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Fig 2. Wilke, H. (1976) *Through the Large Glass* [Video]. Available at:

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Fig 3.

Introduction (250 words) 198

*insert footnote: VALIE EXPORT spells her name in all caps. The name came from a packet of cigarettes as a way to challenge...

I am interested in looking at anger in women and uncovering the cause of female rage, focusing on inequality, oppression, misogyny, and the patriarchy. Feminist **performance** art is a powerful form of expressing this anger. I will be looking at feminist performance artists, VALIE EXPORT* and Hannah Wilke who challenge how women's bodies have long been confined to sexual objects. My second keyword is **medical-gaze**, exploring medical misogyny that has historically disregarded women's emotions as hysteria, to further silence and marginalise women's suffering. I will be discussing the controversy behind the Salpêtrière photographs alongside Louise Bourgeois' work, reframing the outdated depiction of the hysteric woman. My final keyword **abjection** will explore the lived-in source of rage that influences the action, the performance. Two artists I am particularly interested in whose work embodies this inner rage while reclaiming the female body are Ana Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann.

In this essay, I will also be discussing key theorists and thinkers such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey, Elaine Showalter and Julie Kristeva to support my essay.

Performance (650 words) 609

“To be a woman is to perform”

(find another source)

The quote above has been attributed to feminist philosophers and thinkers who challenge the harmful societal expectations placed on women to appease to the male gaze. To begin with, my first keyword, performance, I will look at French Existentialist Philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir's theory, “One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 273). Here, Beauvoir argues that to be a woman is not to be defined by biological sex but rather shaped by patriarchal societal norms and expectations on how women should appear and act. Many female artists have used performance as a platform to challenge the idea of women solely existing as passive objects, expressing how womanhood is a socially learned role rather than an innate biological destiny. It highlights the persistent pressure to navigate and conform to external expectations.

This leads me to the work of feminist performance artist VALIE EXPORT. In a series of performances, she called Tap and Touch Cinema (1968-1989), EXPORT plays

into the role of performative femininity to challenge the overly sexualised female body portrayed in Hollywood cinema and modern media.



Fig 1. VALIE EXPORT, *TAPP und TASTKINO (TAP and TOUCH CINEMA)*, 1968-1989

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey explores this in her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), writing,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for

strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11).

(talk about how Mulvey sections the male gaze into three parts in this quote, reference <https://theconversation.com/half-a-century-of-the-male-gaze-why-laura-mulveys-pioneering-theory-still-resonates-today-256875>).

During the performance, EXPORT strolls Vienna's bustling shopping district, wearing a cardboard box with armholes on her upper body, the front of the box is cut out, with a curtain covering her exposed breasts. During the performance, EXPORT is accompanied by her male friend, Peter Wiebel, who acts as her 'pimp'. Throughout the performance, he encourages members of the public, predominantly men, to reach through the curtain and fondle EXPORT's breasts (Alberro, 2000). Through this performance, EXPORT investigates the concept of 'expanded cinema', a concept devised by American Filmmaker, Stan Van Der Beek (talk a bit more).

This piece was especially powerful as EXPORT embodies performative femininity to reclaim spectatorship over the female body, altering the female body from a "passive object to active participant" (Alberro, 2000), forcing the male audience to publicly address their erotogenic fantasies towards the female body.



Fig 2. Hannah Wilke, *Through the Large Glass*, 1976

Like EXPORT, Wilke is known to challenge the over sexualised and objectified female body throughout art history and modern media. We see this in Wilke's 1976 performance piece, *Hannah Wilke Through the Large Glass*, where the artist uses her own body to critique the male gaze. At the beginning of the performance, we see Wilke dressed in a white two-piece men's suit topped with a matching fedora as she strikes fashion poses behind the cracked glass screen of Marcel Duchamp's infamous conceptual piece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (1915-23). The cracked glass of Marcel's painting disturbs the viewer's vision, questioning how we perceive women through a broken patriarchal system.

As the performance progresses, Wilke gradually strips off her clothes, revealing her naked body to the viewer. By utilising these dramatic poses, Wilke playfully mocks

the eroticisation of the female nude through art history and media, using her own body to directly confront the male gaze.

Feminists criticised Wilke for using her 'idealised' female body in the performance, arguing that it only further objectified women and presented them as sexual objects for male pleasure. Wilke challenged this (talk about what she says)

Medical-gaze (650 words) 387

In this section, I will focus on the historical control of women through the threat of institutionalisation and diagnoses of hysteria. The medical gaze is a concept devised by French Philosopher Michel Foucault that outlines a medical practice where doctors would diagnose patients through a "biomedical paradigm, filtering out what is deemed as irrelevant material" that resulted in establishing "an abusive power structure" (Misselbrook, 2013). This is relevant to cases of female patients admitted to the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, France during the seventeenth century for what doctors diagnosed as hysteria.

Research shows that most women admitted to Salpêtrière hospital were not mentally ill but instead punished for defying patriarchal norms and structures (ref). Feminist critic and writer, Elaine Showalter, expands on this writing, "During an era when patriarchal culture felt itself to be under attack by its rebellious daughters, one obvious defense was to label women... as mentally disturbed." (Showalter, 1987, p.

145). This highlights how doctors exploited the diagnoses of hysteria not as a genuine illness, but to further control, dismiss, and silence women who acted against the patriarchy. This level of control and submission forced upon these women at Salpêtrière links to Foucault's concept of "docile bodies", in which he believed that implementing various methods of power and control would result in a more disciplined and obedient body (Foucault,). This has since been expanded on by feminist writers such as Sandra Lee Bartky, by applying it to gender, demonstrating how the female body has historically been forced into docility due to patriarchal structures and expectations. (check over). This further solidifies how women at Salpêtrière were seen as victims of this docility, forced to be submissive and passive to appease the patriarchy.

Today, medical misogyny is still relevant as ever, as most medical treatment is still predominantly catered to and tested on the male body. Heart attacks present differently in women, but most people are only told how to recognise the symptoms that present in men. Men will get painkillers for most procedures, but women don't get painkillers for more invasive procedures like coil insertion and smear tests (Invisible Women - Google Books or find another source).

Since then, female contemporary artists have attempted to reclaim the harmful representation of the hysterical woman. This now leads me to the work of Leila Hekmat, who implements theatre, performance, costume design and video into her work to redefine society's preconceptions of what it means to be a woman today.

In Hekmat's cabaret-esque performance, Music for Wild Angel (2022), she highlights how symptoms of hysteria that women were once shamed for, such as add more can

be liberating for women. Through this, Hekmat shifts the negative stigma surrounding women's hysteria to a more positive one, encouraging women to embrace their so-called hysterical symptoms in a world where women are actively



Fig 3. Leila Hekmat, Music for Wild Angels, 2022

Instead of attempting to treat women, the work celebrates their differences. Giving freedom to women.

Abjection (650 words) 193

Abjection, within the context of art defines “artworks which explore themes that transgress and threaten our sense of cleanliness and propriety particularly referencing the body and bodily functions” (Tate,).

Abject art is especially popular among feminist performance artists, as it disrupts how women are expected to behave by using methods seen as unclean and provocative, challenging the idea of the passive woman. Abject art was heavily influenced by feminist novelist and philosopher, Julie Kristeva. This supported by Kristeva who writes, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15).

We see the use of abjection in Carolee Schneeman's iconic performance, *Interior Scroll* (1975). Schneeman first performed the work at the *Woman Here and Now* exhibition in Hampton, New York, in front of an audience of predominantly female artists. The performance began with Schneeman entering a room wrapped in a white sheet, yielding a bucket of mud. Schneeman carefully undresses herself before wrapping her body in a white sheet, then jumping onto a table, smothering her body with mud, and announcing to the audience she will be reading from her book, *Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter*. The performance progresses with Schneemann embarking on a series of dramatised poses resembling those of a life model while reciting lines from her book. Schneeman then proceeds to carefully pull a scroll from

her vagina while reading its contents, which was a response to a critique from a male artist claiming Schneeman's work was "messy, female work" (Artbasel). The scroll text featured segments of a Super 8 film directed by Schneeman in 1973, titled *Kitch's Last Meal*. The film entails a conversation with filmmaker and Schneeman's ex-lover, Anthony McAll, "in which the artist sets intuition and bodily processes, traditionally associated with 'woman', against traditionally 'male' notions of order and rationality" (Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schneemann-interior-scroll-p13282>).

This performance was highly controversial for its time as it challenged traditional views around art and gender, as Schneeman criticised the idea of women being passive through her provocative reaction to critique. Schneeman's work introduces the concept of the female body as a source of knowledge and creativity. Interior Scroll reflect on Schneeman's thinking around, "Vulvic Space", which she describes as,

I thought of the vagina in many ways-- physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers. This source of 'interior knowledge' would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship (Tate,)

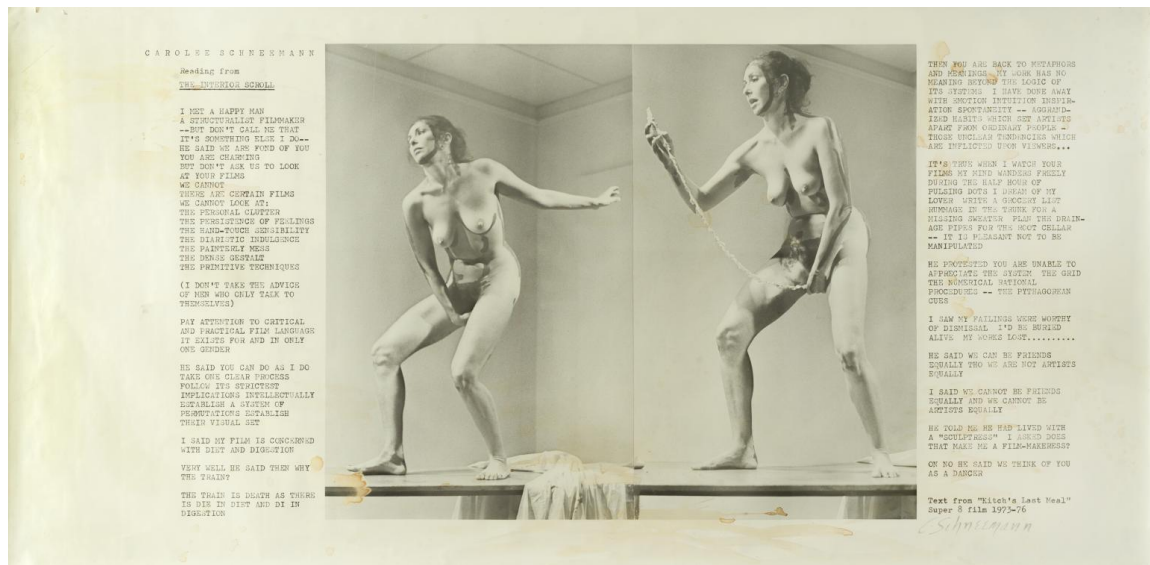


Fig 5. Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975.

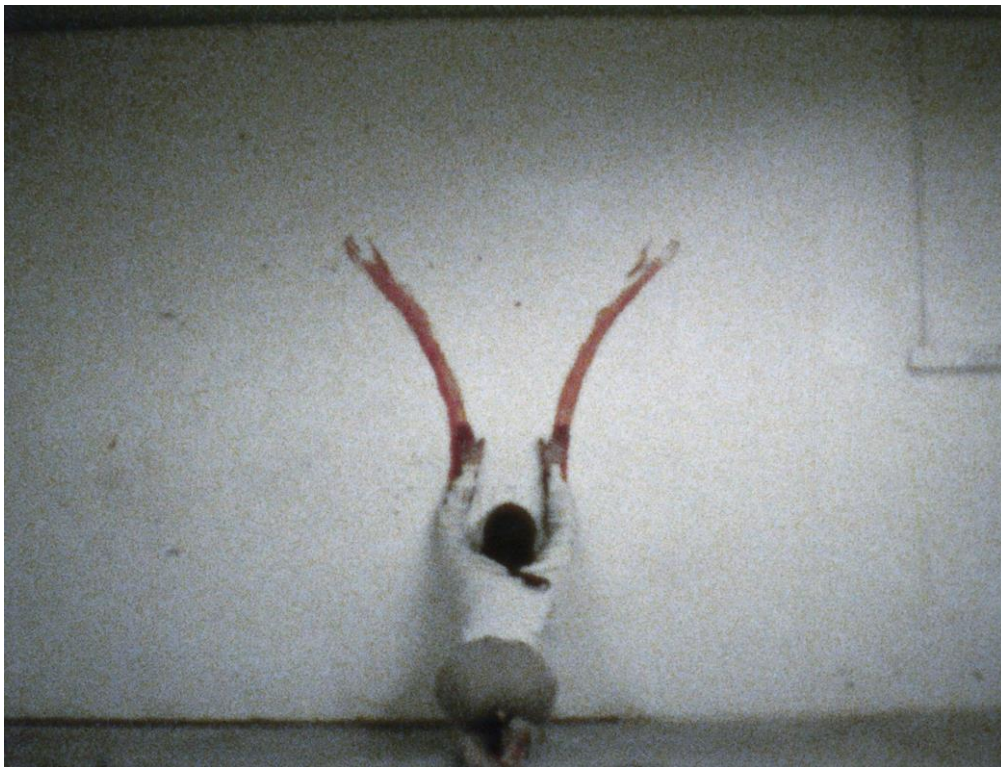


Fig 6. Ana Mendieta, *Body Tracks*, 1982.

Similarly, we this use of abjection through many of Cuban performance artist, Ana Mendieta's work. The piece I will be focusing on is a series of performances Mendieta called, Body Tracks, between 1973 and 1980.

In these series of performances, Mendieta uses her body as medium to paint with blood, slowly dragging her blood-soaked arms down a stark white wall. This action addresses Yves Klein's 1960's, Anthropometries, where he employed women as "living paintbrushes", smothering them in IKB blue paint to capture imprints of the women's bodies on paper (ref TATE). On the contrary in Body Tracks, Mendieta uses her own body as the medium for her own work, reclaiming agency while criticizing an art world dominated by men.

- **Abjection – things that are a part of you being defined as disgusting and monstrous/**
- **Does exposing the female body in this way risk objectification? - It could**

Conclusion (300 words) 140

Sum up how all three keywords correspond to each other.

For next year, I would like to explore these areas further and include concepts such as (write out some of the points not considered in the essay). I would also like to consider (write out some more). Other potential areas of deeper exploration are (write out last points)

Potential final question, "How do contemporary feminist artists transform the female body from an object of patriarchal observation into a site of embodied resistance?" (reword).

"How are contemporary feminist artists working to reclaim the female body from an object of patriarchal surveillance into a site of embodied resistance?".

This research has focused on women who become the subject of their work as a force against oppression. In my own work, I have started to include aspects of this as a recent piece included a video of myself. I would like to further explore the idea of turning myself into the subject, in my future work.

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