Beauty Matters

Edited by **Peg Zeglin Brand**

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What Is Beauty?

What exactly is beauty?
Who gets to decide whether or not we are beautiful?
We surely can't decide for ourselves for the world would scorn us as conceited.
Look in the mirror!
Trace the shape of your nose, run circles around your eyes, your lips.
Try to make your hair catch the light so it shines ever so perfectly.
You whisper under your breath, "I guess I am pretty," but is it you that gets the final say? . . .

Who decides whether or not we are beautiful?
Magazines that paste their air-brushed beauties for all to admire.
Movie stars who walk toward the camera, smiling, sucking in their stomachs and sticking out
    their boobs.
Who was the first person to claim that blondes had more fun?
Who was the first to say that white is better than black, skinny is better than fat,
    and tall is better than short?

The truth is, we all define beauty.
Every time you stand in front of a mirror
Every time you gain a few pounds and then step on the scale
Every time you dye your hair or pop in the colored contacts
Every time you look at yourself and smile and of course,
Every time you wish you were someone else.

—Laura L. Swain (at age 16)

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An earlier version of "Introduction: How Beauty Matters," by Peg Zeglin Brand, originally appeared in a symposium entitled "Beauty Matters," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 1–10.

Chapter 1, "Kantian and Contextual Beauty," by Marcia M. Eaton, originally appeared in a symposium entitled "Beauty Matters," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 11–15.

Chapter 3, "Malcolm's Conk and Danto's Colors; or, Four Logical Petitions Concerning Race, Beauty, and Aesthetics," by Paul C. Taylor, originally appeared in a symposium entitled "Beauty Matters," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 16–20.

Chapter 6, "Beauty (Re)Discovers the Male Body," by Susan Bordo, originally appeared as "Gay Men's Revenge" in a symposium entitled "Beauty Matters," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 21–25. A longer version appears in Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999). A section entitled "Male Decorativeness in Cultural Perspective," on the varied history of Western attitudes toward male display and African American influences on fashion, has been omitted from this version of the essay.

Chapter 11, "A Man Pretending to Be a Woman: On Yasumasa Morimura's 'Actresses,'" by Kaori Chino, originally appeared in *Morimura Yasumasa: The Sickness unto Beauty—Self-Portrait as Actress* (Yokohama: Yokohama Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 157–162.

Foreword: Cutting Two Ways with Beauty

ELEANOR HEARTNEY

Recently, the *New York Times* ran an article reporting that supermodels are falling out of favor as magazine cover girls, and that their coveted slots are being filled instead by celebrities. This prompted one modeling agent to bemoan despairingly, "Where is the next generation of Linda Evangelistas going to come from?"

For the mere mortals who must view these unearthly creatures from the wrong side of the magazine racks, the news was unexpectedly cheering. Was it not a signal that our culture's relentless quest for physical perfection is faltering a bit? However, realism quickly set in. After all, celebrities, for the most part, are also impossibly beautiful. Still, the change did seem slightly positive—indicating a general desire to leaven beauty with a bit of "content."

Will we ever be at peace with beauty? Or must we always maintain an actively contradictory relationship to it, like my friend who proudly refuses to have the breast she lost in a mastectomy reconstructed, but who recently had a face lift?

Our present ambivalence about beauty has a variety of sources—social, psychological, political, even biological. From a philosophical point of view, it might be traced to contemporary society's discomfort with the utopian blandishments of the Platonic triad. The frightening consequences of the Aryan ideal, the obvious ethnocentrism of "universal" standards of beauty, and the absurdity of the notion of a beautocracy make it clear that the good, the true, and the beautiful are anything but kindred souls. In a pinch, we are more likely to agree with Adolf Loos's dictum, "Ornament is crime," than with Keats's ecstatic proclamation that the union of Beauty and Truth are "all ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

But in another sense, we have simply inverted the relationship between the beautiful and the good—substituting beauty's opposite to create a new triad consisting of the good, the true, and the ugly. Hence our fondness for the ideas that truth must be unvarnished and that the good must be without

Lisa Yuskavage, Blonde, Brunette, Redhead, 1995. *Oil on linen, 36 x 36 inches each. Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery.*

illusions. In discussions of art, "too beautiful" has become a pejorative, while within the intellectual community at least, too much attention to personal appearance is considered a character flaw.

Thus, while the terms may have flipped, discussions of beauty remain deeply enmeshed in questions of morality. We are forever interrogating the guilty pleasures we derive from beauty with such questions as, Is beauty a form of tyranny? Is it exploitative? Is our response to beauty a moral choice, or is it externally determined—a matter of social conditioning, or a function of inalterable biological, physiological, or evolutionary factors? Is the embrace of beauty politically incorrect?

When the focus is turned specifically to physical beauty, the level of discomfort intensifies. Does our enjoyment of beauty reveal biases of class and race? What are implications of studies that find that attractive people are more trusted and successful than unattractive ones? In an era of widespread plastic surgery, what has become of Orwell's dictum: "After fifty, everyone has the face he deserves?" Does beauty undermine the egalitarian ideal?

But maybe it's time to cut beauty some slack. Perhaps it's not necessary to turn all questions of pleasure into questions of morality. Perhaps it's possible to be feminist and fashionable, for instance. Perhaps it's possible to loosen beauty's—or anti-beauty's—attachment to the good and the true. Perhaps the political danger inherent in the identification of beauty and morality is matched by the aesthetic danger of their opposition. (I'm thinking here of the flood of politically correct, aesthetically bereft artworks which washed through the art worlds of the 1980s and 1990s.)

Beauty seems in need of rehabilitation today as an impulse that can be as liberating as it has been deemed enslaving. Confident young women today pack their closets with miniskirts and sensible suits. Young female artists toy with feminine stereotypes in ways that make their feminist elders uncomfortable. They recognize that, like pornography, beauty can be a double-edged sword—as capable of destabilizing rigid conventions and restrictive behavioral models as it is of reinforcing them.

Why does beauty matter? Beauty flies in the face of a puritanical utilitarianism. It defies the reductiveness of both the political left and the political right in their efforts to bend it to a mission. Beauty subverts dogma by activating the realm of fantasy and imagination. It reminds us that the enjoyment of "mere" pleasure is an important element of our humanity. And it knits the mind and body together at a time when they seem all too easily divided.

Beauty is a contested category today because we both long for and fear its seductions. The essays in this volume interrogate beauty in all its complexity. But whether they construe it as friend or foe, they make it clear that beauty, and our preoccupation with it, cannot be wished away. Deeply embedded in that inchoate matter from which our judgments of value are formed, beauty is inseparable from all that is best and worst in human experience.

Peg Zeglin Brand

Introduction: How Beauty Matters

The image is simple, stark, yet stunning.

The photograph is untitled but well known to the art world as part of the Kitchen Table Series (1990) by Carrie Mae Weems. It is not only an instance *of* beauty but it is also *about* beauty—the adornment and display of the female body.

The space is balanced. The scene is quiet and unassuming. The luminescent skin tones of woman and child reflect the glow of a single light bulb. Time stands still for the brief and trivial act of applying lipstick. Absorbed in mirror-reflections, anticipation in the woman and girl grows as they imagine future judgments of their looks by others. Are they wearing the right color? Is it applied correctly? Their images are subdued in shades of gray. Applying lip color seems to enliven their faces, enhance their personalities, and, by extension, bring vitality to the starkness of their spartan surroundings.

Upon closer inspection, this is no trivial act. There is concentrated effort here: studied imitation, a deliberate process of replication bridging a generation gap between an adult notion of "beauty" and a child's notion, not yet formed. There is a ceremonial sharing of information, an induction into the secrets and codes of *beautification*, a transference of power. But, we begin to notice, this initiation rite is for women only.

The empty chair invites us in: to balance the triad, to partake in the ritual. But to assume the place of the third person at the table requires the revealing of one's self—male, female, white, black, old, young, observer,

Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled, *from the* Kitchen Table Series, *1990. Silver print, 28 1/4 x 28 1/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PPOW, New York.*

participant—each of whom has ideas about beauty. Given the ritual depicted—of "applying one's face"—men cannot *really* participate, so they observe. As long-time observers of beauty, they have often regarded themselves as highly qualified, cultured men of taste: men for whom beauty matters. Men have a long-established tradition of appreciating beauty in nature, art, and women that is chronicled in histories of art, philosophy, and literature. More recently, however, such men have been accused of

enjoying much too heartily the privileged "male gaze": a look, some feminists claim, that objectifies, belittles, and silences the woman on display.

To sit at the table is even more complex for a woman since she cannot *simply* be an observer. Beginning at an early age, she must consciously *choose* to partake in the rites that involve beauty *matters* like lipstick, gloss, and liner. Some who refrain, to one degree or another, from wearing makeup and buying seasonal fashions, from exercise routines, or from cosmetic surgery have become vocal critics of such matters. Like Simone de Beauvoir, who in the 1940s accused women of complicity with men in their own oppression, they denounce women's participation in what Naomi Wolf has famously labeled "the beauty myth."[1] Beauty has become central to the topic of representation in general. Images of women in society, in advertising, in television, and in film, have placed the female body—long an icon of beauty and seduction—at the center of debates about pornography, girls' sports, and women's exercise routines. The pursuit of beauty and its attendant ideals lies at the center of controversy among women who disagree about the role of female agency in body-building, cosmetic surgery, and the act of wearing makeup. Women debate whether an elusive ideal of beauty is a menacing, male-fabricated myth that victimizes women or an avenue of self-realization by which women become empowered agents.[2] To think that issues of beauty within the worlds of fashion, popular culture, and the media fail to influence how beauty matters within the art world is to refuse to acknowledge the frequency and potency of cross-fertilization.

It is worth noting, however, that the topic of beauty—which has gradually come to the attention of feminist theorists—has been a staple of the content of artwork by women artists for decades. Feminist theorists have begun to view the female body as it has been depicted by male and female artists throughout recorded history as "contested territory"; their analysis of the portraiture of women artists highlights crucial links between issues of identity, sexuality, and empowerment.[3] Furthermore, beauty has come to operate in new and unusual ways; under the influence of the fashion world, artists are now making "girlie art" that represents "the perfected image of what beautiful is."[4] In "Cutting Two Ways with Beauty," Eleanor Heartney calls attention to the artistic production of younger women artists, who, "in miniskirts and makeup," invoke conflicting concepts of "beauty" in their work. She writes, "like pornography, beauty can be a double-edged sword—as capable of destabilizing rigid conventions and restrictive behavioral models as it is of reinforcing them." Clearly, the meaning of "beauty" has gained complexity amid the rhetoric of a "postfeminist" age in which women compete with men in an increasingly competitive, market-driven art world.

Weems, as an artist and woman, invites us to sit at the table and to share our thoughts about beauty. To do so, I believe, is to visually demonstrate *how beauty matters*. She invites a dialogue that precludes the standard philosophical response, that is, one based in a concept of *pleasure* that is *presumed* to be neutral, objective, and disinterested. Instead, she invites us to look at the representation of woman as she is situated *in context:* a context in which her beauty—and the value-laden concept of "beauty"—operates historically, culturally, and politically. As an artist, a woman, and an African American, she provides the setting that gives rise to many questions: What is beauty and how does it operate within the context of our particular culture? What are the ideals of feminine beauty and are they relevant to portraying beauty in art? How does skin color function as a "deviation" from the paradigm of white beauty, which has operated for so long in Western civilizations as the standard of all that is pure and good? How do inherited notions of physical beauty operate on girls who, at younger and younger ages, strive to control their bodies to the point of starvation? In an age of child pornography and sexual abuse of children, how can we ignore the effects of an industry that initiates infants as young as eight months into a cycle of beauty pageant competition. Recall JonBenet Ramsey was already a "winner" at age six, yet her murder is still unsolved. Given the extremes to which parents will go for the sake of improving their children's looks, how can an aesthetics of beauty—as it filters down to younger ages through advertising, peer, and parental pressure—ever be justified *apart from* ethics?

How beauty matters, therefore, is open to considerable debate. The essays in this volume seek to open the discussion about beauty—as based primarily in a philosophical tradition—to a larger audience. It is an attempt to invite various representatives to the table and begin a constructive dialogue about beauty *across* disciplinary boundaries. For example, feminist theorists who construct theories of the body and critique the beauty industry may come to better appreciate the work of women artists who offer viewers a subversive pleasure by using their bodies to visualize beauty for others. Art critics, literary theorists, and Cultural Studies scholars may come to recognize the important historical role of "beauty" in philosophical aesthetics, including the ways gender, race, and sexual orientation have informed the concept prior to the twentieth century. Women artists may come to re-examine the trend to borrow notions of "beauty" from the world of fashion and advertising, particularly as we come to better understand the harmful impact of such images on younger generations who excessively, and in imitation of their elders, strive for physical perfection.

This volume, moreover, is an attempt to expand the scope of traditional philosophical inquiry more substantively into the realms of contemporary women's art, art criticism, Cultural Studies, and feminist theory. Kant rubs shoulders with Calvin Klein. Beautification in Hegel's Third Realm operates alongside the practice of Chinese foot-binding. Plato confronts Picasso. New viewpoints extend "beauty" into the study of disabled bodies, women's intersubjectivity, and computer-generated hybridizations. There are analyses of kitsch, cross-dressing, and Karole Armitage.

The title, *Beauty Matters*, is intentionally ambiguous in the hope of yielding a multiplicity of meanings. First, "matters" can be interpreted as a verb, in which "beauty matters" reflects the historical importance of a concept that has provoked philosophical interest since the time of Plato and has motivated women worldwide to look better, more attractive, and more desirable. (Beautification rituals extend back to the time of Cleopatra, when varicose veins on legs and breasts were outlined in blue dye to enhance their appearance.) Alternately, "matters" can be read as a noun, in which "beauty matters" constitutes the tools of fashion, the materials of women's decoration, or, in another sense, the "talk" about (the business of) beautification. Given the central role women's bodies have played in the making of art (recall the many images of nudes, Venuses, and scenes of rape), the advent of photography and film (women in porn, film stars), and the fashion industry (runway and media models for predominantly male designers), it should come as no surprise that women have *not* dominated the academic "talk" about beauty, that is, the philosophical, art-historical, and art-critical discourses. Nor is there any strong indication that the trend will change in the near future. As outlined below, the history of the concept of beauty has been exclusively within the province of male philosophers; the current resurgence of theoretical interest in beauty is dominated by male critics; and the number of women who write in the fields of philosophy, art theory, and art criticism is still sorely disproportionate to the high numbers of men who write about beauty. We need more women to speak out about beauty and to engage in a productive dialogue (among themselves *and* with men) since it is *their* bodies that are routinely on display, under scrutiny, and the object of all who gaze. The call for more participation by women writers is in no way intended to deny the rich literature about women artists that has emerged in the last few decades; rather, it is to show that the burden of responsibility to engage dialectically with "beauty" has been shouldered—to a great degree—by women *artists* and it is their work that needs more attention, reflection, and critical review. For women, beauty has always mattered—in a personal way and as an inevitable and

underlying sociopolitical framework for how they operate in the world. For women artists, beauty has mattered in the messages expressed through their art (common to much feminist art from the 1970s through the 1990s) or in the apolitical stance they strive to achieve today.

Beauty Is Back

Beauty, once deemed timeless, unchanging, and universal by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, is currently back in fashion. Predicated on the success of art critic Dave Hickey's 1993 text, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, and on the claims of 1995 Whitney Biennial curator Klauss Kertess who said, "The issue of the nineties is beauty," critic Peter Schjeldahl announced in a 1996 *New York Times Magazine* essay that "Beauty Is Back." He issued a call for the public to recognize "Beauty's malaise—the problem of worn-out philosophies that clutter its dictionary definition"—in order to overcome "the historically freighted, abstract piety of 'Beauty.'" ("Beauty" with a capital "B" is a reference to Plato's timeless and universal Form of Beauty, as opposed to instantiations of "beauty" of our own time or in our own sense of the term.) Not only did he confidently herald that "[a] trampled esthetic blooms again," but volunteered "to rescue for educated talk the vernacular sense of beauty."[5]

Equally dismissive of philosophy's contribution to the discussion of beauty, Dave Hickey bemoaned "our largely unarticulated concept of 'beauty'" and summarily discarded aesthetics as "old patriarchal do-dah about transcendent formal values and humane realism." More recently, Bill Beckley and David Shapiro, editors of a 1998 anthology of readings entitled *Uncontrollable Beauty*, located the origins of beauty in the nineteenth century. They also ignored a long and noteworthy history that included Aristotle, the eighteenth-century theorists of taste, and Kant.[6] Co-published with the School of Visual Arts in New York, the text, subtitled *Toward a New Aesthetics*, is unabashedly marketed toward "a new generation of artists."

Such narrowly conceived critical remarks are now being replicated in the press. One editor at a university press was quoted as saying, "We've had aesthetics for the last 200 years, but a lot has been missing from the definition." This was reported in an article entitled, "Wearying of Cultural Studies, Some Scholars Rediscover Beauty," in which aesthetics was described as emerging from its marginalized status in English and American Studies departments, where it had long been considered "the forbidden subject," that is, "the bad child no one wants to talk about."[7] What is common and noteworthy among these influential sources is that none of

these authors consider the history of beauty in aesthetics seriously but have rather found it easier to haughtily dismiss its legacy and to urge others toward similar disdain. This irresponsibility is being transmitted to a new generation of artists who, in their naive assumptions, beliefs, and creative output, believe they are actually *discovering* beauty (for the first time) and uniquely determining the scope of its meaning. Perhaps they are; but if so, it is surely in the "vernacular sense" for which Schjeldahl had hoped, for the current connotation of "beauty" not only exceeds its prior definition(s), it is also by and large out of control. It is now the case that "beauty" can mean anything at all. Consider a few examples.

In response to charges of obscenity in his homoerotic photos of "The X Portfolio," Robert Mapplethorpe claimed to be "obsessed with beauty." Andres Serrano, famous for a large color photo of a crucifix submerged in urine, uses materials for shock value in his search for beauty. Damien Hirst's display of a fourteen-foot-long dead shark in a tank of formaldehyde was his way of expressing the feeling it evoked: "beauty combined with cruelty." (In a more recent show, his work was titled, "The Beautiful Afterlife.") As Kaori Chino points out in her essay in this volume, artist Yasumasa Morimura entitled a recent exhibition of photographs of himself in drag "The Sickness unto Beauty—Self-Portrait as Actress."

Art critics only add to, and simultaneously inspire, the confusion. According to Hickey, Mapplethorpe's disturbing images exemplify "formal beauty."[8] A Hirst sculpture consisting of shelving dotted with hundreds of cigarette butts impressed Roberta Smith as "strikingly beautiful."[9] In Lynn Gumpert's view, Morimura's impersonations raise "fundamental questions about the 'true' nature of beauty and selfhood."[10] Even novelist John Updike has joined the discussion. Writing about the erotic drawings of Egon Schiele, he invokes the disclaimer of Freud, who said, "the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are nevertheless hardly ever judged to be beautiful," yet praises Schiele's drawings of women whose sex "is observed without being exploited." Beauty, he posits, "lies, perhaps, not in the eye of the beholder but in the hand of the creator."[11]

The most disturbing trend in contemporary art writing is the premeditated move to elide the beautiful with the sublime: a dangerous precedent that is noticeable among art critics, theorists, and artists alike. For instance, Hickey writes: "I rarely use the word beauty in reference to an image that isn't somehow dangerous or transgressive."[12] Schjeldahl finds beauty in "bizarre, often bleak, even grotesque extremes of visual sensation."[13] Recalling the title of his co-edited volume, Beckley casts beauty as "uncontrollable."[14] Even artist Cindy Sherman, in describing her photographs of

bloody mannequin body parts amid scenes of vomit and dirt, describes the "grotesque, disastrous and disturbed" character of her work in similar terms:

> 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.[15]

This new model of beauty incorporates elements once confined to the distinct and contrasting philosophical notion of the sublime, which, again, most art critics fail to acknowledge or explore. Rather, they recast "beauty" as dangerous, transgressive, subversive, uncontrollable, grotesque. Beauty is no longer sought for the pure pleasure it gives; rather, in an era of unlicensed freedom to reproduce images of violence ad infinitum, beauty is cast in terms of the *dangerous* pleasure it gives, the way it pushes one to the edge, the way it allows us to safely taste the forbidden and evil under the guise of "beauty." Given the moral implications of a culture that finds the grotesque and dangerous beautiful, this dark side of beauty begs for critical analysis by scholars in art theory, ethics, social-political philosophy, and Cultural Studies. A look to the past is an essential component of informing ourselves toward that end.

Beauty's Past

In the process of addressing the deficiency of recent art writing about beauty, many essays in this volume use Immanuel Kant and other philosophical figures as either starting or reference points. A brief overview of the centrality of philosophy to the discussion of beauty will help place these essays in context. Questions about the types of qualities that inhere in objects of beauty (that is, in nature, in works of art, but also in bodies—male and female), the kinds of experiences they provoke, and the ways we come to value both, have occupied center stage in 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 questioned the role of beauty in the physical world and within society at large since his goal was to urge all persons toward the attainment of knowledge of Beauty in the ideal (metaphysical) realm, where Virtue was the primary goal. Art, or *techne* (translated more appropriately as "craft" than "art") was problematic; it could appeal to a person's passions rather than reason; it could deter one from the goal of being a virtuous citizen. Beautiful poems or statues in the "world of

sense" (the world around us), therefore, invite suspicion. Poets and artists, although inspired by the gods, were not welcome in his utopian vision, the Republic. His legacy is a well-known distinction that contrasts a notion of timeless Beauty that *transcends* the physical world with a concept of beauty as the imitation and instantiation of Beauty in beautiful things *in* the world. Beautiful things, imitating and partaking in the Form of Beauty, share common characteristics like unity, measure, and proportion.

Common to both Beauty and beautiful things is the complex human act of *contemplation:* a component retained from Plato and elaborated in a cognitive-based notion of beauty by St. Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, beauty manifested itself in real-world objects through perfection, proportion, and clarity, and is tied to human perception and desire: "[T]he 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 the calming of desire. In the eighteenth century, a person's sense of taste came into play as the faculty that, singly or not, apprehends beauty, the sublime, or the picturesque. Nature, or the natural environment, played an important role by expanding the range of beautiful "objects" one might perceive. Landscapes, both actual and depicted, became the occasions of pleasurable experiences. But such pleasure was still devoid of desire; and thus disinterestedness—the exclusion of ethical, social, and political concerns—was introduced. Subjective theories came to occupy center stage as more emphasis was placed on the role of the perceiver ("Beauty is in the eye of the beholder") and less on the features of the object that triggered one's faculty of taste. The sublime came to replace beauty as the stronger of the two, and eventually (into the twentieth century) the notion of a sense of taste was replaced by that of the aesthetic attitude. Until the recent resurgence of interest in beauty, Ludwig Wittgenstein's mid-twentieth-century challenge to the use of basic philosophical terms had prompted an abandonment of the ongoing project of defining "art" and "beauty." Notable exceptions were Guy Sircello's 1975 analysis of the properties of beautiful objects and Mary Mothersill's revival of theories of taste in 1984.[16] As if to answer the question posed early in the 1990s, "Whatever Happened to Beauty?" numerous essays and several new texts on beauty have recently been published.[17]

It is important to note that 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* operated within the context of a male-dominated, openly gay society. In the eighteenth century, by contrast, phi-

losophers primarily used descriptions of women's bodies in their theories. Consider one example from Edmund Burke:

> 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.[18]

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, as she is in most representations throughout the history of art, the passive object to be looked at. Burke signals another shift in thought from the classical era when he further observes:

> 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.[19]

Reinforcing a norm that precludes the Greek ideal of desire, Burke demonstrates how the norms of desire, operating independently of beauty and love, become heterosexually coded. These codes were to remain dominant for centuries. Philosophical inquiry into heterosexual codes has been minimal; in this volume, Susan Bordo boldly re-opens the discussion of the desire for male bodies.

Race also plays a fascinating role in Burke's theory of beauty and in subsequent theories of the sublime. Burke tells the story of a white boy, blind since birth, who gains his sight and sees a black woman for the first time. The woman inspires both shock and terror in the boy; Burke interprets her deviance from a proper "white(s)-only" concept of feminine beauty as a transgression. The sublime comes to represent the dark, raced, terror that stands in contrast to the beautiful.[20] It is not surprising, given the religious and philosophical tenets of the day that held women to be vastly inferior to men, that the experience of the masculine sublime was ranked far above the (feminine) beautiful. Kant promoted the idea that blonde, blue-eyed women represented the ideal of female beauty, denigrating Africans and Indians to the status of "savages," but then postulated the notion of ideal beauty *within* individual races and cultures. Even Kant's inquiry into the beautiful and the sublime—considered by many to be the apex of aesthetic discourse—becomes inextricably tied to issues of gender, race, and cultural identity.

Beyond Kant

The authors in Section One start with Kant but move beyond standard notions of beauty that see the body as an external indicator of one's inner moral character. Marcia Eaton sympathizes with Tolstoy's rejection of Kant's pleasure-based theory and recommends a contextual approach. Suggesting that there are really two senses of beauty (only one of which is Kantian) she ties beauty to factual beliefs and moral attitudes. Noël Carroll is concerned with beauty and non-beauty (or, more specifically, beauty and ugliness) and the representation of ethnic and racial minorities. He notes how illustrations that evoke responses of horror or humor are routinely used to dehumanize, villainize, and show ugliness in the form of imperfect or defective human bodies. He suggests an analysis of depictions that play on the antinomy between the beautiful and the ugly in light of their Kantian connection to morality. Paul C. Taylor recalls a short story by Toni Morrison as an activist project that calls attention to a white-dominated culture that has *racialized* beauty. The internalization of such norms helps explain the desire of blacks to straighten their hair, as in the examples of Malcolm X or the many women who used Madame C. J. Walker's products early in the twentieth century.[21] Taylor suggests the recasting of philosophical aesthetics as a kind of cultural criticism, a suggestion supported by Arthur Danto, who turns away from Kant's influential dichotomy of artistic and natural beauty—as exemplified by fine art and the wonders of the natural world—toward Hegel's theorizing on decoration, adornment, and physical improvement. Danto argues for a concept of beauty that originates in Hegel's Third Realm, located *between* aesthetics and ethics: one that would include the clothing worn by Helen of Troy, the tattoos of New Zealand natives, *and* the straightening of African American hair.

Body Beautiful

In Part Two, Kathleen Higgins moves the discussion of how beauty matters in historical and philosophical terms to talk about matters of beauty in the world of fashion and advertising, where ideals of glamour and flawlessness function as paradigms that propel women into vicious cycles of emulation. She argues that women naively strive for characteristics more appropriately considered kitsch instead of beauty. This, in turn, has led philosophers to dismiss beauty—as it relates to women *today* and their concern over looks and dress—from the realm of serious philosophical concern.[22] Her probe into issues of power—long associated with beauty—and the desire it arouses, serves to enlighten the origin of the philosophical

notion of disinterestedness. Susan Bordo's discussion of advertising and its preoccupation with beautiful bodies looks at gay consumer culture by turning our attention to male bodies that function as sex objects to elicit desire in both women *and* men. This dual marketing of "straight-looking, masculine men, with chiseled bodies" enables advertising to walk a fine line between homophobic rejection and successful sell. Such advertising complicates the cultural coding of gender, body stance, and other visual clues that inform the way bodies are portrayed, enabling Bordo to analyze both the pervasiveness of cultural norms of beauty and the ways in which they operate in gender-specific ways.[23] Dawn Perlmutter extends the discussion of how beautiful bodies are exploited as icons for consumerism and fame in our culture by revisiting the haunting murder of JonBenet Ramsey. Perlmutter traces the pursuit of bodily perfection through the history of beauty queen pageants and notes the trend of younger and younger girls becoming the contestants who parade and pose like adults. Denying the claims of promoters that beauty pageants offer a means of increased self-confidence and empowerment for girls, Perlmutter cites the pervasive "patriarchal notions of beauty, sex, youth, competition, and hierarchy" that routinely serve to demean and objectify the young women and girls who are involved.[24]

The essays by Eva Kit Wah Man and Anita Silvers serve as transitions between sections, linking the previous essays on beautiful bodies to those that explore the body in/as art. Man offers an insightful history of beauty that extends back to the Confucian era, follows its development through the courtesan culture of late Imperial China, and provides insights into contemporary notions of the beautiful woman in recent communist China. The Chinese emphasis on a paradigm of female beauty that requires women to be "young; small; slim," with "smooth white skin," "charming smiles" and "red lips" seems to have changed little over time. However, fashion—particularly Western fashion—has come to play a new role in China, enabling women to forge new identities and assimilate power previously unavailable to them. Anita Silvers also explores presumptions about beauty and the body that permeate artistic representations and real life. She asks why we enjoy the anomaly of a distorted face in a Picasso painting yet fail to admire such a face in real life. Kant has claimed that what is ugly can be portrayed as beautiful in art, but rejecting this binary distinction, Silvers invokes recent disability studies to question the current system of cultural representation in which disabled bodies operate. Noting that Eakins's depiction of a painted cadaver in 1875 was originally deemed repellent and only later considered "original" by art historians, she suggests the broaden-

ing of aesthetic strategies to enable us to view real people in morally and politically enriched ways. Our ability to view other humans more positively becomes, in effect, a case where beauty matters, apart from matters of art and aesthetics.

Body as Art

In light of the fact that we have looked at the return of "beauty" as it was defined by male artists, critics, and philosophers and have simultaneously called attention to women who are center stage in the fashion and beauty industry, one might ask, How have women artists dealt with issues of beauty and representation of the body? Is it a coincidence that the beautiful—first categorized as feminine—has now been recast as the (masculine) sublime? Has it been recast as dangerous and transgressive by (male) critics because of its past association with the feminine? Perhaps the work of women artists and feminist theorizing about the body can shed light on this complicated conceptual morass.

Much has been written about women's art of the 1970s and the role consciousness-raising played in addressing issues of identity and empowerment. Recent scholarship has unearthed fascinating histories of female surrealist artists, Unica Zürn and Francesca Woodman, who dealt with the many ways women's bodies were used in and as art in the history of art, early film, advertising, and eventually television.[25] 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 for decades the psychology and politics of beauty and the intimate connections between beauty, gender, race, and sexuality. Consider artists like Hannah Höch, a dadaist who in the 1920s arranged photos of white and black body parts in assemblages that interwove raced beauty ideals.[26] Or Carolee Schneeman, who posed nude in early performance pieces to critique the way women had been visually depicted by male artists.[27] The black and white "film stills" of Cindy Sherman (the same artist later responsible for the blood and vomit photos) imitated the filmic presence of the beautiful woman posed for male gazers. 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."[28] In the 1970s, Adrian Piper engaged the "conflicting standards of beauty and social acceptance on the most intimate level" by cross-dressing in her

performance pieces and investigating the adage of the male-dominated Black Power movement, "black is beautiful."[29] Renee Cox photographed herself as a modern black Madonna with child. Orlan has undergone nine surgeries to reconstruct her face to imitate the ideals of female beauty represented by da Vinci, Botticelli, and Gerard in order to show that such male-defined ideals can never be attained (see the Orlan interview in this volume). Janine Antoni "paints" canvases with lipstick (see Robinson's essay) and 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."[30]

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 while pushing the limits of "art," women have placed an analysis of the many meanings and implications of "beauty" at the core of their work. Artworks created by women have manipulated and critiqued ideals of beauty to suit their own taste and expression and have wrested control of the representation of images *of* women from the hands of their male counterparts. These examples (which are only a few among many) clearly illustrate 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, art critics, and theorists. 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 as insular as before.

The essays in Part Three of this volume seek to remedy the deficiency and to move the dialogue in new directions. Continuing the theme of the human body in visual art, Hilary Robinson writes about woman's "sexualized subjective identity" in light of Luce Irigaray's notion of beauty which, for women, is "a potential state of being which can only come about as a result of rethinking political and cultural discourse." She analyzes the notions of corporeal, spiritual, and artistic beauty, all of which inevitably link the aesthetic with the ethical, political, and the ontological. Artworks, particularly representations *of* women and self-portraits, are seen not as objects of illusion but rather of mediation, offered by the artist to others who may then choose to accept or reject the connection.[31] Kaori Chino also focuses on the body as art in an investigation of the work of Yasumasa Morimura, an artist who has photographed himself in a series of impersonations of Hollywood actresses that includes Vivien Leigh, Elizabeth Taylor,

and Marilyn Monroe. In spite of Japan's tradition of female impersonation in Kabuki and Noh theater, male viewers of Morimura's photographs were initially far less interested than were women, whose reactions ranged from awe and amusement to pure admiration. Chino describes the "Actresses" as beautiful, and offers a perspective that contrasts sharply with the well-known and accepted images of Marilyn Monroe by Andy Warhol: "Morimura receives the violent 'masculine gaze' often aimed at women with his exposed body, then the next moment laughs it away, and finally nullifies it."[32] Sally Banes sets the innovative work of Karole Armitage against a backdrop of nineteenth-century ballet and the work of Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine. The methods employed by Armitage spring from a brand of feminism shared by many artists of the 1960s and 1970s that empowered her to challenge and subvert the traditions of ballet that she had previously learned. But, as Banes argues, the beauty remains, albeit in new forms. The highly sexualized movements, bordering on the pornographic, are "mixed with icons of ravishing, transcendent beauty recognizable from the ballet canon."[33] Finally, the last essay is an interview conducted with a performance artist whose body also functions at the heart of her work. Orlan has reconfigured certain features of her face to resemble women depicted in famous artworks by artistic "masters." She draws attention to the futility of women's attempts to conform to male-defined standards of beauty and is critical of any (one) universal notion of beauty. She is an extreme example, surpassing Morimura, of measures undertaken by an artist, as she undercuts religious notions of the sanctity of the flesh and brazenly defies even the most liberal definitions of "art."

New-Age Beauty

Finally, given the goal of this volume—to bring together art, aesthetics, Cultural Studies, feminist theory, and fashion to the table of "talk" about beauty—it is fascinating (and fun) to find an entire line of cosmetics called "Philosophy" whose byline reads: "[T]he new age of beauty is the old age of beauty in disguise."[34] Described as a "fundamental physical science,"[35] the product line of "Philosophy" is divided into five areas: aesthetics (having to do with color), logic (skin care), metaphysics (fragrance for bed and bath), ethics (where profits are donated to nonprofit foundations or "individual people in need"), and epistemology (books and music). Recalling the untitled photograph by Weems with which we began this introduction, the advertising for one product in the extensive "Philosophy" line ties adult rituals of beautification to the unrealized aspirations of child-

hood: "*the coloring book* finally offers the artist in all of us a simple, convenient way to express our creativity and our beauty." The product plays with the notion of a creative girl who grows up to be a busy woman with no time for creativity (crayons) or play, *except for* the application of color to her face every morning by means of her *coloring book*:

in the beginning . . .

There was a little girl, a poet, and an artist. the little girl loved playing
with her doll. the poet loved expressing her deepest thoughts in her
diary; and the artist, wild and imaginative, loved her coloring book
and coloring crayons. there was true joy in being a girl
and plenty of time to do so.

times changed . . .

the little girl sadly became less herself and more plastic, like her doll.
the poet became an office memo queen; and the artist became
increasingly more scattered as she dug through her
makeup drawer every morning.

then there was an important discovery . . .

the discovery allowed the little girl to become "real" again. the poet
would now have more time for poetry, and the artist
had a brand new coloring book.

Invoking Plato's timeless and universal notion of "real" Beauty, *the coloring book* offers a diversified palette that contains "high-pigment, matte colors formulated to have a timeless, ageless, and universal appeal." The line includes "ten shades of eye shadow, four blushes, five lip colors, and two liner pencils plus seven professional makeup brushes for the tools of artful application"; color names range from "serenity" to "sensuality," from "passion" to "wisdom." Like Plato's focus on the beauty of one's soul, "Philosophy" offers "a way of life for the thinking mind and feeling heart in search of simplicity and balance."

Thus, the aesthetics component brings color to the monotony of gray in our lives (and faces); logic brings reason to dialectic; metaphysics posits Beauty that transcends the world around us; ethics reminds us of our responsibilities to others, including future generations who seek to imitate women they admire; and epistemology reminds us that, as Aquinas claimed, the beautiful is that which calms the desire by being seen or *known*. The new age of beauty recalls the old; it is only the disguise that misleads us into thinking it has never been seen or known before.

Has beauty become dangerous or has it always been so? I invite you to keep these basic philosophical notions in mind as you travel through the essays in this collection, in order to formulate your own thoughts on beauty, the passion of the soul it incites, the desire it calms, and the virtue it inspires in us all.

Notes

1. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York: William Morrow, 1991). Sandra Lee Bartky criticizes the "fashion beauty complex" in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990). See also Rose Weitz, ed., *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For a contrasting view that emphasizes empowerment, see Nancy Friday, *The Power of Beauty* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), and Harriet Rubin, *The Princessa: Machiavelli for Women* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1997). An additional bibliography follows these notes, organized according to category.

2. Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

3. This phrase is captured in the title of a text by Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith, *Women and Art: Contested Territory* (New York: Watson Guptil, 1999). Several new texts have recently been published that highlight the representation of women in portraiture (see bibliography).

4. See Elizabeth Hayt, "The Artist Is a Glamour Puss," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, Sunday Styles section, pp. 1, 4. A show of young women artists who dress like fashion models is reviewed; the author notes, "exuding glamour or sexuality is an extension of the themes in their work, the 90s being a decade in which many artists have made images of high fashion their point of departure."

5. See Dave Hickey's text, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues, 1993); Kertess's quote is found in Paul Goldberger, "Klaus Kertess and the Making of the Whitney Biennial," *New York Times Magazine*, February 26, 1995, p. 61; Peter Schjeldahl, "Beauty Is Back: A Trampled Esthetic Blooms Again," *New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1996, p. 161.

6. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro, eds., *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics* (New York: School of Visual Arts and Allworth Press, 1998).

7. Scott Heller, "Wearying of Cultural Studies, Some Scholars Rediscover Beauty," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 1998, pp. A15–A16.

8. Hickey, *Invisible Dragon*, p. 23.

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

10. Lynn Gumpert, "Glamour Girls," *Art in America* 84 (July 1996): 62–65. The title of the show is a play on Kierkegaard's 1849 text, *The Sickness unto Death*.

11. John Updike, "Can Genitals Be Beautiful?" *New York Review of Books* 44, no. 19 (December 4, 1997): 10, 12.

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

13. Schjeldahl, "Beauty Is Back," p. 161; see also Schjeldahl, "Notes on Beauty," in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, p. 55.

14. Beckley and Shapiro, *Uncontrollable Beauty*, pp. x–xi.

15. Noriku Fuku, "A Woman of Parts," *Art in America* 85 (June 1997): 80. See also Zdenek Felix and Martin Schwander, eds., *Cindy Sherman: Photographic Work 1975–1995* (Munich: Schirmer Art Books, 1995).

16. Guy Sircello, *A New Theory of Beauty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); see also his *Love and Beauty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

17. Danto addressed this question in an essay entitled "Beauty and Morality," in *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994), p. 375. He had attended a conference entitled "Whatever Happened to Beauty?" at the University of Texas–Austin in 1992. The essay is reprinted in Beckley and Shapiro, eds., *Uncontrollable Beauty*, pp. 25–37.

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

19. Ibid., p. 91.

20. See Meg Armstrong, "'The Effects of Blackness': Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 213–236. For the manifestation of this tendency in works of art, see, for example, Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C., and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990). Many more texts have appeared in the past decade.

21. In his notes, Taylor hints at the ongoing debate over Madam C. J. Walker's hair-straightening and skin-lightening products of the early 1900s. I would like to add a note about the socioeconomics of Walker's accomplishments. "Walker women," similar to women today who sell Avon products, were employed in large numbers at salaries that were higher than average for black women in the United States; by 1916, 20,000 were employed in the United States, Central America, and the Caribbean. Walker is heralded as "America's first black, self-made female millionaire" who actively engaged in and promoted philanthropy. See A'Lelia Perry Bundles, *Madam C. J. Walker, Entrepreneur* (New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1991).

22. See Karen Hanson, "Dressing Down Dressing Up: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion," in Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds., *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 229–241.

23. Recall Bordo's text on anorexia nervosa, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

24. See also Henry A. Giroux, "Innocence Lost: Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Abuse," *New Art Examiner* 25, no. 9 (June 1998): 26–31; and Joyce Carol Oates, "Who Killed JonBenet Ramsey?" *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 11 (June 24, 1999), pp. 31–37.

25. See for instance, Rosalind E. Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1999).

26. Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

27. 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.

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

29. 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. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

30. 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.

31. For a fascinating anthropological view on why so-called Venus of Willendorf figures portray women with big breasts and stomachs, see Le Roy D. McDermott, "Self-Representation in Upper Paleolithic Female Figurines," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (April 1996): 227–275. McDermott suggests they were created by pregnant women to record their own bodies (as they looked down at them).

32. Morimura gained much attention when his exhibit, *Sickness unto Beauty—Self-Portrait as Actress*, traveled to the United States. According to one critic, the body of work was intended to "signal the artist's philosophical and almost perverse interest in the concept of beauty." See Gumpert, "Glamour Girls," p. 62.

33. The discussion of women's bodies in dance is infrequent in philosophy. For philosophical implications of Sally Banes's text, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), see my essay "Bodies, Agency, and Beauvoir," part of a symposium in *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 114–117.

34. The "Philosophy" line is available in department stores and at www.philosophy.com (1–888–2new-age). All quotes are taken from a catalog dated January 1998.

35. It is interesting that the ad uses the phrase, "fundamental physical science," since several books have just been published dealing with the evolutionary role of beauty and the attraction between sexes as an indicator of species survival. Examples include Nancy Etcoff, *The Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); for a critique of beauty evolutionists, see Jacque Lynn Foltyn, *The Importance of Being Beautiful* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). For a "new science of evolutionary psychology" see Natalie Angier, *Woman: An Intimate Geography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

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