
Symposium: Beauty Matters

Peg Zeglin Brand *Beauty Matters*

... beauty may be in for rather a long exile.
—Arthur C. Danto (1994)¹

The issue of the nineties will be beauty.
—Klaus Kertess (1995)²

Beauty Is Back
—Peter Schjeldahl (1996)³

The point of this symposium is to locate one trajectory of the new wave of discussions about beauty beyond the customary confines of analytic aesthetics and to situate it at the intersection of aesthetics, ethics, social-political philosophy, and cultural criticism. The three essays that follow, authored by Marcia Muelder Eaton, Paul C. Taylor, and Susan Bordo, represent a conjoined effort to move “beauty” beyond the traditional parameters of past contextual theories of art—theories which in their own right (only decades ago and analogous to art criticism itself) opened up rich philosophical terrain beyond the confines of formalism. This introductory essay will offer some guidance as to why a symposium on beauty merits attention. Exploring the ways artists and critics have revived the concept of beauty will provide a point of comparison between artworld practices and recent philosophical literature. Most importantly, a new approach to philosophical theorizing will be recommended: one that places questions of gender, race, and sexuality at the forefront of analyzing our experiences of beauty in nature, the human body, and art. Curiously, this new approach is not so much a radical departure from traditional philosophical aesthetics as it is a return to questions basic to the field since the time of Plato: questions about the types of qualities that inhere in objects of beauty, the kinds of experiences

they provoke, and the ways we come to value both.

The symposium title, “Beauty Matters,” is intentionally ambiguous. In contrast to Danto’s 1994 prediction, beauty is beginning to significantly matter to artists and critics *now*—at the end of the twentieth century—for the first time since losing its appeal earlier this century. “The issue of the nineties will be beauty,” noted Klaus Kertess, curator of the controversial 1995 Whitney Biennial, as he quoted Dave Hickey, whose small but influential 1993 volume on beauty, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, has single-handedly revived the topic to major proportions.⁴ Peter Schjeldahl, critic for *The Village Voice*, followed Hickey’s prediction by confidently proclaiming in 1996: “Beauty Is Back; A Trampled Esthetic Blooms Again.” More recently, Bill Beckley and David Shapiro, filling a perceived void since the 1931 volume, *Philosophies of Beauty: From Socrates to Robert Bridges*, released an anthology of writings—co-published with the School of Visual Arts in New York (and thus a guideline for “a new generation” of artists)—entitled *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics*.⁵ Clearly these artists and writers are making beauty *matter* by reviving an old term and reinvigorating it with new prestige. Why now, at the end of the 1990s? Robert Hughes once characterized the art of this century as “The Shock of the New”;⁶ more recently, Vicki Goldberg has responded: “Truly Shocking; Now It’s a Bore.”⁷ Thus the reintroduction of beauty is at least, in part, an attempt to counteract the doldrums of the artworld. The more important question, however, is *how* does beauty really matter now?

One meaning of “beauty matters” invites us to interpret “matters” as a mode of action, a verb

meaning “to be of importance or consequence, to regard as weighty, to care for.” Consider how contemporary artists utilize the term “beauty” in explications of their work. Robert Mapplethorpe, known for obscenity in his homoerotic photos of “The X Portfolio,” claimed to be “obsessed with beauty.”⁸ Andres Serrano, famous for a large color photo of a urine-soaked crucifix, employed materials with shock-value in his search for beauty.⁹ Damien Hirst’s display of a dead shark, fourteen feet long, in a tank of formaldehyde was his way of expressing the feeling it evoked: “beauty combined with cruelty.”¹⁰ More recently, a show of Hirst’s work was entitled “The Beautiful Afterlife.”¹¹ Yasumasa Morimura, a Japanese artist who has photographed himself in drag as Vivien Leigh, Marilyn Monroe, and Olympia in Manet’s painting of the same name, entitled a recent exhibition “The Sickness unto Beauty—Self-Portrait as Actress.”¹²

Art critics routinely invoke the term “beauty” as well. According to Dave Hickey, Mapplethorpe’s disturbing images exemplify “formal beauty.”¹³ A Hirst sculpture consisting of shelving dotted with hundreds of cigarette butts impressed Roberta Smith as “strikingly beautiful.”¹⁴ (Donald Kuspit, however, has judged the work of the British conceptualists quite differently; “there is precious little art that is positive, tender, or beautiful.”)¹⁵ On Lynn Gumpert’s view, Morimura’s female impersonations raise “fundamental questions about the ‘true’ nature of beauty and selfhood.”¹⁶

Noticeably absent from these ruminations on beauty in contemporary art are references to Plato, Burke, Hume, or Kant. In contrast to past theorizing on art, which delineated many senses of the term “beauty,” philosophy plays no significant role in current art-critical discourse except to represent the *past*—which critics deliberately reject. For example, Hickey bemoans “our largely unarticulated concept of ‘beauty’”¹⁷ and quickly dismisses aesthetics as “old patriarchal do-dah about transcendent formal values and humane realism.”¹⁸ Beckley locates the origins of beauty in the nineteenth century with John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Santayana: as if there were no eighteenth-century theorists of taste, no Plato, and no Kant.¹⁹ As for Schjeldahl, he asserts, “Things can hardly get worse. ... Beauty’s malaise is a problem of worn-out philosophies

that clutter its dictionary definition.”²⁰ Because beauty is attributed to objects as disparate as the Mona Lisa’s smile and the grimace of an African mask, it posits an essence that “makes nonsense of the word [‘beauty’].” Instead, “Beauty is an experience, not a quality.” His goal is “to rescue for educated talk the vernacular sense of beauty from the historically freighted, abstract piety of ‘Beauty.’”²¹ Philosophically speaking, of course, Schjeldahl does not probe deeply, given his preference for dictionary definitions. Yet he and others strategically employ critical remarks and theoretical observations in order to persuade us that *now* is the time to care about beauty and that beauty must be reconceived in a *new*, nonphilosophical way. Hickey emphasizes how problematic the re-introduction of the term has been; Beckley notes that “seething beauty” has suddenly resurfaced; Shapiro adds, “beauty is gradually reemerging without pretense to universalism.”²² Thus “beauty” is poised at the beginning of a new phase, “a new Aesthetics”—set to reenergize the artworld in fresh and exciting ways—but apparently with no philosophical input.²³

What about aesthetics? Has “beauty” reinvigorated philosophy toward a new aesthetics as well? As we know, philosophical notions of beauty have mattered to philosophers for quite some time and, in contrast to Danto’s prediction, they appear to be experiencing some renewed interest as well. Let us recall some past articulations about beauty in order to gauge the impact of current artworld theorizing and criticism. Consider the way “beauty” is treated, for example, in a new introductory text by George Dickie.²⁴ As with numerous anthologies published recently, the concept of “Beauty” is summarily covered in one chapter, extending no further than Kant’s aesthetics.

Plato linked beauty with love: first, the love of a beautiful body, and then, the beauty of one’s soul, beautiful practices and customs, the beauty of knowledge, and ultimately the Form of Beauty. He also introduced serious questions about the role of beauty in the physical world and within human society since his goal was to urge all persons toward the attainment of Beauty in the ideal realm. Thus beautiful poems or statues in “the world of sense” are suspect, and poets and artists, however inspired by the gods, are not welcome in the Republic. His legacy,

however, is the distinction between Beauty that transcends the physical world and beautiful things (in the world) that share some common characteristics: unity, measure, and proportion. Common to both Beauty and beautiful things is the complex act of *contemplation*: a component retained in the cognitive-based notion of beauty of St. Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, beauty manifests itself in real-world objects through perfection, proportion, and clarity, and is tied to human perception and desire: “the beautiful is that which calms the desire, by being seen or known.” Thus beautiful things share objective features in the world of experience while persons experience the subjective property of pleasure (or calming of desire). In the eighteenth century, a person’s sense of taste comes into play as the faculty that (singly or not) apprehends beauty, the sublime, or the picturesque. Nature (the natural environment) plays a very important role by expanding the range of beautiful “objects” one might perceive; landscapes—both actual and painted—are the occasions of pleasurable experiences. But such pleasure must still be devoid of desire; and thus disinterestedness—the exclusion of ethical, social, and political concerns—becomes mandatory. Subjective theories come to occupy center stage as more emphasis is placed on the role of the perceiver and less on the features of the object that trigger one’s faculty of taste. The sublime comes to replace beauty as the stronger of the two, and eventually the notion of a sense of taste is replaced by aesthetic attitude. As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein’s mid-century challenge to the use of basic philosophical terms generally led to an abandonment of the ongoing project of defining “beauty.” Notable exceptions have been Guy Sircello’s 1975 analysis of the properties of beautiful objects and Mary Mothersill’s revival of theories of taste in 1984.²⁵

Beginning as far back as Plato, gender and sexual orientation played a significant role in discussions of beauty. Plato’s discussion of love in the *Symposium* operates within the context of a male-dominated, openly gay society. In the eighteenth century, philosophers prominently employed descriptions of women’s bodies in their theories, gendering the beautiful feminine and the sublime masculine. Recall, for example, Edmund Burke’s tantalizing description of a beautiful woman:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried.²⁶

Burke’s remarks are startling: not so much in their frankness about how the male observer is seduced (by “the deceitful maze”), but how emphatically his “unsteady eye slides giddily” while the female is the passive object to be looked at. In addition, Burke’s observer is presumed to be heterosexual. In another passage (quoted by Dickie, although not commented upon in terms of sexual orientation), Burke notes:

We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; whilst the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire. Which shews that beauty, and the passion caused by beauty, which I call love, is different from desire, though desire may sometimes operate along with it.²⁷

Burke clearly reinforces a norm that precludes men from feeling desire when perceiving other beautiful men.

Furthermore, race comes to play a role in Burke’s theory of beauty as well as many subsequent theories of the sublime. In a revealing essay on the raced character of the sublime, Meg Armstrong retells Burke’s story of the white boy who, blind since birth, sees a black woman for the first time.²⁸ Inspiring both shock and terror, the woman transgresses the boundaries of a proper white(s)-only, feminine beauty. Kant, too, promoted the blonde, blue-eyed ideal of female beauty, denigrating Africans and Indians to the status of “savages.” Thus, Kant’s inquiry into the beautiful and the sublime—considered by many to be the apex of aesthetic discourse—becomes inextricably enmeshed in issues of gender, race, and cultural identity. Oddly enough, when recent revivals of the concept of “beauty” in philosophy of art have occurred, they have been strangely silent on these fundamental issues.²⁹

For instance, Rudolf Arnheim recently proposed a notion of beauty as suitability, where “beauty” is defined as “the appropriateness of

form, supplying the intended 'idea' or meaning of the work with an adequate appearance." His only acknowledgment of the issue of race is a hasty endorsement of recent studies that purport to show "that within the standards of different races the criteria for what is called beauty are the same as those of the Western tradition."³⁰ Eddy Zemach has offered parameters for *real* beauty by which aesthetic judgments are right or wrong based on the verifiability of aesthetic properties of objects.³¹ Neither his analysis nor that of Malcolm Budd, who has reopened the topic of beauty in Kant, deals significantly with issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.³² Two conclusions might be drawn from these trends: first, rather than languishing in exile as Danto predicted, beauty has once again begun to matter within philosophical aesthetics.³³ Recent philosophical interest *may* be predicated on the revival of beauty orchestrated by artists and critics, but there is no necessary connection. Philosophers of art do not always engage the work of current artists and contemporary critics directly. Perhaps like the art and criticism of the artworld, the doldrums in philosophy need addressing as well. Second, beauty has come to matter in ways that revive past "historically freighted, ... worn-out philosophies," thus vindicating the complaints of a critic like Schjeldahl. In fact, one might characterize philosophy as establishing a revival of beauty that is more narrowly circumscribed than ever before. In other words, beauty has resurfaced, but in the same old ways ... or less so. Given these parameters, what is the likelihood that a *new* aesthetics of beauty is forthcoming? How might "beauty" be re-oriented within philosophical aesthetics on different, less traditional grounds? Will opinions of artists and critics come to play a more integral role? What other factors might shape future conversations about beauty in new and innovative ways?

One significant improvement would be the introduction of feminist writings, where the term "feminist" is fleshed out in its most inclusive sense, involving racial, sexual, and cultural aspects.³⁴ A feminist point of view can prove helpful in preventing the insularity of aesthetics. Informed by feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, ethics, and social and political philosophy, feminism challenges the neutrality of purportedly objective and universal statements about beauty. Modeled upon feminist cri-

tiques of major philosophers throughout history, one can imagine an extensive re-reading of the "canon" of primary authors on beauty.³⁵ Appraised of current art practice, criticism, and theory, a feminist approach can reflect the complexity of art in today's unique social contexts. It can adopt more inclusive language that reflects differing points of view, and finally, it can add diversity to the mix of data already relevant to the full assessment of a work of art. There is already a tremendous body of literature—from feminist art history, art criticism, literary theory, film and cultural studies—to challenge the many ways "beauty" is used within various cultures. Two of the most notable strategies within feminist scholarship emphasize (a) an ecofeminist approach to nature, and (b) an emerging discourse on the body, fashion, and consumer culture.

Consider, then, two additional meanings of "beauty matters," both based in feminist theorizing. (a) Beauty matters—in indirect ways that bear exploring—on a grand scale for a new generation of writers and political activists who "see nature as a feminist issue":

According to ecological feminists ("ecofeminists"), important connections exist between the treatment of women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and the treatment of nonhuman nature on the other. Ecological feminists claim that any feminism, environmentalism, or environmental ethic which fails to take these connections seriously is grossly inadequate.³⁶

Being careful not to misrepresent ecofeminist interests, I am suggesting that *beauty matters indirectly* because ethical concerns take priority over aesthetic concerns. Nevertheless, the ecofeminist agenda to incorporate ethics, public policy, and a growing global consciousness into a discussion of nature provides an interesting contrast to the disinterestedness advocated by eighteenth-century philosophers writing on nature as well as a fascinating parallel to the essay presented here by Marcia Eaton. Setting the stage with a review of Kantian and contextual aesthetics, she argues against a notion of Kantian beauty. Following Tolstoy's lead, she suggests a contrasting notion of "contextual beauty" by which beauty is "a contextual property deeply connected to factual beliefs and moral attitudes." Not only is contextual beauty more representative

of the judgments pronounced by non-Eurocentric cultures but, for example, it also allows one's ecological and ethical beliefs to be relevant to a judgment of beauty in nature.

In similar ways, ecofeminist writers highlight the context of judgments about nature by giving voice to the viewpoints of women in Native American, African, and other impoverished cultures. In these contexts, women uniquely bear an unjust share of the burden of physical labor and assume the primary roles of procreator and nurturer. Ecofeminists would argue that the overwhelming harm done to human beings dictates the primacy of moral issues over aesthetic, but basic philosophical questions plague the person attempting to make aesthetic judgments about beauty in nature when ethical concerns intrude: how does one balance ethics and aesthetics? How would a feminist decide? In an essay entitled, "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?" Eaton recommends "a conceptual interdependence" between aesthetics and ethics by which "neither the aesthetic nor the ethical is prior."³⁷ Even so, by conjoining the two, Eaton advocates a role for ethics that defies traditional aesthetics, and opens the way for judgments of contextual beauty that cannot exclude ethical, ecological, and environmental concerns.

Consider yet a third meaning of *beauty matters*, again along feminist lines: (b) Beauty has mattered to women—for centuries, even millennia—as evidenced by their care for physical appearance: their bodies, faces, dress, and more recently their "reconstructed" selves. Advertisements proclaim cosmetic surgery, liposuction, and breast implants as the site where "art and science meet." The "fashion beauty complex" (Sandra Bartky's term)³⁸ has constructed "the beauty myth" (Naomi Wolf's term)³⁹ that fuels an annual multimillion-dollar business in moisturizers, makeup, and magazines about dieting. Adopting the complex or myth serves to pressure women to conform to society's norms of feminine beauty: the constant effort to look young and thin. This institutionalization of beauty has spawned an entire industry devoted to beauty *matters* where "matters" designates the noun meaning "what a thing is made of, what all material things are made of." Thus *beauty matters* in this sense are tied to women's mental health, physical well-being, and decoration.

American culture has not only helped create

the anorexic young woman whose eating disorders are tied to a low sense of self-esteem—approximately 90 percent of sufferers are female; various polls have revealed that young women *see* themselves as "too fat" while in fact they are often below standard norms for body size⁴⁰—but fashion has served up the newest ideal of "heroin chic": a fashion industry "look" that overlaps with "high art." These phenomena, investigated by feminist observers like Susan Bordo, point directly to a cause: the visual bombardment of images of thin, young women in advertisements and entertainment.⁴¹ "Gay men's revenge" is predicated upon a popular mode of double seduction: the selling of *male* bodies to both heterosexual women and gay men. To posit "the phallic body" as the "true, enduring sex object of Western culture" in place of "any female version of beauty" is to radically alter the paradigms inherited from the eighteenth century. Fashion and consumer culture affect the ways beauty is attributed to bodies formerly at the "margins" of masculinity. Is it coincidence, one might ask, that the images of fashion and advertising bear a striking resemblance to the men who populate the "high art" of Mapplethorpe?

And, as Paul Taylor observes, the beauty desired by Toni Morrison's black girl in *The Bluest Eye*—to "see the world with blue eyes"—attests to the complexity of a request embedded in "the realization that a white-dominated culture has *racialized* beauty, that it has defined beauty *per se* in terms of white beauty." In his essay, Taylor explores antiracist aestheticism: the preoccupation of African-American artists/activists with standards of physical beauty. He contests the raced ideals of white beauty operating on black culture by examining the practice of hair straightening on women and men, including the trauma incurred by Malcolm X on the occasion of his first conk. The cultural milieu of this phenomenon becomes complicated when we consider the economic empire one woman achieved in selling hair straightening products to other women of color; Taylor includes a discussion of Madam C. J. Walker, America's first black female millionaire. His call for cultural criticism to inform a new aesthetics of beauty, like Eaton's inclusion of ethical considerations, expands the range of aesthetics into social-political philosophy. One can imagine, for instance, an inquiry into the principles of beauty upheld by the

African Mende tribe who, like Burke, consider the beautiful to be gendered feminine. The body of a Mende woman represents ideals of beauty based on proportion and delicacy. Unlike Burke, however, the color of beauty is not white/Caucasian but rather an “overall, unflawed copper complexion.”⁴²

Furthermore, beauty has become central to the topic of representation in culture in general.⁴³ Images of women in society, particularly from advertising, television, and film,⁴⁴ have placed the female body—long an icon of beauty and seduction—at the center of debates about pornography, girls’ sports, Olympic competition, bodybuilding, and women’s daily exercise routines.⁴⁵ The pursuit of beauty remains steadfastly at the center of controversy among women who disagree about the role of female agency in bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, and even the simple act of wearing makeup.⁴⁶ Women debate whether an elusive ideal of beauty is a menacing, male-fabricated myth (where woman is victim) or an avenue of self-realization (where woman sees herself as empowered agent).⁴⁷ To think that issues of beauty within the worlds of fashion, popular culture, and the media fail to influence how beauty matters within the artworld is to refuse to acknowledge the frequency and potency of cross-fertilization.⁴⁸ As Bordo aptly reminds us:

The ideas of those who work for Calvin Klein and those who work for Oxford University Press (or University of California Press) are in conversation with each other, no doubt about it. The question remains whether we are content to allow that conversation to remain covert and unanalyzed.⁴⁹

Women artists have been integral to this “conversation” since it began: creating art that stimulates much of what is seen and said in the artworld today. Cultural images, debates over beauty, and changing physical ideals have long played a significant role in their work. The female body has come to occupy the intersection of feminist art, art criticism, and theoretical writing about beauty. Unlike male artists such as Mapplethorpe, Serrano, Hirst, and Morimura, who have only recently begun to appropriate the language of beauty in their art, women artists—in increasing numbers—have been exploring the psychology and politics of beauty and the inti-

mate connections between beauty, gender, race, and sexuality for decades. Consider artists like Hannah Hoch, a dadaist who rearranged photos of white and black body parts in assemblages interweaving raced beauty ideals.⁵⁰ Or Carolee Schneeman, who posed nude in early performance pieces to counteract the way women had been visually depicted for centuries by male artists.⁵¹ More recently, the black and white “film stills” of Cindy Sherman imitated the filmic presence of the beautiful woman posed for male gazer(s). Her color photos of the 1980s, described as parodies of “soft-core pastiche,” manipulated the erotics of the gaze within the “politics of representation of the body.”⁵² In the 1970s, Adrian Piper engaged the “conflicting standards of beauty and social acceptance on the most intimate level” by cross-dressing and investigating the sexist adage of the Black Power movement, “black is beautiful.”⁵³ Renee Cox has photographed herself as a modern black Madonna with child.⁵⁴ The French performance artist Orlan has undergone nine surgeries to reconstruct her face according to the ideals of female beauty set by da Vinci, Botticelli, and Gerard in order to show that such male-defined ideals can never be attained.⁵⁵ Painter Janine Antoni “paints” floors with her hair and canvases with lipstick;⁵⁶ Kiki Smith sculpts self-portraits out of chocolate that she licks into human shape. The photographs of Nan Goldin catch heroin addicts in the act, elevating them to the status of “high art,” while waif-like counterparts appear in dreary Calvin Klein ads as “heroin chic.”⁵⁷

These excursions into previously uncharted realms of physical and bodily beauty are uniquely female based and feminine oriented. Unlike the “body art” of Vito Acconci or Chris Burden, who sought to shock audiences with the graphic display and (ab)use of their bodies in order to push the limits of “art,” women have had an analysis at the core of their work of the very meaning(s) of “beauty.” Situated in a society that routinely turns women into objects of the male gaze, women became the creators of their uniquely represented selves by devising alternative visions of individual and group identity.⁵⁸ Artworks created *by* women manipulated the ideals of beauty to their taste, wresting control from the hands of their male counterparts.

Based on these examples and many more that

can be produced, it becomes clear that beauty has been integral to women's art and discourse in innovative ways that still fail to gain a foothold in the thinking of most philosophers. If these *beauty matters*—which inevitably carry over into the world of art and aesthetics—continue to be ignored, the projected *new* phase of “beauty” will remain irreparably deficient. The essays offered here share at least two recommendations for future philosophies of art.

First, from Kant to conk to Calvin Klein, *beauty matters*. Pushing beyond the prescribed limits of what might be called Minimal Contextual theories (those of Danto, Dickie, and Eaton's previous work, all of which invoke the artworld or the institutions of the artworld), the three symposium authors advance what might be called a Máximal Contextual approach. That is, they call for more inclusion of contextual information rather than less; a maximizing of context rather than minimizing. Eaton invokes ethics; Taylor, cultural criticism; Bordo, gender politics. Thus, all three authors strongly reject the constrictive legacy of disinterestedness by enlarging the scope of nonaesthetic contextual concerns. In addition, they reconfirm aesthetics as an inquiry more encompassing than just the philosophy of art.⁵⁹ They bring attention (back) to nature and the human body.

Second, human color, size, shape, ethnicity, and sexuality are all *beauty matters*. Philosophers who deny the centrality of the human body within the discourse of the beautiful and the sublime are the legacy of earlier philosophical “classics” that weighs upon our own talk about beauty now. Arthur Danto is one of the few philosophers who has set a good example by dealing with these issues head on. For instance, after noting the lack of beauty in much art of the early 1990s (concerned with issues of morality!), he proposed a notion of “internal beauty” by which artworks like Robert Motherwell's *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* might be admired:

The paintings are not to be admired because they are beautiful, but because their being so is internally connected with the reference and the mood. The beauty is ingredient in the content of the work, just as it is, in my view, with the cadences of sung or declaimed elegies.⁶⁰

Danto goes on to analyze the internal beauty of Mapplethorpe's graphic depictions of penises,

noting that the photographs are “images of a kind to arouse envy and desire in the right sort of audience,” thereby serving “a rhetorical function, the way the advertising photograph does.”⁶¹ We return to the issue of sexuality, or more correctly, we cannot avoid it.

Finally, I encourage philosophers to expand not only the range of contexts within which the analysis of beauty takes place, but also to direct attention to the recent trend in art writing by which beauty has been reconceptualized into a version of the sublime. The core idea in *The Invisible Dragon* is Hickey's redefinition of the term. He states, “I rarely use the word beauty in reference to an image that isn't somehow dangerous or transgressive.”⁶² For Schjeldahl, beauty can be found in “bizarre, often bleak, even grotesque extremes of visual sensation.”⁶³ For Beckley, beauty is now inexplicably “uncontrollable.” This new model makes subversion (either actual or potential), the grotesque, and the uncontrollable necessary elements of beauty. This provokes numerous questions for the role of pleasure and desire within the experience of beauty, and helps explain the application of “beauty” to the work of Mapplethorpe, Serrano, and Hirst. The dangerous and horrible, once confined to the visual terror of the sublime, have now infiltrated beauty. Positive reviews of Cindy Sherman's 1990s photographs of bloody manequin body parts are another case in point. When asked about the “grotesque, disastrous and disturbed” character of her work, Sherman replied:

The world is so drawn toward beauty that I became interested in things that are normally considered grotesque or ugly, seeing them as more fascinating and beautiful. It seems boring to me to pursue the typical idea of beauty, because that is the easiest or the most obvious way to see the world. It's more challenging to look at the other side.⁶⁴

This new “dark side” of beauty is unexpected. It goads philosophy into delving into the moral, social, and political implications of a culture that finds the ugly beautiful. When anorexic girls, blood and vomit, junkies, dead sharks, and sado-masochistic sex come to be revered as beautiful, we can either remain disinterested or we can honestly confront the perversity of *how* beauty has come to matter in distinctly nontraditional ways.

Recall that Danto once asked, "Whatever happened to beauty?"

It's back ... with a vengeance.⁶⁵

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1. Arthur C. Danto, "Beauty and Morality," in *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994), p. 375. Danto attended a conference entitled "Whatever Happened to Beauty?" at the University of Texas-Austin in 1992.

2. Paul Goldberger, "Klaus Kertess and the Making of the Whitney Biennial," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 26, 1995, p. 61.

3. Peter Schjeldahl, "Beauty Is Back; A Trampled Esthetic Blooms Again," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1996, p. 161. For additional thoughts, see also Schjeldahl, "Notes on Beauty," in *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics*, eds. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: School of Visual Arts and Allworth Press, 1998), pp. 3–59.

4. Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues, 1993). One chapter is reprinted in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, pp. 15–24.

5. These authors have failed to acknowledge standard philosophical writings about beauty published since 1931.

6. Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Knopf/Random House, 1981).

7. Vicki Goldberg, "It Once Was S-x, Truly Shocking; Now It's a Bore," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1997, sec. H, p. 33.

8. Celia McGee, "A Personal Vision of the Sacred and Profane," *The New York Times*, January 22, 1995, sec. H, p. 35. A recent Serrano show was shut down in Australia after two days because of bomb threats—see *Art in America* 85 (December 1997): 12—and The Netherlands's Groninger Museum was prohibited from showing a Serrano poster featuring *Leo's Fantasy* (depicting a woman urinating in a man's mouth) in public—see *ARTnews* 96 (April 1997): 29.

9. Sarah Lyall, "Is It Art, Or Just Dead Meat?" *The New York Times Magazine*, November 12, 1995, p. 31. Hirst was subsequently honored with the top art award in Britain: the 1995 Turner Prize from the Tate Gallery.

10. Hirst's show took place May 2–June 21, 1997, at Galerie Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich.

11. Lynn Gumpert, "Glamour Girls," *Art in America* 84 (July 1996): 62–65. Gumpert adds, "The show was a play on the title of Kierkegaard's 1849 book, *The Sickness unto Death*, and is intended to signal the artist's philosophical and almost perverse interest in the concept of beauty" (p. 63). See also the catalogue, *Morimura Yasumasa: the Sickness*

Unto Beauty—Self-Portrait as Actress (Yokohama Museum of Art, 1996), with essays by Taro Amano, Yasuo Kobayashi, Kaori Chino, and Norman Bryson.

13. Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon*, p. 55.

14. Roberta Smith, "A Show of British Moderns Seeking to Shock," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1995, sec. B, p. 6.

15. Donald Kuspit, "Report from New York: Art at Odds with Itself," *Art New England* 17 (February/March 1996): 6.

16. Gumpert, p. 63.

17. Hickey, *Invisible Dragon*, p. 40.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

19. Beckley, "Introduction: Generosity and the Black Swan," *Uncontrollable Beauty*, pp. x–xi.

20. Schjeldahl, "Beauty Is Back," p. 161.

21. Schjeldahl, "Notes on Beauty," p. 55.

22. Beckley, p. xi; Shapiro, p. xxii.

23. "Toward a New Aesthetics" is the subtitle of *Uncontrollable Beauty*. In his introduction (and on the book jacket), Beckley claims to have included "some of today's most important art critics, poets, and philosophers" (p. xi). Danto's essay, "Beauty and Morality" is reprinted from *Embodied Meanings*, but only two other authors out of thirty list themselves as philosophers: Hubert Damisch and Donald Kuspit.

24. George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach* (Oxford University Press, 1997), chap. 2, pp. 6–27.

25. Guy Sircello, *A New Theory of Beauty* (Princeton University Press, 1975); Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford University Press, 1984).

26. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, trans. J. T. Boulton (University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 115.

27. Burke, in Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, p. 16.

28. Meg Armstrong, "'The Effects of Blackness': Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 213–236.

29. Examples include George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1996); *Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Ralf Meerbote (North American Kant Society, 1991); Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

30. Rudolf Arnheim, "Beauty as Suitability," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 252.

31. Eddy M. Zemach, *Real Beauty* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

32. Malcolm Budd, "Delight in the Natural World: Kant on the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1998): "Part I: Natural Beauty," pp. 1–18; "Part II: Natural Beauty and Morality," pp. 117–126; and "Part III: The Sublime in Nature," pp. 233–350.

33. Other texts include Stephen David Ross, *The Gift of Beauty* (SUNY Press, 1996) and *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies*, ed. James Soderholm (University of Alabama Press, 1997).

34. For instance, Karen J. Warren defines feminism as "a movement to end racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism." See Karen J. Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 4.

35. This would be similar to Nancy Tuana's editing of a Pennsylvania State University Press series called "Re-Reading the Canon."

36. Warren, p. 4. See also Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (Indiana University Press, 1996).

37. Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997): 361.

38. Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

39. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: William Morrow, 1991).

40. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (University of California Press, 1993), p. 334, n. 25. Bordo cites a 1984 study in which "a poll of 33,000 women revealed that 75 percent considered themselves 'too fat,' while only 25 percent were above Metropolitan Life Insurance Standards, and 30 percent were below." As Bordo adds in *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O. J.* (University of California Press, 1997), psychologists call such self-hatred "body image disturbance syndrome" which can persist until a girl is deathly thin; "this ideal of the body beautiful has largely come from fashion designers and models" (p. 108).

41. In addition to Bordo, see Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997) and *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Harvard University Press, 1988).

42. Sylvia Ardyn Boone, *Radiance From the Waters: Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Mende Art* (Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 119.

43. There are far too many titles to mention here. Authors include Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

44. Some of these discussions are heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theory, for instance, the work of Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Indiana University Press, 1989), Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image* (London: Routledge, 1996), and Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (Harvard University Press, 1994).

45. See Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Harvard University Press, 1990), and *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Harvard University Press, 1990); and Berkeley Kaite, *Pornography and Difference* (Indiana University Press, 1995).

46. Other recent directions the discussion has taken include: Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1996); *Deviant Bodies*, eds. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Indiana University Press, 1995); *Posthuman Bodies*, eds. Judith Halberstram and Ira Livingston (Indiana University Press, 1995); and *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York University Press, 1996).

47. See Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 1995) for a defense of cosmetic surgery as empowering female agency.

48. New questions are continually being asked outside philosophical circles that bear directly on aesthetics, such as "Is Fashion Art?" by Sung Bok Kim in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 2 (March 1998): 51–72. Also, recent issues of art magazines have devoted sections to art and fashion updates: see *ARTnews* 96 (September 1997): 114–123; *Art in America* (September 1997): 42–45.

49. Bordo, *Twilight Zones*, p. 19.

50. Maud Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Hoch* (Yale University Press, 1993).

51. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), plate 26. A review of Schneeman's recent retrospective show is the subject of an essay by Nancy Princenthal entitled, "The Arrogance of Pleasure," *Art in America* 85 (October 1997): 106–109.

52. Laura Mulvey, "Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977–87," in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 69, 66.

53. Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Mirror, The Other: The Politics of Aesthetics," *Artforum* 28 (March 1990): 111–115. See also Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, 2 vols. (MIT Press, 1996).

54. "Exhibiting Gender," by David Joselit, *Art in America* (January 1997): 36–39.

55. Barbara Rose, "Is It Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act," *Art in America* (February 1993): 82–87, 125. See also Peg Brand, "Disinterestedness and Political Art," in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Malden, MA: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 155–171.

56. Kay Larson, "Women's Work (or Is It Art?) Is Never Done," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1996, sec. H, p. 35.

57. See, for example, Goldin's "Getting High, New York City" (1979), or Mary Ellen Mark's "Heroin Addict on the Toilet" (1969), in Carmen Vendelin, "Junk Sells," *New Art Examiner* 25 (November 1997): 34–38. The promo for the essay states, "The irresistible appeal of the loser now permeates the art world, which has, of late, been pumping out images of prostitutes, drug addicts, street kids, and the generally down-and-out" (p. 5). See also Holly Brubach, "Beyond Shocking," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1997, pp. 86–87.

58. In a review entitled "Void, Self, Drag, Utopia (And 5 Other Gay Themes)," Roberta Smith notes that "feminist artists of the 1970's (Judy Chicago, Ree Morton, Eve Hesse, Harmony Hammond and Lynda Benglis) were the first to tackle the issue of gender," which subsequently influenced gay and lesbian artists of the 1980s. *The New York Times*, March 26, 1995, sec. H, p. 40.

59. A recommended text along these lines is Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

60. Danto, "Beauty and Morality," p. 366. This essay is reprinted in Beckley and Shapiro's *Uncontrollable Beauty*, pp. 25–37.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

62. Dave Hickey, interviewed by Ann Wiens, "Gorgeous Politics, Dangerous Pleasure: An Interview," *The New Art Examiner* 21 (April 1994): 13.

63. Schjeldahl, "Beauty Is Back," p. 161.

64. Noriko Fuku, "A Woman of Parts," *Art in America* 85 (June 1997): 80. See also *Cindy Sherman: Photographic Work*

1975-1995, eds. Zdenek Felix and Martin Schwander (Munich: Schirmer Art Books, 1995).

65. My sincere thanks to Philip Alperson for support for this Symposium project and for helpful comments on an ear-

lier version of this essay. For further explorations of beauty, see an anthology of readings edited by Brand, *Beauty Matters* (Indiana University Press, forthcoming).