cunt* (1971) and *Womb* (1972) are exemplary of this experimentation, successfully employing the particular effects of watercolor on paper to render the juicy flesh of women’s genital anatomy -- marked as simultaneously sexual and reproductive and proffered as symbolic of a generalized female subjectivity. In *Peach Cunt*, a pearly pod of labial and clitoral flesh hovers like a hole in the middle of its paper support, now puckered by the pod’s leaking fluids; in *Womb*, a large, magenta vessel, bursting forth like a flowering of tumescent genital skin, soaks into a sheet of thick creamy paper, while the dark purple crevice in its center - accented by pale pink lobes of (Caucasian) “flesh” and rimmed in glistening orange -- projects its womb-like space paradoxically into the depths of the paper’s surface.



Faith Wilding *Peach Cunt* (1971)
Courtesy of artist

In these early works Wilding already shows her capacity for pushing her diverse media to their limits, exploiting the liquid effects of paint and the tensile agitation of graphite line to produce images that evoke the lived febrility of human (usually women’s) experience. Across all of Wilding’s works, this sensitive deployment of materials reinforces the effects of the always body-oriented content of Wilding’s works (to surface what Vivian Sobchack calls the ‘corporeal information of images’).⁶ Wilding’s pictures thus coalesce with performance pieces such as *Waiting* in their resonant evocation of bodily experience. Wilding’s *Peach Cunt* and *Womb* break down the conventional understanding of woman-as-image, passive and controlled by vision (a “male” or masculine/patriarchal “gaze”). These pictures also histrionically perform the painterly image against the grain of modernism as it existed in U.S. art discourse at the time they were created -- against both flatness and anti-literariness. These burgeoning, organic images flamboyantly shatter the skin-deep geometries of Clement Greenberg’s exhortations, conquering his obsessive exclusion of content or narrative from painterly form.⁷ The *Womb* and the *Peach*

Cunt are blood-engorged lobes of female flesh, stains of mucous that render the skin of the paper malleable; they are messy, organic “flesh” made feminist in its bold rebelliousness.

By insistently returning the picture to the body, Wilding crucially contests the contemporary regime of spectacle, or of what philosopher Martin Heidegger calls the “world picture,” wherein, as Sobchack summarizes the situation, our bodies ‘become increasingly distanced in images, increasingly viewed as ‘resources,’ and increasingly lived as ‘things’ to be seen, managed, and mastered.’⁸ In addition, *Womb*, like all of



Faith Wilding *Womb* (1972)
Courtesy of Artist

Wilding’s works, two-dimensional or otherwise, thwarts the othering of the body as a kind of exteriorized project, in Sobchack’s Heideggerian terms, by producing its flesh as highly specific – as, in fact, genital (sexual/reproductive) and female. This is the “lack” upon which patriarchy founders again and again in its repetitious othering of naked female bodies – the “lack” that Wilding makes “present” in glistening, moist, flesh-soaked watercolor.

In *Womb* and *Peach Cunt*, the female body, though universalized (and implicitly staged as Caucasian), is anything but “exteriorized project”: it is felt from within and projected outward, bursting the confines of its sallow shallow page. In this way, the embodiment of all images (their capacity to reflect back what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘texture of Being’ that is our flesh in engagement with a world that is also ‘flesh’) and the corporeality of all vision (vision is occasioned by ‘what happens in the body’) are borne out through representation. The fragile, trembling edges of these womb/cunts, their gooey depths, enact the way in which, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, ‘by lending his... body to the world,’ the artist ‘changes the world into paintings.’⁹

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the artist is resolutely male (“his” body). But, Wilding’s deployment of painting-as-(female)-flesh suggests it is no accident that Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor for the painter’s vision is, against the grain of his own logic, linked to female fecundity and procreation: ‘It can be said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother’s body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us. The painter’s vision is a continued birth.’¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty appropriates biological fecundity for the otherwise implicitly male artist; in doing so he, certainly inadvertently, forces an opening into which the female creator – such as Wilding – can aggressively insert herself, penetrating the masculinist fabric of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis.

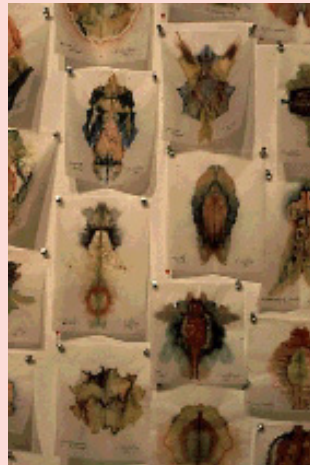
Wilding’s *Womb* and *Peach Cunt*, then, metaphorically as well as literally body

forth - give birth to - painting as flesh of the world (which in turn produces the artist and, in turn, the viewer as flesh); they collapse two entities Merleau-Ponty implicitly assumes are distinct: the mother and the painter.¹¹ Such evocations as *Womb*, still invested in the second-wave feminist obsession with authenticity, where each womb/cunt image is imagined to be the signifier of a universal “woman’s experience,” seem to epitomize Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological celebration of painting as looking toward the “secret and feverish genesis of things in our body” (p.167). Contextualized within contemporaneous feminist thought, such cunt/womb pictures project “woman” as originary -- a highly charged political act in the 1970s - even as they encourage all viewers to recognize themselves as embodied in particular, gender-specific ways. Poignantly, these were to be the last images of Wilding’s career to produce feminine subjectivity as fantasized essential origin of (pro)creative power.

Wounds

After a decade and a half of work in radio, personal research in the areas of feminist theory and visual culture, and continuing experiments in exploring embodied experience in paint, in 1996 Wilding updated the cunt in *Wall of Wounds*, manipulating its seeping weeping fleshy contours to produce it as a signifier of human wounding in general (that is, the “lack” of female genital anatomy now comes to signify the “lack” structurally inherent to all subjects, also reflecting the yen for victimhood that seems to motivate the current rage for talkshow self-revelation).¹² One hundred flaps of translucent skin/paper flutter against the support of the gallery wall, butterflies grotesquely stuck to its surface by pushpins. Each flap carries with it a depthless “wound,” a symmetrical Rorschach blob of throbbing color; each is modified with brush and pen and labelled in its particular woundedness: phallic wound, self-inflicted wound, nomadic wound.

Turning from the gaze of the speculum (the primary tool of bodily exploration in early 1970s feminist consciousness raising groups) to the endoscopic vision of new imaging technologies, Wilding’s wounds begin to open the feminine flesh out onto the world; they turn the cunt/womb into an invaded, ideologically determined space, denaturalizing its supposed authenticity as originary site of human life. Lack is made present: *Haptic Wound*, touchable skin of the legs spread wide, anus and cunt lined in blue (like a cerebral section inverted); *Virtual Wound*, with its vaginal lip-print oval surrounding yawning hungry aperture rimmed in brown. With each wound for sale at the



Faith Wilding *Wall of Wounds* (1996) Courtesy of artist
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reasonable price of \$15, each is also obtainable as commodity (“Get your wound here cheap, only \$15!.... Imagine! your own wallet-sized wound’¹³).

The *Haptic Wound* poses itself in opposition to the optic regime of the “World Picture,” insisting on image as skin as body as world. The *Virtual Wound* interrogates the flesh technology that instrumentalizes the body by submitting it to the controlling vision of medical imaging. It is no accident that the visualization of uterine space is the exemplary enactment of the flesh machine’s rationalization of flesh.¹⁴ Wilding’s en fleshed cunt/womb/wounds de-authenticate the mother/painter, pointing to all subjects as fully embodied yet ideologically invested – to all flesh as determined in and through the various instrumentalizing logics of technology.

Armored Bodies

In several series of works produced from the early to mid 1990s, Wilding deployed the visual aggression of collage to construct monstrous fragmented animal/human/machine bodies that extend her engagement and interrogation of the flesh machine. In the small scale watercolor and collage *Recombinants*, which she has described as producing the body as ‘an uneasy, monstrous depository of melancholic historical fragments expressed as animal, human, organic, and machine parts,’ Wilding literalizes and exaggerates the threatening hideousness of bodily fluids and orifices that her early 1970s cunt images had aestheticized.¹⁵ Monstrosity is now celebrated rather than refused; fragmentation (the resulting explosion of bodies by flesh machine technologies) is proposed as potentially liberating rather than only inevitably castrating.

In one *Recombinant* (1995), for example, a pinheaded woman ensconced in heavy chest armor rides a grotesque beast that is apparently part horse, part armored man. Holding flaccid reins in one hand and an ineffectually short whip in the other, she makes a ludicrous attempt to ride side-saddle -- a “feminine” pose that hardly ameliorates the masculinization of her armored torso. She must pretend to be oblivious to the phallic pipe that, jutting out from the horse/man’s lower body, makes a feeble attempt to act as a leg.

Larger series, such as *War Subjects* (also produced in 1995), present life-sized monstrous bodies that are weirdly androgynous or hermaphroditic. In one *War Subject*, for example, two elongated, limp bodies compete for painterly space. On the left a translucent white body rimmed with collaged armored feet (which look like rows of bullets) is truly grotesque - acephalic, it consists of a male and a female torso joined at the upper chest; on the right, a body of clotted red paint,



Faith Wilding *Recombinant*
(1995) Courtesy of artist

with the head of a flayed rabbit, hangs upside down. Both bodies are deformed but also eerily appealing: color-as-flesh engages in a saturated dance with linear contour. In Wilding's terms, these perverse bodies are 'both beautiful and strange' with beauty used 'as a terrorist tactic rather than an end in itself.

These recombinant bodies all engage the viewer through fascination (horror) and fleshy erotic appeal (beauty) -- both asserting visual pleasure as a kind of "terrorist" regime that can nonetheless be highly enjoyable and productive for feminist viewers and makers of art and highlighting the rationalization of flesh in contemporary life. Although it may seem oxymoronic to comment upon the effects of high technology with resolutely modernist and pre-modernist media (collage and painting, respectively), the result of this aesthetic trick is to engage us bodily: while collage enacts the fragmentation of the Pancapitalist regime in its stuttering forms (here, dislocated body parts), per Merleau-Ponty, painting 'offers to our sight [regard]... the inward traces of [a profoundly embodied] vision, and... offers to vision its inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real.'¹⁷



Faith Wilding *War Subjects*
(1995) Courtesy of artist

In the case of Wilding's recombinant body images, painting replicates the ideological formation of the "real" (our bodies) through the flesh machine. At the same time, these enfleshed paintings become what we might call 'counter flesh machines': part of the network of bodily production, painting -- in its linking of the imaginary and the real, of ideology and its political and economic effects -- can be mobilized to renegotiate the 'political and economic frontiers of flesh products and services.'¹⁸

Techno-Embryos

Sustaining her career-long intensification of painterly color and line as themselves technologies of flesh, Wilding's *Embryoworld* project synthesizes the concerns of her early and mid-career work. Like the *Wall of Wounds*, *Embryoworld* is about bodies constructed (wounded) through scientific modes of bodily visualization and (re)production - this time, specifically those technologies mobilized in support of assisted conception (sonogram technologies, IVF, and so on). *Embryoworld* marks Wilding's full entry into the cyberfeminist project.

The 1997 *Embryoworld* installation at The Art Gallery, University of Maryland, College Park played off of the delightfully skin-like flaps of *Wall of Wounds*.¹⁹ In *Embryoworld* the translucent paper/skin flaps are saturated once again with symmetrical organic shapes in jewel colors that, in their viscous and damp



Faith Wilding: Left to right images from the series *Embryoworld 1997: Male failure, Self-surveilling Embryo, Vaginic embryo*. Courtesy of artist

appearance, appear to slip and slide over the paper/skin surface like the stains of bodily fluids.²⁰ This time, the womb/cunt shapes are embellished with line drawings of primordial monstrous creatures from pre-modern scientific texts and of various visualizing and medical tools applied in assisted conception technologies. As with *Wall of Wounds*, each line drawing is hand labelled so that it looks all the more like it comes from a medical textbook; the thirty-two images (ranging from an ironized ‘Natural Embryo’ grown from a donor egg to ‘Monstrous’ and ‘Artificial’ embryos of all kinds) are loosely pinned to the wall in two circular formations on either side of a long, vertical scroll-like painting on tissue covered with biomorphic designs and central Rorschach-like colored forms. Viewed overall, the constellation of images itself becomes either a gigantic penis with testicles or a blossoming of multiple central core images.

The individual flaps of “skin” are thus both saturated with leaking fluid and inscribed with medicalized bodies and terms related to assisted conception: ‘Selective Reduction Embryo’ (where a cool blue top merges into a bloody red flowering below which highlights a symmetrical womb, one side of which has a healthy embryo, the other of which is undergoing a “selective reduction” abortion); frighteningly grotesque ‘Image-Tech’, ‘Telepresent’, and ‘Self-Surveilling’ embryos -- replete with their own viewing apparatuses, which obtrude from their very flesh, and weird bodily deformities that surrealistically interrupt the fruit-like organicism of the underlying Rorschach forms.²¹ The womb is marked as highly technologized (and not necessarily originary) site of embryo life, while a series of embryos documenting ‘male failure’ documents the crude asymmetry of diseased male genitalia (such as the penis suffering from ‘strangulation (paraphimosis)’).

Each tiny picture resonates with our own flesh as we experience it from the “inside” (feeling the saturated colors as our own secreted bodily fluids) as well as from the “outside” (becoming aware of its medical inscriptions). At the same time, the inscriptions are inherent to the fabric of flesh just as the fluids are given meaning from the outside. It is reproductive technologies that define our (especially women’s)

flesh as invaded, commodified, and eugenically inflected, marking the extent to which upper-middle class couples (those with access to these technologies, which are largely not covered by insurance) increasingly attempt to control the number, gender, and/or genetic profile of our offspring.²²

Wilding's embryos show us, retroactively, that her cunts were always already socialized -- never the seemingly authentic marks of female experience that they seem to have wanted to be. The cunts, so speaks her Wall of Wounds, are culturally determined metaphors of human lack; the embryos markers not of the authentic beauty of human conception, but of its artifice and monstrosity as its siphoning through technology is made increasingly obvious. Conception and birth have never been "natural," a fact that is more and more at the forefront of reproductive discourse. The embryo -- made through recent legislation into a full subject, with greater rights than the woman who houses it -- is rendered as highly technologized flesh.²³

Endless Work....

In a performative lecture entitled *Duration Performance: The Economy of Feminized Maintenance Work* and executed on May 19, 1998 at Ars Electronica Centre, Linz, Austria, Wilding returns to the themes raised in earlier projects with a renewed and passionate activist inflection. Like *Waiting*, *Duration Performance* reiterates the monotony of women's experience (in particular here, with regard to women's work) to make a point about the everyday effects of the Pancapitalist economy in relation to a woman's place in the public and private arenas. *Duration Performance* opens with Wilding, dressed in a girlish waitress outfit, apron, starched collar and all, typing furiously at a computer work station; she then stops and reads a litany of topics ('This is a story about endless work.... This is a story about the laboring female body in the invisible feminine economy of production and reproduction. This is a story about repetition, boredom, exhaustion, stress, crashes...'), speaking into a secretarial mic, as a loop of terms related to women's labor ('clean, wash, dust, wring... shop, phone, drive... cut, sweep, paste, insert, format...') is projected onto a large screen.



Faith Wilding images from *Duration Performance* (1998) left and below.
Courtesy of artist



The description of Wilding's "story" complete, she then moves to a lecture podium and begins a lecture accompanied by computer-generated images (including photographs documenting Wilding's own *Waiting* and formative 1970s "maintenance" performances of women's work by members of the Feminist Art Program and Mierle Ukeles). The lecture describes the position of working women in the high tech contemporary world, where computer automation has facilitated the growth of low-paying data entry jobs for women, has sustained the gendered division of labor, and has produced "electronic joblessness." Wilding calls polemically for an activist cyberfeminist approach to these problems -- arguing that feminists must make visible how the deployment of information technology is 'affecting the restructuring of work and the loss of jobs' in the worldwide Pancapitalist regime and revaluing 'the human work of family care-giving that is vital to the productive lives of all human beings.'

Wilding's *Duration Performance* thus returns to the themes of women's experience (including women's work domestically and otherwise) but with a new cyber-twist: women's experience is now "wired women's experience" with a consciousness of how differences in socio-economic status, race, and sexuality are produced and negotiated by and through new technologies (flesh machines and otherwise). Crucially, Wilding calls for an extension of "past liberation movements"; as one of the central figures of second-wave feminist art discourse, she is powerfully positioned to move feminism into a new -- highly technologized and poststructuralist -- feminist point of view in the third wave.²⁴

It is shocking proof of the continuing sexism of the art world that an artist as crucial to the development of a foundational component of contemporary art and art discourse such as Wilding has not been given her due in terms of critical and institutional visibility.²⁵ This has something to do with the fact that Wilding has resisted responding directly to the feminist polemic of the "male gaze" that became hegemonic in the 1980s; it also relates to her continual development and the resistance of her work to being easily categorized as well as to her particular positioning at the cutting edge of cyberfeminism (the existence of which the art world has not yet acknowledged). Paradoxically, the importance of this work lies at least in part in its radical refusal to fit into any of the roving categories (feminist body art; postfeminist art; postconceptual art; etc.) which the art world mobilizes to make sense of our visual environment and with which it, simultaneously, closes down the ambiguity of hybrid work such as Wilding's.

This essay in this sense transgresses the subversive potential of Wilding's practice by attempting to historicize it and integrate it into existing narratives about body-oriented art work in the 1990s. By arguing that the sucking drains of Robert Gober's sinks and the yawning vaginal jaws of Cindy Sherman's sex-toy portraits could be viewed more profoundly for their alignment with the sex simmering holes of Wilding's earlier womb/cunts, the shitting, victimized abject

bodies of Kiki Smith or Sue Williams for the thread they cast back to the pathetically passive figure of Wilding's *Waiting....*, in one sense I am performing just the kind of categorization that this maverick artist has continually resisted. I am willing to take this risk if it ensures a wider appreciation of this wildly pleasurable and conceptually compelling work and the embodied (enfleshing) visual experience it engenders. Wilding's body of work, returning to Merleau-Ponty, 'opens upon a texture of Being' in our Pancapitalist world of highly technologized machinic maps conditioning our experience of self and other.²⁶ This texture, whether rendered in watercolor and pen or through performance, is dense and fully engages our flesh beyond the simplistic politics of the seemingly disembodied "male gaze" that came to dominate feminist art theory from the mid 1970s into the 1990s. Examining the visualizing and communications technologies that extend but also subtend us, Wilding's fabulous, recombinant, monstrous bodies and viscous, puckered vulvae acknowledge but also productively negotiate the effects of the flesh machine on our contemporary experience.

Notes

1. Critical Art Ensemble (with a contribution by Faith Wilding), *Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1998), see 4-5. On the mandate of the CAE see their essay 'Observations on Collective Cultural Activism' *Art Journal* 57, no. 2 (Summer 1998) pp. 72-85.
2. Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright, and Constance Penley 'Introduction' in Treichler, Cartwright, and Penley (eds.) *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, Science* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) p. 3; the authors also write of the 'performative character' of imaging technologies in their 'role as a staging ground for struggles over agency and control' and of the predominant use of these technologies in visualizing the female reproductive body.
3. On *Womanhouse*, see Wilding's own account in her book *By Our Own Hands: The Women Artist's Movement Southern California 1970-1976* (Santa Monica, California: Double X, 1977) pp. 25-29, Judy Chicago 'Womanhouse/Performances' in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 112-132, and Arlene Raven's 'Womanhouse' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.) *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 48-65. Chicago's book also includes the text for *Waiting*, which was first published in *Ms. magazine* in December, 1973; see *Through the Flower* pp. 213-17. A film clip of Wilding performing *Waiting* is included in Joanna Demetrakas's movie *Womanhouse*.
4. Of note in this regard is Wilding's participation in the recent exhibitions, including *Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995), and my *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum, 1996), and in conferences including the first *Cyber feminist International* in conjunction with *Documenta* (1997) (see documentation Old Boys Network online) and 'The F Word

- conference on feminism and art' at California Institute of the Arts in October 1998.
5. See her accounts of the Feminist Art Program in *By Our Own Hands* and in 'The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970-1975' in *The Power of Feminist Art* pp. 32-47. Judy Chicago was the initial creator of the FAP and theorized and produced a great deal of "central core" imagery during the late 1960s and early 1970s. See my account of this in 'The 'Sexual Politics' of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context' in Amelia Jones (ed) *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press and Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1996).
 6. Vivian Sobchack, "'Is Any Body Home?': Embodied Imagination and Visible Evictions' *ms* January 1997; a shorter version of this text will appear in Hamid Naficy (ed) *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
 7. On the essence of modernist painting as flatness and anti-literariness see Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), reprinted in John O'Brian (ed.) *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) pp. 85-93.
 8. *Ibid.* See also Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture,' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) pp. 115-154.
 9. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' (1961), tr. Carleton Dallery, in James Edie (ed.) *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 175, 162.
 10. *Ibid.* p. 169. On the pleasurable political potential of feminist painting see also Mira Schor's 'The Erotics of Visuality' in *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) pp. 165-169.
 11. In relation to this conjunction of terms, Marcel Duchamp's 1949 statement 'The artist is only the mother [of the artwork]...' resonates interestingly; see my discussion of this phrase in *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 146-47.
 12. Of the *Wall of Wounds*, Wilding has written: 'Show your wound! is an imperative which seems to be the motivation fueling TV and radio's talk-show entertainment across America today. We have revised Descartes: I hurt, therefore I am. Victimhood is the new privileged status for consumers. It gives everyone an edge. Wounds as entertainment: pain as pastime and spectacle; a perfect foil for genuine economic, social and personal trauma' in 'Wounded Painting/Painted Wounds' *New Observations* 113 (Winter 1996) p. 27.
 13. The *Wall of Wounds* was produced for the exhibition I co-organized with Laura Meyer at the U.C. Riverside Sweaney Art Gallery in the spring of 1996; all 100 of the wounds were sold before the closing of the show.
 14. CAE makes note of this point in *Flesh Machine*, 68 p. 57.
 15. Wilding, unpublished 'Artist's Statement'.
 16. *Ibid.* This particular attention to the political potential of the "beautiful" counters the current reactionary discourse of beauty taking hold in Los Angeles and spreading nationally and internationally through the texts of Dave Hickey and criticism published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Artissues*.

17. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' p.165.

18. CAE, *Flesh Machine* pp. 4-5.

19. Included in the installation at College Park were two additional components: a group of patient applications for IVF and pedigree charts and, subtitled 'Body and Soul' two flasks on a shelf, each of which held red or green ink, connected by a swag of fabric slowly absorbing the colored fluid. See Kimberly Gladfelter 'Faith Wilding' in *Terra Firma* (College Park, MD: The Art Gallery, 1997) p. 16. I am indebted to this essay for explaining the installation in full as I did not view it.

20. There are predecessors to this rendering of the body-as-trace through its stains, from Marcel Duchamp's 1946 semen stained *Paysage Fautif* (made for a unique edition of his *Boîte-en-valise*) to Andy Warhol's piss (or "Oxidation") paintings from 1978 and Charles LaBelle's 1990s floating fields of bodily fluids, with hyperbolic labels crossing the abject and the high Romantic (in one such image, what looks to be spit is labelled "Mallarmé," cum, "Rimbaud," blood, "Baudelaire," and urine, "Verlaine"). On the possible symbolic ramifications of such displays of the body's abject substances see Helen Molesworth 'Before Bed' *October* 63 (Winter, 1993) pp. 69-82.

21. This kind of organic imagery bears a strong connection to much of the second-wave Surrealist work from the 1940s and 1950s. See, for example, Helen Lundberg's *Plant and Animal Analogies*, 1934; reproduced in Susan Ehrlich (ed.) *Pacific Dreams: Currents of Surrealism and Fantasy in California Art, 1934-1957* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1995), color plate 2.

22. See CAE 'Observations on Collective Cultural Activism' p. 79.

23. The key legislative moment for the anti-choice movement were the 1981 determinations on the part of Congress and the Senate Judiciary Committee of the embryo/fetus as a person from conception (the fetus technically developing from an embryo at around eight weeks). See Valerie Hartouni *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and Carol Stabile 'Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance' in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, Science* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) pp. 171-197.

24. Sadly, until very recently younger artists (other than those who have studied with Wilding at her various teaching jobs in New York and Pittsburgh) know little of Wilding's - or other early second-wave feminist artists' - artwork and theory, since these have largely been excluded from histories of contemporary art. The most egregious specific examples of this strategic forgetting include the 1987-88 catalogue and exhibition celebrating the history of California Institute of the Arts CalArts *Skeptical Beliefs* (organized by Susanne Ghez of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago but also overseen by Paul Schimmel at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California), which almost completely excludes the Feminist Art Program (it is mentioned in passing only once - in Catherine Lord's essay) and the more recent show and catalogue *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (organized, not incidentally, by Paul Schimmel for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1998), which completely excludes the ground-breaking performances of the FAP.

25. While recent exhibitions and books historicizing feminist art, such as my *Sexual Politics*, the *Division of Labor* show and catalogue and the anthology *The Power of Feminist Art*, have included

Wilding's work along with art by other women associated with the early 1970s feminist art movement, mainstream histories of contemporary art continue to erase this particular kind of work, which is not easily recuperable into masculinist theoretical paradigms (as, one could argue, much of the feminist work lauded in the 1980s - by artists from Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman to Lorna Simpson - was institutionalized in ways that deflated its feminist polemics). By mainstream, I mean not smaller regional or university galleries such as the Bronx Museum of Art or the UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum (which hosted, respectively, Division of Labor and Sexual Politics) but museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art, and Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art (per the latter's strategic repression of 1970s feminism in the show *Out of Actions*, previous note).

26. Merleau-Ponty 'Eye and Mind' p. 166.

For full documentation of Faith Wilding's work and lectures, visit Faith Wilding's website

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