



**MARTHA  
WILSON:**

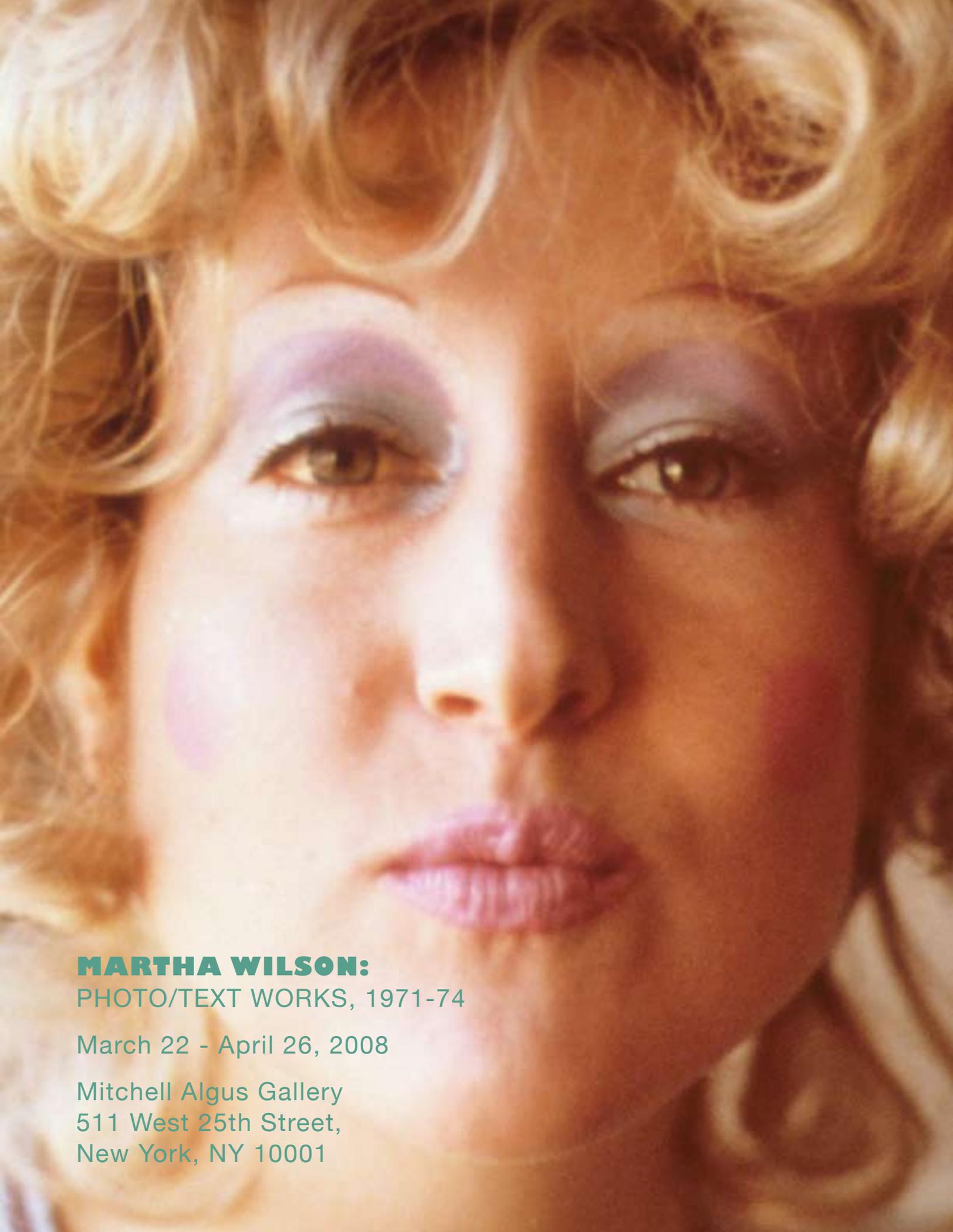
PHOTO/TEXT WORKS,  
1971-74



*I Make Up the Image of My Perfection, 1974*

Photo by Alan Comfort

Detail on front cover



**MARTHA WILSON:**  
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Mitchell Albus Gallery  
511 West 25th Street,  
New York, NY 10001



*Male Impersonator (Butch)*, 1973

This was my unsuccessful effort to “pass” as a man in Men’s Rooms in Halifax, Nova Scotia; men took one look at me and said, “Get out.”  
Photo by Richards Jarden

## **MARTHA WILSON: NOT TAKING IT AT FACE VALUE**

Martha Wilson is an American who began to work as an artist in the early 1970s in Halifax, Canada, where she was affiliated with the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). In her conceptually based performance, video and photo-text works, Wilson masqueraded as a man in drag, roamed the streets with her face painted red, catalogued her various body parts, manipulated her appearance with makeup, and explored the effects of “camera presence” in self-representation. Although this work was made in isolation from any feminist community, it has been seen to contribute significantly to what would become one of feminism’s most enduring preoccupations: the investigation of identity and embodied subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> This recognition resulted mainly from critic Lucy Lippard’s visit to Halifax in 1973, and her subsequent inclusion of several brief but perceptive references to Wilson’s work in her ground-breaking anthology, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art*.<sup>2</sup> Since then, Wilson’s name has appeared fairly regularly in the literature on feminist and performance art, which suggests she has enjoyed considerable critical acclaim, at least within these particular histories.<sup>3</sup> And yet, a closer examination of this literature reveals that all these citations are mere passing mentions; in fact, they may even diminish Lippard’s earlier insights by reducing the range and diversity of Wilson’s work to a preoccupation with “beauty myths.”

Wilson’s early work has been included in several recent exhibitions. In *Corpus Loquendi/Body for Speaking* (1994), curator Jan Peacock placed Wilson within the larger context of body-centred video in Halifax. Her work was paired with that of Canadian photo-conceptualist Suzy Lake in *Deflecting the Blind Spot* (1996), a MA exhibition project curated by Lee Rodney at York University in Toronto. These exhibitions constituted important reappraisals of Wilson’s work, but Peacock’s catalogue unfortunately included only a single page insert on Wilson, while Rodney’s essay was not published.<sup>4</sup> In 1996 Wilson was also included in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, an exhibition at the Armand Hammer Museum in Los Angeles which reconsidered the *Dinner Party* within the context of early feminist art. In this case, a major catalogue was published, but the brief references to Wilson’s work reiterate the same observations Lippard made twenty years earlier.<sup>5</sup>

This situation presents us with a paradox, whereby an artist is accorded a position of historical prominence which seems oddly disproportionate to the actual paucity of published information on her work. In Wilson’s case, it is not simply a matter of recovering the “hidden history” of a hitherto unknown or undervalued artist, but rather of peeling away the accreted layers of the critical construct that has accrued to a body of work which appears, at face value, to be relatively well known and understood, but which in fact is not. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to engage Wilson’s early work in a sustained analysis, and to account for the factors which have shaped its critical and historical reception in such a peculiar way. These factors include not only the predictable dismissal of Wilson’s work by her (male) conceptual peers in the early 1970s, but also the remoteness of the Canadian context for that work (in relation to New York and California as the key centres of critical and feminist art practice), and the difficulty of reconciling it within the generational categorizing which continues to preoccupy feminist theorists, critics and historians even today. Thus the task of re-reading Wilson’s practice involves looking not only at the work itself, but through and beyond it to the critical and historical contexts of interpretation and reception which frame it, including my own. My approach to contextualizing Martha Wilson’s early work draws together several strands of feminist thought as a way to engage a dialogue between history and theory such that “history” is not taken as empirically self-evident, nor is “theory” taken as the regulatory model to which history must be adapted regardless of the fit.

Martha Wilson’s inquiry into identity formations aligns her early work with the broad impetus of 1970s feminist art to shake loose what were perceived as the imposed roles and restrictions upon women in patriarchy. Feminist theory of the 1980s has subsequently pointed out some of the very real limitations and contradictions of early feminist art, such as its political utopianism, biologism,

and naïve contention that bad or false images of women could be supplanted by good or true ones.<sup>6</sup> Yet this line of thinking, associated with the intersection of feminism with poststructuralism, has tended to exacerbate feminism's generational factionalism and misconstrue 1970s feminist art as monodimensional and categorically "essentialist." Despite these deleterious implications, however, the theoretical premises of so-called "second generation" feminism have also provided a positive framework in which to consider Wilson's art practice as enacting a postmodern fissuring of fixed identity and subject/object positions.<sup>7</sup> And in that Wilson's investigations of identity were constituted as *embodied* performative acts, her work, like that of a number of early feminist body artists, is open to contemporary readings of the politically transgressive potential of gender performativity.



The term "gender performativity" was coined by philosopher Judith Butler, who maintains that no identity can exist before, outside or beyond the gendered acts which perform it.<sup>8</sup> While Butler's insights do indeed inform my reading of Wilson in fruitful ways, I share the skepticism of many feminists that the explosion of gender as a category of identity precludes the possibility that women—as subjects—can be constituted as a political entity. And while Butler's notion of gender performativity has already been profitably employed by critics and historians like Peggy Phelan, Amelia Jones and Rebecca Schneider as a way to re-engage with early feminist performance, I am concerned that it not be permitted to occlude the tensions that may arise when the specific historical conditions of Wilson's practice are also brought to bear.<sup>9</sup> For if Wilson was propelled by a desire to shatter the notion of identity as bounded and stable, she was also pulled by a desire to parse the fragments for something she could reconstitute for and of herself.

### **VISIBILITY**

Wilson's search for self-discovery was characteristic of its time. What was distinctive was how her concerns to de-construct and re-construct gender identity ran parallel to her emergence as an artist. While the connections between these points may not seem immediately visible, I suggest they are linked here through the question of visibility itself. A big part of Wilson's struggle was to gain visibility as an artist in a culture where, as Griselda Pollock has argued, "woman" has been "structurally positioned as a negative term in opposition to which 'masculinity' established its dominance and exclusive synonymy with creativity."<sup>10</sup> This task was made even more

formidable by the fact that Wilson came from a background in English literature rather than visual art. Wilson's interest in art emerged after she moved from Ohio to Halifax in 1970 with her partner, Richards Jarden. Jarden attended the MFA program at NSCAD, while Wilson did her MA in English Literature at Dalhousie University. As Wilson noted later, the reason for going to Canada was both pragmatic (more generous scholarships) and political (a protest against America's involvement in Vietnam).<sup>11</sup> Wilson completed one year of her Ph.D. before dropping out over a conflict with her supervisor who felt that her thesis proposal to analyze the structural forms of Henry James' novels was "visual art," and not literature. She then headed across the street to NSCAD, where she got a job teaching English.

Wilson's interest in the relation between art and literature flourished at NSCAD, which was a

#### *Captivating a Man, 1972*

A reversal of the means by which a woman captivates a man: I have dressed up Richards Jarden as Marcel Duchamp's female persona, Rose Selavy. Photo by Martha Wilson

vital centre of conceptual art at the time and host to an impressive array of international visiting artists and critics.<sup>12</sup> Wilson found this conceptual milieu liberating, for it legitimated the notion that visual art could consist of language.<sup>13</sup> Wilson's own foray into conceptual art began with a series of language-based works in 1971. The form, structure and even the wry humour of these pieces were typical of conceptual art's linguistic mode, but they differed radically in that they dealt with propositions not about "the object" or the art-world systems in which it circulated, but about relationships between identity and reproduction. For example:

*Determined Piece:* A woman selects a couple on the basis of I.Q. test scores (high or low) and raises their baby.

*Color Piece:* A dark-skinned couple and a light-skinned couple permutate. The resultant nine children are distributed in the most emotionally comfortable manner for the couples involved.<sup>14</sup>

The questions these pieces raised about genetics, gender roles, proprietary rights and parental "authorship," which mark a clear departure from conceptual art's insular and self-reflexive aesthetic, can perhaps be taken metaphorically as the geneological origin of all Wilson's subsequent investigations into artistic and gendered identity. This gap between Wilson's approach and the conceptual paradigm was further signalled by the provocative title she gave this series—the "Chauvinistic Pieces"—which alluded to the alienation she felt from a community she sought to be part of, but which excluded her both as a woman and as an interloper with no credentials as an artist.

Ironically, Wilson's increased proximity to the centre of art production—and socialization—seems to have reinforced her sense of her marginal and, at best, supporting role. As an artist, she remained firmly fixed in the "blind spot" of her male peers.<sup>15</sup> But in a move deftly calculated to make a spectacle of her own invisibility, Wilson began to produce works which paired textual propositions with photographs that made the gendered implications of these pieces unmistakable. In *Breast Forms Permutated* (1972), nine different pairs of breasts (conical, spherical, pendulous, etc.) are arranged in a modernist grid with the theoretically "perfect set" in the centre. Although *Breast Forms* may be seen as a perverse parody of the oppressive effects of how women feel compelled to measure their social and individual worth according to body image, it also operates as a critique of visibility itself in its ridiculing of the "Western fixation on the female body as object of a masculine 'gaze'."<sup>16</sup> As feminists have argued, the scopic regimes of representation are problematic not simply because they position women as passive, sexual objects "given-to-be-seen," but because, as Rebecca Schneider has argued, "our cultural ways of knowing [have been] traditionally wrapped up with visuality, with vision set forth as proprietary, transcendent of tactility, omnisciently disinterested, and essentially separate from the object which it apprehends."<sup>17</sup> For Wilson, however, the question of visuality was fraught not only with the problem of how to become visible as an artist without becoming objectified as a woman, but of how such a question could even be posed within an artistic milieu defined by what Benjamin Buchloh described as conceptual art's denigration of aesthetic pleasure and concomitant "rigorous elimination of visuality."<sup>18</sup>



*Posturing: Drag, 1972*

An experiment in sex transformation: I am pretending to be a man dressing up as a woman by wearing a wig, false eyelashes, false fingernails, makeup. Photo by Doug Waterman

Wilson's response to this dilemma by augmenting her textual propositions with enactments of her own body/self not only scuttled the conceptualists' prohibition against visibility, but rendered visibility itself—through the “rhetoric of the pose”—into an aggressively performative action.<sup>19</sup> In *Posturing: Drag* (1972), for example, Wilson performed a double sex transformation by posing as a man impersonating a woman. Wilson wrote in the accompanying text: “Form determines feeling, so that if I pose in a role I can experience a foreign emotion.” This laconic statement is unclear as to whether the emotion referred to is that of the male or female impersonator, or more generally, of the ambiguity of transformation itself. Indeed, the ambiguous meaning of *Posturing: Drag* seems open to multiple readings. In one sense, because she becomes something seen through, and constituted by, the eye/I of her imaginary male subject, Wilson's self-display may be seen to have laid bare the premise of Teresa de Lauretis' caveat that woman is unrepresentable except as representation.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, Wilson's doubled layer of dissembling undermines any effort to correlate subject and object positions along sex/gender lines, thus unleashing the tensions of sexual ambiguity. In recent feminist and queer writing on the body, sexual ambiguity is seen to have the radical potential to confound what Sandy Stone has termed the “phallographic myth” of the biological ontology of sex and the cultural assignment of gender.<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler has also argued that performative acts which invoke sexual ambiguity by confusing the binary framework of gender could reveal “the very notion of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity” as a regulatory fiction.<sup>22</sup> For Butler, the transvestite is the paradigmatic example of such ambiguity; whether on stage or on the street, the transvestite's act “constitutes a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that . . . challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity.”<sup>23</sup>

Such theoretical insights provide useful ways for going beyond the simplistic view that Wilson's work was mainly preoccupied with how beauty myths objectify and oppress women, but one runs the risk of anachronistic imposition by aligning *Posturing: Drag* too closely with the radical critique of heterosexism they call for. Not only was Wilson's own (hetero) sexuality not in question here, but her doubled layer of cross-dressing returns her to her point of “origin” in a way that recalls Gloria Steinem's ironic quip, “I don't mind drag--women have been female impersonators for some time.”<sup>24</sup> Yet as Wilson's attested in her next work, *Painted Lady*, that point of origin was no simple or natural state. Wilson's transformation here, through makeup and stylization, into a representation of hyperbolic femininity seems to prefigure Rosi Braidotti's observation that “the hard work required to construct oneself as a woman—or a man—prove that sex and gender are not to be confused, and that the unity between the empirical and the symbolic--between being made and a man, being female and a woman--is acquired at a high cost.”<sup>25</sup> Like *Posturing: Drag*, *Painted Lady* was no simple, parodic critique of female objectification. As her explanatory text reveals, the disappearance of Wilson's own features behind the stylized mask produced an “absence of preconditions” that was empowering, not objectifying:

A range of possible expression, of unaccustomed attitudes, can fill this vacuum; absence of self is the free space in which expression plays. Thus the “obstacle,” the painted surface, is ironically the means of expression.

For Wilson then, the process of self-objectification was paradoxically experienced as positive, for it cleared a space which could be filled by her own self-determined visibility and agentic subjectivity.

## **PERFORMATIVITY**

As I have argued, Wilson's investigations into gendered identity are fully commensurate with the general ethos of early feminist art, but for her the problem was not how to shed the prescriptive and oppressive models of “ideal” femininity, but rather to understand how identity shapes itself through the performance of such models. My concerns about anachronistic imposition

notwithstanding, the way Wilson's work prefigured some of Butler's ideas about gender performativity is uncanny. For example, where Butler wrote that "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity," Wilson's script for *Premier*, a 1972 video performance (unexecuted), comprises the following proposition:<sup>26</sup>

I am dramatizing the performance aspect of human behavior by reading a script in front of this video monitor. Individuals play at being themselves in order to realize themselves, so in a sense, all human beings are performing in front of video monitors or audiences, fictive or real, at all times. What this means for the concept of "self" is that the self does not exist as anything but a dramatic effect. The self others deal with is the image we project into a scene of action, and what is at stake is whether this image will be credited or discredited.

As Wilson implies, what is at stake here is that her performance of gender identity not counteract her successful enactment as an artist ("whether this image will be credited or discredited"). Wilson made this connection explicit in the script for the performance *Appearance as Value* (1972), which described to her audience her efforts to project a convincing appearance of her "ideal self [as an artist], the self I am striving to live up to." Rejecting the premise of an assumed congruence between "the fostered impression or the interior sense I attempt to conceal," Wilson disclosed her strategies for keeping both in play:

My solution is to play practical jokes on myself, to engineer mock-serious disruptions of my projected definitions to keep myself in touch with the distance between my projections and my internal sense... Simply airing this piece on appearance as value makes fun of my projected image of myself as confident artist, while I assert that that is in fact what I am.

Although Wilson's propositions about the performance of identity have a keen affinity to Butler's views, including her advocating of strategic disruptions to the stylized repetition of performative acts, their more immediate connection may be to sociologist Erving Goffman, whose 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, was influential for a number of artists during this period.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Goffman's key premise, that self-identity is a projection produced in the interweaving between how one wants to appear and how others regard that appearance, is literally echoed in the title of Wilson's piece, *Appearance as Value*. Moreover, her self-mockery suggests that she sees both the "internal" and the projected "appearance" of self as equally fictive, equally performative. After all, Wilson is claiming here that her *performance* as a "confident artist" is what in fact constitutes her as exactly that.

Such a claim is a tautology, of course, along the lines of the declarative aesthetics established by Duchamp's ready-made—"this is art because the artist proclaims it so"—and then absorbed into conceptual art, mainly by Joseph Kosuth, as a "form of validating performatives."<sup>28</sup> As Thierry de Duve has noted, such ideas held a fascination for conceptual artists for a time, but "the problem with the tautology was that it repressed questions of hidden power."<sup>29</sup> For if, in the circular logic of this tautology, anyone who proclaims something to be art is thereby an artist, the very premise of declarative



Art Sucks,  
1972  
Video performance



Cauterization, 1974  
Video performance  
Thanks to the Nova Scotia College of  
Art and Design for the use of their loft

aesthetics becomes meaningless without a legitimating authority to confer or deny status to such a claim. Many conceptual artists responded by turning their attention to how this validating authority was exerted by the institutions and systems of the art world.<sup>30</sup> From Wilson's perspective, however, the locus of hidden power lay in the gap between between the ease with which the authorial status of artist was granted to her male peers, while her own status as such remained dubious. In other words, Wilson's own tautological declaration of herself as "confident artist" was in response to her realization that the ostensibly neutral identity of the artist in fact concealed the alignment of that identity with the prerogatives of masculinity. As Amelia Jones states:

The artist must be embodied as male in order to be considered an artist —placed with a (patri)lineage as originary and divinely inspired—but his embodiment (his particularity as a gendered and otherwise vulnerable, immanent subject) must be hidden to ensure his transcendence as disembodied and divinely inspired.<sup>31</sup>

Wilson's conceptual peers may have launched a concerted attack against the aesthetic and political values of modernism, but questions of the relationship between artistic subjectivity, power and gendered embodiment were emphatically not on their critical horizon. Consequently, the fact that Wilson's work grafted performative images of a specifically female embodiment to conceptualism's linguistic model hindered the possibility of it being perceived as art within Halifax's conceptual coterie.<sup>32</sup> Although (or because?) Wilson's pieces staked a claim to her visibility as a woman and an artist, they were dismissed by her male peers as trivial affronts to the seriousness and rigour of what Benjamin Buchloh described as the "victorious paradigm of Conceptualism, which represses, excludes, denigrates all other practices--which at that moment are of performance, of the body."<sup>33</sup> This denigration of performance and of the body from which it is generated must be seen in relation to conceptual art's "radical dismantling of agency and subjectivity" which, while emphasizing "nontranscendental forms of thinking," effectively worked to sustain the Cartesian subservience of the body to the mind.<sup>34</sup> This dismissal also averted the threatening implications of how Wilson's use of her body, which confronted her male peers with her own gendered subjectivity, put into question the unspoken assumptions of the inherently masculine authority of the artistic subject.

For Wilson, whose cultural positioning as a woman defined her, in the terms made famous by Simone de Beauvoir, as the embodied and immanent Other, and thus lacking access to the transcendent subjectivity of the male artist (who could, of course, lay claim to "nontranscendental forms of thinking" from a position of power and privilege unavailable to the female artist), it was clear that no aspect of subjective identity could be detached from corporeal experience.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in *Art Sucks*, a video performance from 1972, Wilson explicitly evoked the embodiment of subjectivity by projecting her preoccupation with artistic identity into the concrete realm of the corporeal. Referring to her sense of being seen as peripheral to the College's art community, she declared that:

Art-making is a process which sucks identity from individuals who are close to it, but not participating themselves. The only way to recover identity is to make art yourself. In early June, 1972, I captured the soul of Richards Jarden in a color photograph. As soon as I ingest the

photograph I will recover the identity that was drained from me in the past, and we will be of equal power.<sup>36</sup>

Wilson's methodical, piece by piece, ingesting of the photograph is not without a certain ironic violence, for she metaphorically cannibalizes her partner's soul, now "captured" in the photograph. This is art-making as retribution, since the outcome involves reappropriating what Jarden had previously depleted from Wilson, and thus equalizing their artistic powers.

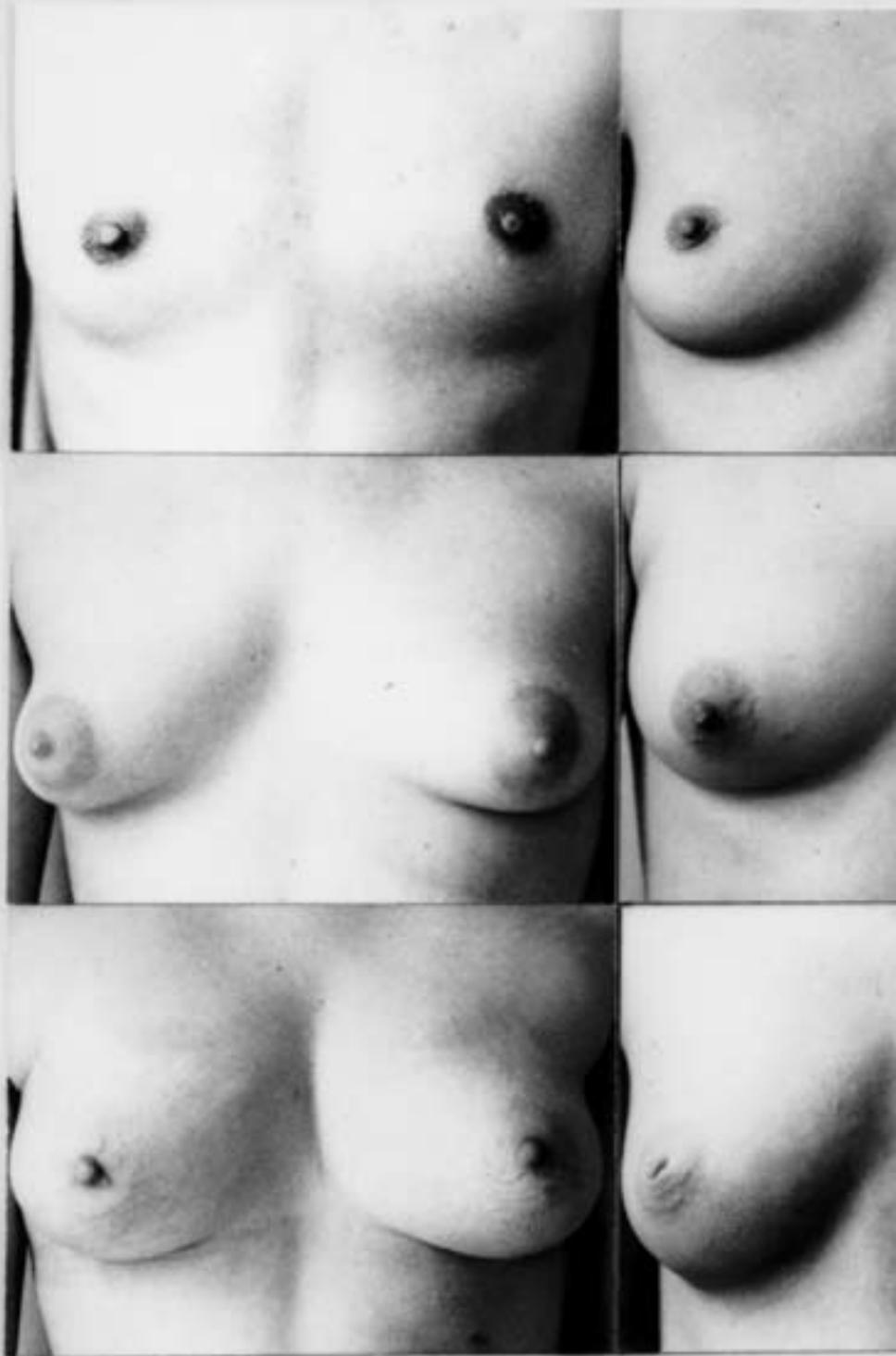
In *Captivating a Man* (1972), another performance where Wilson used makeup to enact a kind of double-drag, Wilson reprised the theme of captivation, artistic identity and gender. But where makeup is normally used to perfect femininity, it functions here as "A reversal of the means by which a woman captivates a man: the man is made attractive by the woman. In heterosexual reversal, the power of makeup turns back on itself; captivation is emasculation." Given the stature of Marcel Duchamp within NSCAD's conceptual community, it can be no coincidence that Wilson's drag persona so closely approximates the gender ambivalences portrayed in Man Ray's famous photograph of Duchamp as Rose Sélavy. This allusion to Duchamp's legacy as father-genitor of conceptual art clearly suggests that Wilson intended her transformation to question both gender and artistic identity in a way similar to how Duchamp's "self-feminization" of the "author-function" disrupted the "masculine authority of modernist authorship."<sup>37</sup>

As I read Wilson's own highly equivocal gesture, the question of whether it represents a woman in the guise of a man or a man rendered effeminate is irrelevant. As Marjorie Garber has argued in her book on cross-dressing and cultural anxiety, efforts to fix the cross-dresser into one of the binary categories of "male" or "female" tend to look *through*, rather than *at* the cross-dresser. But Wilson's performance of gender as neither strictly this nor that underscores the undecidability and mutability of such binary categories as "male" or "female," thus bringing about what Garber has called a "crisis of category" itself.<sup>38</sup> And by positing this crisis within the framework of both gendered and artistic identity, Wilson deprives the naturalizing narratives of the former from simultaneously obscuring and authenticating the masculinist assumptions of the latter.

## **IDENTITY**

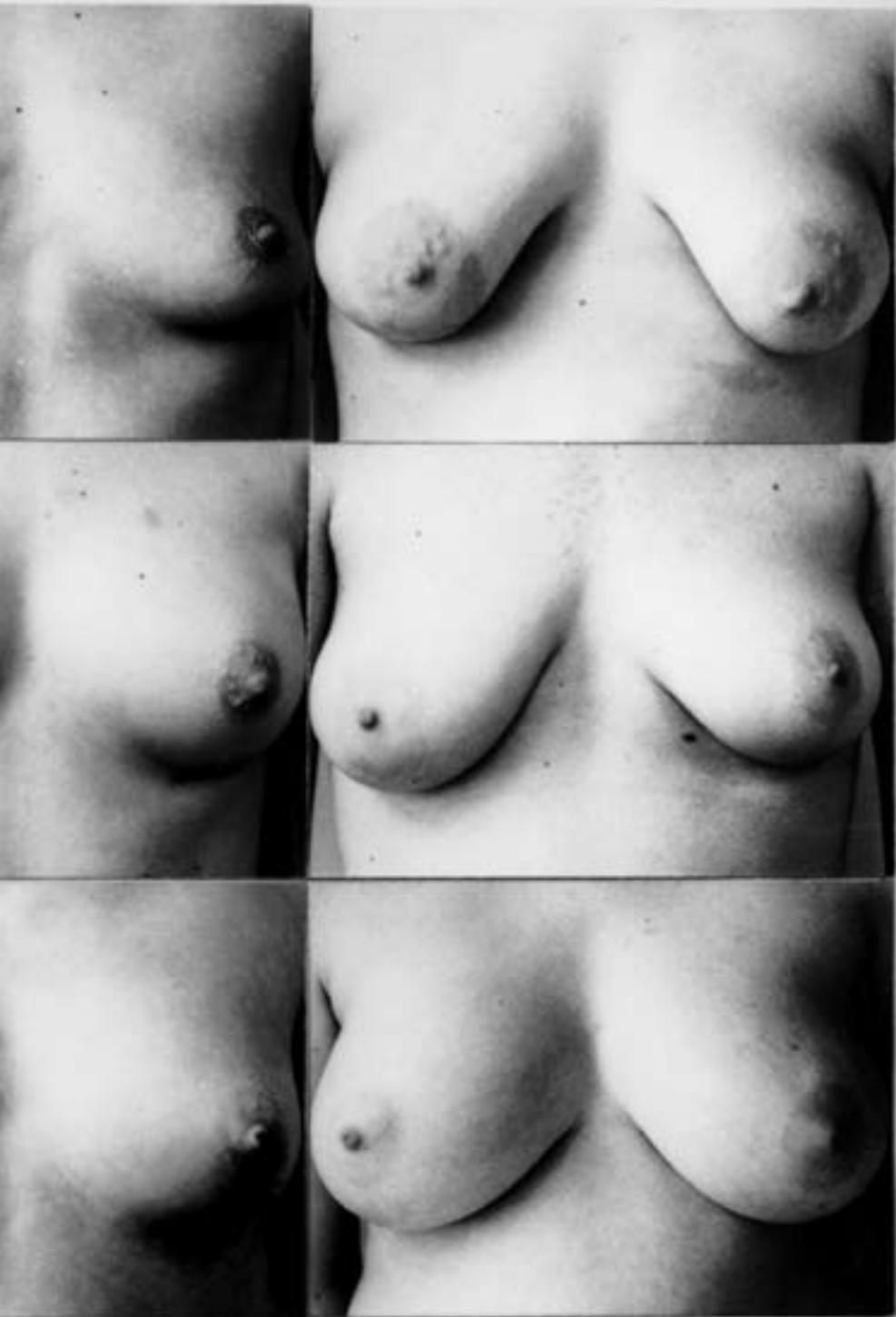
Throughout her remaining two years in Halifax, Wilson continued to peer into cameras, mirrors and monitors to focus on the vicissitudes, incongruities and linkages between the identity and appearance of the self. In *Composure: Misery* (1972), Wilson intended to compare the difference between facial gestures made with and without the aid of reflective surfaces such as a mirror or video monitor. Although her textual proposition assumed that the gestures made before the mirror would enable her to see herself more "objectively, and thus compose my features so they are congruent with the image I want to project," in executing the piece she realized that the gestures made without "feedback" were more expressive of the emotion she wanted to convey: "Thus, my features are more responsive to internal "mirrors" than to real, external mirrors . . . To have composure is to be one's own mirror."<sup>39</sup>

Wilson's statement suggests that she saw her unreflected gestures as more natural or true expressions of her "subjective awareness of [her]self." This conclusion strikes a contrast to the approach to subjectivity of someone like Butler, who argues against the very possibility of an innate (gender) identity. Though I have endeavoured to show that the symmetry between some of Wilson's ideas about identity and those current in postmodern discourse should admonish us not to relegate her work (nor that of many of her early feminist peers) to the dustbin of "essentialism," this incongruity points to the limitations of the historical/theoretical parallels. Early feminist artists like Wilson were able to make acute diagnoses of how women's cultural positioning denied them even the possibility of the coherent selfhood promised to the male subject, but this does not mean they were necessarily disposed to seeing this as a critically advantageous position. As Nancy Miller noted, for women who had just begun to discover the political grounds for claiming



BREAST FORMS PERMUTATED. Beginning with the flat can occur as either conical (down), spherical (diagonal) or pendulous, conical-full, pendulous-full) complete the diagram.

Martha S Wilson April 1972



cheapest example in the upper left-hand corner, breast forms  
elusive (across). The intermediate forms (small-conical, small-  
Theoretically, the "perfect set" is located in the center.

an agentic subjectivity, “the condition of dispersal and fragmentation that Barthes valorizes (and fetishizes) [was] not a condition to be achieved but to be overcome.”<sup>40</sup>

This duality, of both seeking and problematizing the humanist ideal of selfhood, should be seen less as a contradiction within than as a condition of this early phase of feminist praxis. As Linda Hutcheon has argued in an article on Canadian feminist art and literature, this duality arises from a condition of marginality which has created in women what Alicia Ostriker has called a “divided self, rooted in the authorized dualities” of culture.<sup>41</sup> Although the “splitting images” or “double-talking ironies” Hutcheon identifies as characteristic of feminist art are closely associated with the critiques of representation prevalent in the 1980s, Hutcheon traces them back to Joyce Weiland’s work of the early 1970s. From early days to the present, feminist art has consistently used ironic displacements to respond to the “colonized mentality where one’s self-image is split between imposed traditional patterns and authentic experience.”<sup>42</sup>

In 1973 Wilson employed such “double-talking ironies” in three performative pieces which enacted the shifting perceptions between subjective experience and objective appearance. In *Alchemy*, she underwent a chemical transformation by dying her hair three shades of gold, while in *Redhead*, she alluded specifically to the intersection between social and personal expectations caused by the physical transformation of herself into a “stereotype.” In *Stigma*, she objectified herself even more forcefully by appearing throughout Halifax with her face painted red. Although the accompanying text described how Wilson felt treated like an outcast for confronting the public with her art, these works were done at a time when she was finally beginning to gain some credibility as an artist. In 1973 Lucy Lippard, who was a supportive critic of conceptual art, and had also begun to write about women artists and the politics of sexism in the art world, visited the College. Wilson’s encounter with Lippard was both an affirmation and a revelation. Lippard confirmed for her that not only was what she was doing “art,” but there were women across North America engaged in similar activities.<sup>43</sup> Lippard not only wrote about Wilson’s work in two of the essays in *From the Center*, but included her *Breast Forms Permutated* in *c.7,500*, an exhibition of conceptual art by women which opened at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California in 1973.<sup>44</sup>



Wilson was also invited in April 1973 to do a performance at Project Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For this performance, titled *Selfportrait*, Wilson simply posed on a stool in the gallery space. A textual proposition describing the premise of the performance was printed on note cards distributed to the audience, inviting them to write their responses:

Credibility equals reality, so that “self” depends not on who you think you are, but on who others think you appear to be. In the space below, write you impressions of me, and return the slip to the box at the door. In so doing, you are creating me, and subverting the meaning of the term “selfportrait.”

Audience reactions ranged from the bland “Good Performance,” to the inquisitive “I would like very much to find out who *you* think you are,” to the more openly critical “Drop the scrutiny of appearance and become something born and not made. I’m as unsure of you as you are of yourself,” and “I think you’re pretty self-centered and you seem to be on a pseudo-intellectual trip.”<sup>45</sup> In stating that the “self” consists only of how it is perceived by others, and in soliciting her audience to become active participants by “creating” Martha Wilson through their responses to her performed presence, Wilson seems to have been evacuating the very premise of subjective identity, and, by “subverting the meaning of the term ‘selfportrait,’” destroying also the premise

*Painted Lady*, 1972

An experiment in whether makeup is a help or a hindrance to expression. This image without makeup seems introspective.

Photo by Richards Jarden

of artistic agency.

By asking the audience to “create” her, Wilson’s *Selfportrait* suggests that identity is neither self-defined nor projected, but rather interactively negotiated. This reading is in keeping with Amelia Jones’ thesis in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* that body artists since the 1950s have contested and de-mythologized our cultural assumptions of coherent selfhood by making the self contingent upon the other in order to instantiate “a new experience of subjectivity” she describes “as embodied rather than transcendental, as *in process*, as engaged with and contingent on others in the world, and as multiply identified rather than reducible to a single, ‘universal’ image of the self.”<sup>46</sup> There can be no dispute that the critique of subjectivity has been crucial to the feminist project, but what I have tried to argue, and what Jones has not sufficiently acknowledged, is that the postulation of a decentred subjectivity, with no origin or location, must have been met with a certain ambivalence among women artists just coming to speech and agency. And in Wilson’s case, this ambivalence seems most evident in the oscillating duality of her own “splitting images.”

At this time Wilson was introduced to the work of Jacki Apple, who had also exhibited in c. 7,500, and who shared Wilson’s interest in questions of identity and transformation. They began a correspondence, and in August 1973 Wilson and Apple met in New York.<sup>47</sup> This encounter was crucial for Wilson because it was a lifeline out of her isolation in Halifax and because Apple’s appearance forced her to submit some of her own presumptions to a more rigorous feminist critique. Wilson wrote:

I was shocked when I saw her: She looked professional all over, eye makeup to high heels. I thought artists weren’t supposed to look like that. A sexist belief, something inherited from Gertrude Stein, a woman has to be un-pretty to be taken as seriously as a man.<sup>48</sup>

Part of Wilson’s shock seems to have come from the realization that, as much as she had engaged in a critical investigation of the tenuous relationship between appearance and identity in her art, she was ill prepared for a real-life encounter of such jarring dissonance. Recognizing that she had perhaps inadvertently been isolating her investigations within the safety of the artistic construct, Wilson began to perform herself in a series of self-parodies which exposed her own fears and “sexist” presumptions. In *Posturing: Age Transformation*, she posed as a “twenty-five-year-old artist trying to look like a fifty-year-old woman trying to look like she is twenty-five,” which elicited grave anxiety about “how much fear I have of ‘past thirty’ status in society.”<sup>49</sup>

Between November 1973 and March 1974, Wilson produced a series of works, essentially variations on a theme, which cut even closer to the bone around the question of female desirability. Beginning with *Images of my Perfection/Images of my Deformity*, she catalogued parts of her body according to what she perceived as their degree of attractiveness or unattractiveness. Presented with all the formal rigour of the conceptual mode, the lists and photographs document the basis upon which value or its lack is inscribed on women’s bodies. In *Makeover*, Wilson shifted her attention to the face, that most public locus of both identity and the prescriptive ideals of feminine beauty. The outcome of the makeover, however, was a lurid, clownish mask that made a mockery of these ideals. The makeover process was elaborated further in a set of paired photographs entitled *I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity*. In these photographs, and in the subsequent video by the same title, Wilson used makeup, the quintessential tool of feminine perfectibility, to mimic femininity itself, and to re-present it as a facade of tenuous and conflicted fragments unable to coalesce into an ostensibly integral and authentic whole.



*Painted Lady*, 1972. Second part of an experiment in whether makeup is a help or a hindrance to expression. This image with wig and lots of makeup seems more outgoing, suggesting that makeup is an aid to expression.  
Photo by Richards Jarden

Wilson's play with representation in the *Perfection/Deformity* series visualized and embodied what several feminist scholars have theorized as the transgressive potential of mimicry and the masquerade. Mary Ann Doane, for example, defined female masquerade in the context of cinema as a hyperbolization of femininity which resists patriarchal positioning by creating a distance between the woman and her image, and thus denying the immanence or closeness of femininity to itself.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to Doane, who extolled the female masquerade as a subversive strategy, Luce Irigaray argued that it exacerbates women's double alienation because, in positioning her as an "object of consumption or of desire by masculine 'subjects,'" it reifies her as a non-subject alienated from language.<sup>51</sup> For Irigaray, mimicry was a more effective way for women to "convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it."<sup>52</sup> Mimicry, or as Irigaray would later describe it, "hysterical mimicry," allowed women to pass from "imposed mimesis"—in which the female is positioned as mirror to the male, reflecting and thus confirming the truth of his centrality—into a female miming that has no recognizable referent.<sup>53</sup> Such mimicry shatters the illusions of the equivalence between mimesis and truth by "showing the show" through which such truth-claims are staged and thus revealing the "divisive effects of the patriarchal Self in a body that is not the Same."<sup>54</sup>

Wilson explored these "divisive effects" in February 1974 in a video performance entitled *Psychology of Camera Presence*. Using the video camera and monitor to demarcate the point of separation between the cognitive self and the immanent body, she begins by saying:

"In the presence of a camera I split from my body, I see myself from the outside. My watching myself now on the video monitor symbolizes this state of split awareness. My objective in this piece is to disappear psychologically, to be aware only of my absence, not of my awareness of my awareness."

After describing how she will do this by moving her body in a repetitive, rocking motion until it disappears from the edge of the monitor, Wilson asserts that "The absence that is left is not a negative; it is a positive." Wilson's experience of this absence as positive seems prophetic of Rosi Braidotti's suggestion that "The myth of Woman is now an empty stage where feminist women can experiment with their subjective becoming." As Braidotti notes further, however, this is not a site from which the category of gender has been evacuated, but rather a site of contradictions which must be confronted "instead of rushing headlong, prompted by the desire to escape from the 'essentialized feminine' toward a point supposedly 'beyond gender'."<sup>55</sup>

Braidotti's observation informs upon the dualities and paradoxes I have underscored in Wilson's work. Though Wilson focused persistently on the fictive appearances and perceptions of the objectified self, these mutable effects were always counteracted by her own assertions of self-definition and *artistic agency*. Wilson's play with representations thus led not to the dissolution of subjectivity, but to the conclusion that "artmaking is an identity-making process . . . I could generate a new self out of the absence that was left when my boyfriends' ideas, my teachers', and my parents' ideas were subtracted."<sup>56</sup> Clearly, her thinking differed greatly from that of radical poststructuralist like Butler, who argues that the very notion of an interior subjectivity "is itself a publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication."<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, however, Wilson's notions of gender and identity were too fluid to be conducive to certain modes of early feminist thinking committed to discovering a shared "female experience" or "sensibility." In fact, when Wilson presented her work at Cal Arts in 1974 as part of a performance series held at Womanspace in Los Angeles, Judy Chicago denounced it as "irresponsible demagoguery." In Lee Rodney's view, this conflict stems from their divergent approaches to representation:

Chicago's quest was for the singular monument that stands in for the *hitherto unrepresented* women's history, while Wilson denied the singularity of representation,

and the related assumption that the real and the representation are directly connected.<sup>58</sup>

This conflict reveals some interesting points about the larger context of feminist art, thought and politics then and now. While Chicago's hostility to an artist whose work ran counter to the prevailing assumptions of her particular brand of West Coast feminism suggests on whose side the putative "demagoguery" more closely resided, her accusation that Wilson's work was "irresponsible" also reveals how high the political stakes were during feminism's early period of coalition building. But as important as the need for political solidarity was at the time, this conflict testifies to the fact that feminist art in the 1970s was not a monolithic project.

## HISTORY

Abundant evidence for this was recently provided by the Armand Hammer Museum exhibition, *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*. This timely project added much to our understanding of how the widespread characterization of early feminist art as reductively essentialist is both inaccurate and largely responsible for its lapse into critical and historical oblivion. I am highly skeptical, though, of the attempt of several contributors to attribute this problem to the oversimplification of 1970s feminist art on the part of so-called "antiessentialist" feminists of the 1980s like Griselda Pollock, Mary Kelly and Lisa Tickner.<sup>59</sup> While it is certainly productive for historians to reconsider the evident threads of continuity between feminist art in the 1970s and the 1990s, this should not come at the expense of castigating the "antiessentialism" of 1980s feminism as now "calcified into an orthodoxy."<sup>60</sup> This not only obliterates the important contributions made during this decade to feminist debate, it insidiously replicates the antipathies and oversimplifications for which the 1980s generation is now criticized, and even raises questions of partisan nationalism. As the run-in between Chicago and Wilson attests, feminist art has always been diverse and nuanced. So too should our critical and historical interpretations provide what Griselda Pollock calls a "space for momentary conjunctions and creative conflict" which neither flattens out the historical process of feminism nor obscures our own positions within it.<sup>61</sup>

Returning now to Martha Wilson, I would like to consider the question of her particular place within the histories of art and feminism. As I noted, Wilson's reputation, such as it is, was established in a series of brief, reiterative references. But because nobody, apart from Rodney, has submitted her work to a sustained reexamination, Lippard's discussion of Wilson in *From the Center* remains the touchstone of her critical reception even today. Lippard's insights into Wilson's work were perspicuous, and her support was invaluable in helping Wilson articulate her concerns in a specifically feminist context. I contend, however, that although Lippard did not overlook the nuanced complexity of Wilson's investigations, she necessarily wrote selectively to emphasize those elements that enhanced the premises of her own critical project. As a result, the reception of Wilson's early work has been somewhat skewed ever since by a perception that it was concerned solely with beauty myths and female objectification. Even in the ambitiously revisionist context of the *Sexual Politics* exhibition, Wilson's work is summed up as an interrogation of "the ways in which beauty myths and the male-dominated public sphere objectify women and diminish their sense of themselves as subjects."<sup>62</sup> Despite this



*Self-Portrait, 1973.* Appearance equals reality such that "self" depends not on who you think you are, but on who others think you appear to be. Audience members wrote their impressions of me on 4 x 6" cards which when exhibited formed a portrait of the audience. Photo by Paul McMahon

exhibition's intent to revise our presumptions about 1970s feminist art, in Wilson's case it again repeated what has become an ossified interpretation.

I do not wish to imply that Lippard is somehow at fault for stressing what were, after all, key aspects of Wilson's early work. Indeed, had it not been for Lippard's interest in looking beyond New York, California and Europe—and her willingness to travel to the hinterland of Canada's East Coast and Arctic was certainly anomalous—Wilson might have never received any critical support whatsoever.<sup>63</sup> The fact that Wilson's early work was made so far from the centre(s) of the art world was, and remains, a critical liability. Although the contested spaces between margin and centre are now fully subsumed into postcolonial and feminist discourses, the context of a place like Halifax—too remote to be a centre, too provincial to be a margin—accounts in no small way for why Wilson's activities in Halifax still linger in critical limbo. Since nobody there had any interest in writing about Wilson's work at the time or since, the critical fortunes of her extraordinary achievements in the midst of such abject isolation have rested solely upon Lippard's accounts.<sup>64</sup>

It is time to move beyond the face value of these accounts. At the very least, Martha Wilson's situation indicates the pressing need for more primary research on early feminist art. Lippard's estimation of Wilson's work assured her a certain notability in feminist histories, and yet the actual complexity of that work had never been fully explored. To be sure, Wilson was deeply concerned with “the objectification and the ideals of beauty that condition women's self perceptions in patriarchal culture,” but her inquiry into the formations of identity encompassed far more than this.<sup>65</sup> For her, the question of gendered subjectivity was no less central than, and indeed deeply imbedded in, the question of *artistic* subjectivity itself. And if Wilson's preoccupations with the tensions between self-perception and external appearance certainly evoked the undecidability of identity, I have argued that her work did not entirely deny the existence of subjective agency. Thus, while Wilson resisted the imposition of fixed identity, she nevertheless insisted upon the prerogative of artistic agency both to alter her “own” and to inhabit or invade other identities. By way of provisional conclusion, therefore, I propose that Martha Wilson's early work addressed the spaces of the liminal: the spaces *between* self and other, identity and appearance, subject and object, mind and body. And that is to say that I also see her work as existing in a liminal space which is neither contained by the mastering subjectivity of modernism, nor evacuated of identity by the amorphous non-subject of postmodernism.

By Jayne Wark  
Professor, Art History  
Historical and Critical Studies Division  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University  
5163 Duke Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Canada B3J3J6  
Tel: 902 494 8135  
Email: jwark@nscad.ca

## NOTES

1. This paper focuses on the period Martha Wilson spent in Halifax, from 1970 to 1974. After Wilson left Halifax for New York, she has continued to be active as a performance artist into the 1990s. She was a member of the all-girl group Disband (1978-82), and in the 1980s she began a series of satirical performances in which she impersonated high-profile political figures of the American Right such as Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Tipper Gore. In 1976 Wilson became founder and director of Franklin Furnace in New York, a museum dedicated to the exploration of time as the new medium of this century. In 1997 Franklin Furnace closed its physical space and was launched as a virtual exhibition site at [www.franklinfurnace.org](http://www.franklinfurnace.org).
2. Lucy Lippard, “Making Up: Role Playing and Transformation,” and “The Pains and Pleasures of

Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art," in Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 105-107, 128, 130.

3. See Moira Roth and Mary Jane Jacob, *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America 1970-1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983), 17-18; RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 176; Robyn Brentano, "Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life," in *Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object: A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since 1970* (Cleveland: Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1994), 51; and Josephine Withers, "Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming Ourselves," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Abrams, 1994), 167.
4. Jan Peacock, *Corpus Loquendi/Body for Speaking* (Halifax: Dalhousie University Art Gallery, 1994). Rodney has generously provided me with a copy of the unpublished essay, "Deflecting the Blind Spot" (1996), she wrote to accompany this exhibition.
5. Wilson is mentioned in Amelia Jones, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," 28; Laura Cottingham, "Eating from the *Dinner Party* Plates and Other Myths, Metaphors, and Movements of Lesbian Enunciation in Feminism and Its Art Movement," 219; and in the "Exhibition Checklist," 257, all in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones (Berkeley: University of California Press for the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, 1996).
6. See, for example, Mary Kelly, "Reviewing Modernism Criticism," *Screen* 22. 3 (1981): 41-62; and "No Essential Femininity: A Conversation Between Mary Kelly and Paul Smith," *Parachute* 26 (1982): 31-35.
7. For the generational model for historicizing feminism, see Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Matthews, "The Feminist Critique of Art and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69.3 (1987): 326-57.
8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
9. See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).
10. Griselda Pollock, "The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories," in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 15.
11. Martha Wilson, "Artist's Book Beat," interview by Nancy Princenthal, *Print Collector's Newsletter* 22.1 (1991): 62.
12. Conceptual art was well established at NSCAD by 1970 when New York curator Seth Siegelaub organized the Halifax Conference, attended by international minimal and conceptual artists. Such exchanges were further sustained by the visiting artist program, which brought prominent artists to the College to give presentations, teach courses and execute work. The vibrancy of this community was described in Les Levine, "The Best Art School in North America?" *Art in America* 61 (1973): 15.
13. Martha Wilson, personal interview by the author, New York, 12 April, 1995.
14. Four of these pieces were published in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1973), 227, but the complete series, along with documentation of all her Halifax work, was made available to me by Wilson. All citations to Wilson's work, including quotations from photo-text pieces and video scripts, are drawn from these files unless otherwise indicated. The videos Wilson executed in Halifax are in the NSCAD Non-Print Library.
15. For the metaphor of women in the blind spot of patriarchy, see Luce Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. G.G. Gill (Ithaca:

Cornell University Press, 1985), 11-129. Rodney adopted this metaphor to assess the role of representation in the work of Wilson and Suzy Lake in "Deflecting the Blind Spot."

16. Jones, *Body Art*, 50.
17. Rebecca Schneider, "After Us the Savage Goddess," in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 157.
18. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 107.
19. The term "rhetoric of pose" was used by Craig Owens in "The Medusa Effect; or, the Spectacular Ruse," *Art in America* 72.1 (1984): 97-105. Although Owens was writing about Barbara Kruger's work of the 1980s, his theory of the subversive potential of posing to immobilize the gaze can be profitably applied to many 1970s feminist artists. See, for example, Jones' chapter on Hannah Wilke in *Body Art*, 151-95. Though insightful and persuasive, Jones' discussion reveals certain contradictions in that the basis of her argument draws upon the very theories of visibility and representation emphasized in 1980s art critical discourse (of which Owens was an exemplar), which she otherwise repudiates both as insufficient to a deeper understanding of 1970s body art practices, and as responsible for the denigration of such practices as reactionary, metaphysical and essentialist (see esp. 23-25). Such contradictions expose the inherent fallacy of making sweeping generalizations or rigid categorical distinctions between decades and generations in critical and artistic practices.
20. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 20.
21. Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 353.
22. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Writing on the Body*, 412.
23. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 411.
24. Gloria Steinem, quoted in Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 65; originally cited in Anthony Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre: A History of Harvard's Hairy-Chested Heroines* (New York/Milan: A.D.C. in association with A.M.O.F., 1986), 95.
25. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 262.
26. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 402.
27. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959). Although Butler distinguishes her views from Goffman's, both draw upon French existentialist phenomenology; see "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 412. For Goffman's role in mediating this philosophical tradition for North American artists, see Jones, *Body Art*, 38-40.
28. Yve-Alain Bois in "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," roundtable discussion, *October* 70 (1994): 136.
29. Thierry de Duve in "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," 135.
30. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 136-43.
31. Jones, *Body Art*, 62.
32. In response to my question about how her work was perceived by her peers in Halifax, who included regular faculty and visiting artists, Wilson scoffed, "There was no recognition that this *could* be art, let alone that it *was* art!" Nonetheless, these were heady days for Wilson, who recalled that, "[these artists] came and stayed and talked to the students and did pieces and went out and made films. It was wonderful. It was a very fertile time" ("Artist's Book Beat," 62).

33. Benjamin Buchloh in "The Reception of the Sixties," roundtable discussion, *October* 69 (1994): 18.
34. Alexander Alberro in "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," 140, 143.
35. Simone de Beauvoir's feminist revision of existential theories of subjectivity argued that woman has been consigned "the status of the Other" and doomed to immanence because she cannot transcend her embodied corporeality; see *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1952), xxviii.
36. Explanatory text from *Captivating a Man*.
37. Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 180.
38. Garber, 10-11, 16-17.
39. Explanatory text from *Composure: Misery*.
40. Nancy K. Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 109.
41. Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 11; quoted in Linda Hutcheon, "Splitting Images: The Postmodern Ironies of Women's Art," *Reimagining Women: Representations of Women in Culture*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Glennis Stephenson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 257.
42. Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Methuen, 1987), 184; quoted in Hutcheon, "Splitting Images," 257.
43. Wilson interview.
44. During this period Lippard organized a series of exhibitions where the numerical title corresponded to the population of the city in which each one originated.
45. These audience responses are cited in Rodney, "Deflecting the Blind Spot."
46. Jones, *Body Art*, 11, 197.
47. See "Correspondence between Jacki Apple and Martha Wilson, 1973-1974," *Heresies* 2 (May 1977): 43-7. Apple also noted the affinity between their work, and lamented that most of the other women in c. 7,500 had simply adopted the "boring" and "bland" formulas of conceptual art rather than attempting "to present a different perception--a female perception through female experience," 43.
48. Martha Wilson, "Correspondence between Jacki Apple and Martha Wilson," 43.
49. Explanatory text from *Posturing: Age Transformation*.
50. Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23.3-4 (1982): 74-87.
51. Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 84. In Doane's subsequent reworking of her concept of masquerade, she drew more directly on Irigaray's theorizing of it in terms of women's relation to language, ultimately concluding that masquerade designates "the impossibility of a stable feminine position." See Mary Ann Doane, "Masquerade Reconsidered: Some Thoughts on the Female Spectator," *Discourse* 11.1 (1988): 49.
52. Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," 76.
53. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 54.
54. Elin Diamond, "Mimemesis, Mimicry, and the 'True-Real'," in *Acting Out: Feminist Performance*, ed. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 375.
55. Rosi Braidotti, "Of Bugs and Women: Irigaray and Deleuze on the Becoming Woman," in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Theory and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 134, as cited in Rodney, "Deflecting the Blind Spot."

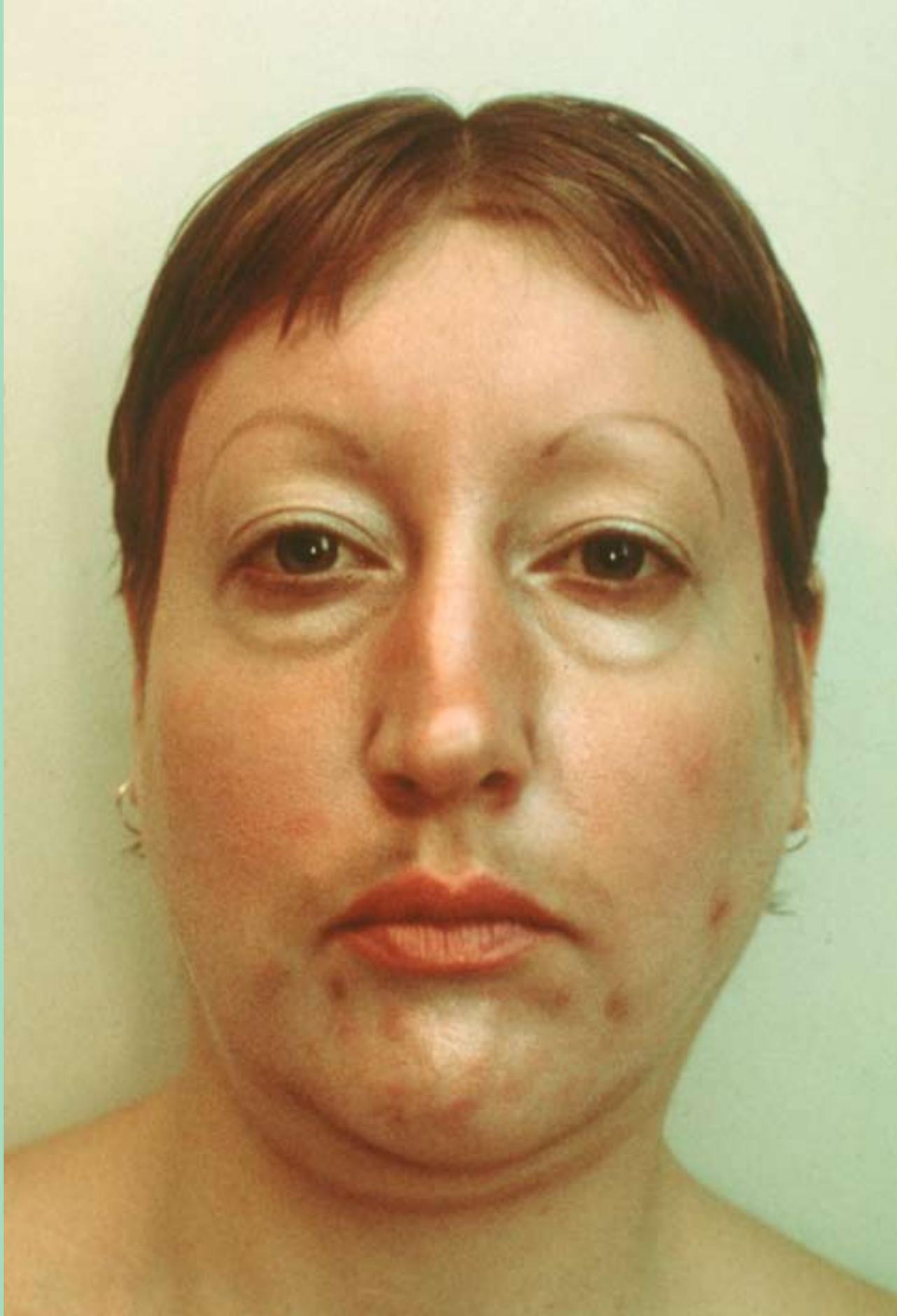
56. Martha Wilson, quoted in Lippard, "Making Up: Role Playing and Transformation," 106.
57. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 412.
58. Rodney, "Deflecting the Blind Spot."
59. See Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of *The Dinner Party*: A Critical Context," in *Sexual Politics*, 90-92, 97-99.
60. Susan Kandel, "Beneath the Green Veil: The Body in/of New Feminist Art," in Jones, *Sexual Politics*, 190.
61. Pollock, "The Politics of Theory," 19.
62. Jones, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," in *Sexual Politics*, p. 28. See also Laura Cottingham's catalogue essay, "Eating from the *Dinner Party* Plates and Other Myths, Metaphors, and Movements of Lesbian Enunciation in Feminism and Its Art Movement," in Jones, *Sexual Politics*, 219.
63. Lippard expressed her frustration with the entrenched power and market-driven ethos of the New York art world in the early 1970s, citing Canada in particular as a place "more fertile for new ideas and new ways of disseminating art than the United States" (*Six Years*, 8).
64. Wilson's Halifax work was not included in the 1988 centenary exhibition documenting NSCAD's history, and the catalogue essay merely stated that she "produced and exhibited feminist pieces while in Halifax." See Robert Stacey and Liz Wylie, *Eighty/Twenty: 100 Years of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design* (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1988), 98.
65. This statement appears in the "Exhibition Checklist" in Jones, *Sexual Politics*, 257.

Jayne Wark, "Martha Wilson: Not Taking It at Face Value", in *Camera Obscura*, Volume 15, no. 3, pp. 1-33. Copyright, 2001, Camera Obscura. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher, Duke University Press.

Martha Wilson: Photo/Text Works, 1971-74  
Mitchell Albus Gallery  
511 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10001

March 22 - April 26, 2008

Design by Dolores Zorreguieta



*I Make Up the Image of My Deformity*, 1974  
Photo by Alan Comfort  
Detail on back cover

