Introduction

MY BODY, MY BEAUTY

I have never been pretty as a picture. Though I, like many women and fewer men, have tried to be. I've attempted to keep my body from changing, from growing or performing in recalcitrant, untidy, and irregular directions. I've labored and paid to be beautiful according to an ideal designed in Western culture, adherence to which requires that one must stay still, as if posing always for a photograph. Even the moving figures, the beauty celebrities on film and videotape, fix themselves in our minds as paralytically perfect images, their bodies erotically deactivated, immobilized and silenced, like still photographic subjects, into aesthetic melancholy.

I began shaving my legs when I was eleven, perhaps younger. Dark and abundant hair from thigh to ankle has been a beauty bane for most of my life. The perfect feminine picture should radiate animal magnetism through her beauty, but she must not be too animal. She must not exhibit a brute body reminiscent of beasts. Only recently have the leg hair and my anxiety about it lessened. I have plucked and bleached my facial hair—on my chin and jaw, above my lips—for almost as long as I have been shaving my legs. The sides of my

cheeks were hairy, too, and my mother took me to an electrologist in order not only to rectify my appearance but also to assuage my shame about it.

This is a narcissist's tale and it is an act of love. It is not a confession. Victims confess, to crimes and faults. Narcissism can be self-love that is not deleterious neurosis.

We might understand the narcissist as the primary figure in a contemporary critique of fitness: self-care and -development will protect an individual from aging, construed as a naturally de-aestheticizing and de-eroticizing process; fitness disciplines isolate us in our own obsessional anguish about loss—of beauty and youth, and of life itself. The fitness narcissist works against mortality, as impossible a task as producing, in actuality, a perfect picture of her body. However, another kind of narcissist, while living within the bombardment of fitness's demands and promises, tries not to run scared from herself. Simplistic popularizations of self-loving techniques, in which the word *self-esteem* becomes a cliché, manifest people's yearning for self-love that operates not only in one's isolated behalf but also relationally—in intimate and everyday social situations. Self-love comes from aesthetic/erotic attentiveness, and many of us are at a loss when it comes to trusting and working with our own aesthetic/erotic capacity in order to know, in soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body, the beauty of the following complex: self-consciousness, self-pride, self-pleasure, and self-love.[1] For how does one live within yet live against a society in which the perfect picture of beauty thrives?

Here I am, red lips wanting to kiss you all up and down your spine, red lips wondering and working out an answer.

I like to experience the sensual dimensionality that is a human being's beauty. I am interested in the aesthetic/erotic field that people create for themselves and inhabit, the field that they in fact are. Beauty as only and simply a visual feature—a still picture—is erotically devoid, a failure of love; and that kind of beauty resonates with the aesthetic melancholy that I earlier mentioned, because, as art historian Francette Pacteau writes in *The Symptom of Beauty* (1994), ideal beauty "entails the loss of corporeal subjectivity."[2] In contrast, and in eros, monster/beauty is the flawed and touchable, touching and smellable, vocal and mobile body that, by exceeding the merely visual, manifests a highly articulated sensual presence. Ideal beauty attracts, whereas monster/beauty very likely

attracts and repulses simultaneously. Although media invest ideal beauty with sexual charisma, which may lure an observer into love of the beautiful body, it is monster/beauty that is the body of love.

My luxuriantly wavy hair always gives me pleasure, and I don't fuss with it. I wash it and let it air dry. But a precise cut is essential, especially since much of my life I've worn French bangs, whose severe glamour requires a meticulous stylist.

I file my nails short and carefully arc them. As a child I polished them red, and as a teenager I liked the glow that buffing gave. For decades, anything more of a manicure than filing has seemed like too much work. Red lips have taken the place of red nails—I love hot flings of color—and in my mid-forties I took to using lip pencil, which creates a clean and sexy contour and, applied all over the mouth, provides a base that enriches the lipstick color laid over it. Painted lips are such a pleasure. Their lined and saturated surface is so neatly sensuous. (Flings of color must be carefully executed.)

From around ten to forty my facial skin was an inadequate complexion. As a preteen and adolescent I used over-the-counter topical products, and a dermatologist removed pus from deep inflammations that were contaminating my feminine well-being: sweet beauty, even enhanced by the contradiction of femme fatale seductiveness, does not erupt; beauty rationalizes and regulates a human body's chemistry. Alluring though I sensed I was, my skin was wilder than I felt that I could be.

Discussing beauty is taboo. It is a sacred and forbidden subject, because female beauty as it has been constructed in Western culture is a paradox—necessary for women yet impossible to achieve. Naomi Wolf asserts on the first page of her 1991 best-seller *The Beauty Myth* that many so-called liberated women are "ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns—to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes—matter so much."[3] In their introduction to *Face Value* (1984), co-authors Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr reveal their doubts, as serious feminist scholars, about writing a book focusing on beauty: it might be trivial and frivolous, "insulting to a woman," unsuitable for cultural and political critique; and it might show them to be "members of a small cult of diehard neurotics."[4] What they discovered, however, was that beauty fascinated and pained other women as much as it did themselves, and they realized that they had entered taboo territory.

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When I was forty an artist whose no-nonsense political paintings and drawings I much admired surprised me by saying, "You look like a model, but your face is too expressive." I think she said that my quirky, emphatic facial expressions "twisted" my features away from prettiness. I get bug-eyed when I'm delighted to see someone, I sneer good-humoredly in conversation with friends, and my face is very mobile. I scrunch up my nose, narrow my eyes, bare my teeth, raise my eyebrows, spread my large mouth in wide smiles that round to extremes the flesh of my cheeks. I distort the shapes of prescribed beauty into the different and more generous proportions of monster/beauty. As I write this, the artist's words remind me that emotion and intellect pervert a pretty picture by wresting an individual from the dubious legitimacy of purely visual beauty. Within the beauty ideal, regular features and, as one ages, "good genes" will promote one's approximation to perfection. Without discounting these aspects and pretending that they never play any part in monster/beauty, I contend that monster/beauty is a sensuous, alluring dimensionality that exceeds both luck and the purely visual.

Lakoff and Scherr affirm that beauty is the "last taboo," not discussed by friends or by feminist scholars. While feminists had broached "other taboos—masturbation, menstruation, things too unspeakable to contemplate until recently," beauty remained an anguish and obsession, a pleasure and a fantasy that "neither feminists nor any other woman could admit to openly."[5] I do not consider the narratives of confession and transformation in fashion magazines, such as the February 1998 *Vogue* story by a thirty-six-year-old woman about her Botox treatment for a "brow . . . indelibly etched with squint and frown lines," to be daring explorations of the beauty problem.[6] Rather, they reinforce the beauty ideal and often, more particularly, its ageism. Popular confession-and-transformation narratives may give the impression of open speech but are simply anecdotal commonplaces, for they lack a complex presentation of the beauty problem and models of contestation that are also models of joy.

The taboo lives, as is clear not only in Wolf's fairly recent book but also in the words of a beauty who is an acquaintance of mine, a scholar and professor in her early thirties who describes herself as the "blonde, blue-eyed, Roman-nosed Caucasian ideal" and who wishes to remain anonymous. I believe that her words ring true for beauties and nonbeauties alike. She writes me, in e-mails dated January 26 and 27, 1998—from which I quote throughout this introduction—that beauty is "something I

have always wanted to talk about but didn't dare. . . . Anyone who says beauty isn't still the main (though not the only) avenue for a modicum of power in this culture for women is full of shit!!! And so it controls us, and so we feel ashamed of it if we have some degree of it, so it gets treated in ways that are negative as well as positive." The blonde scholar's final comment touches on the taboo's paradoxical nature, which Lakoff and Scherr try to tease apart in chapter 2 of *Face Value*. Simultaneous "sinking and swimming" is artist Martha Rosler's description of the contradictory feelings that arise in women over their practice, or nonpractice, of conforming to beauty ideology.[7] The beauty swims because she looks so good, and she sinks because she must work hard to maintain the status that her appearance has achieved for her seemingly effortless conformity to pretty picturehood. Individual beauty labor garners both attention and damnation. The nonbeauty sinks because she fails at supreme femininity, yet she swims because in her appearance she has resisted the impracticable model. When beauty is a standard of success rather than a variety of pleasures, everyone sinks and pleasure itself drowns in the tortured apparatus of effort, competitiveness, impossibility, and failure.

Monster/beauty encompasses a variety of pleasures, which may include the regular and harmonious features that tend to signal ideal or conventional beauty. Such features, however, are not the basis of the alluring aesthetic/erotic field that is monster/beauty. Aesthetic/erotic wit, a decisive way of dressing oneself in the sensuality and beauty of Aphrodite, proceeds from the corporeal subjectivity and agency that define monster/beauty.

A midlife scholar describes my beauty to me. I've asked her to do this because she's piqued my curiosity and vanity by telling me that I'm conventionally and unconventionally beautiful.

> Regular features do seem to me associated with what is generally considered beautiful. However, striking looks, like your very large and luminous eyes, can also be marks of beauty. The ways that you seem to me conventionally attractive are that you are slender but have sexy curves . . . , have a harmonious face, and have shiny, wavy hair. What is unconventional is how dramatic your features and gestures are: big and passionate looking. While your facial features harmonize with each other they also stand out and draw attention. You move forcefully and with a lot of purpose. You project self-confidence.[8]

Wendy Chapkis begins *Beauty Secrets*, published in 1986, with an account of traumas due to her mustache and ends her three-page introduction with a poignant declaration that I take as a manifesto and a call to action, which is speech:

> But going beyond private solutions means breaking the silence. And I still don't think my problem should matter. It shouldn't matter enough to tell. It shouldn't matter so much that I could be so afraid to tell.
>
> And yet I know that there can be no truly empowering conclusions until our beauty secrets are shared.[9]

Throughout Chapkis's book women tell their beauty secrets, about disability, aging, fat, compulsive eating, mastectomy, acne, sex change surgery, dark skin devaluing them aesthetically because of the blonde ideal, clothing and makeup choices that give them pleasure. For Lakoff and Scherr, Wolf, and Pacteau, as well as for Chapkis, their own experiences as women and feminists who live under the sign of the beauty ideal motivated them to write their beauty books, even though the personal appears very little—the most in Chapkis, the least in Pacteau. I attribute this absence to a particular aspect of the taboo. As the blonde scholar writes to me, "None of this is permissible public speech." That is true whether the would-be speaker does or does not resemble the perfect picture.

In my twenties, volcanic skin displays generally subsided, but large pores and cheek scars, the visible memory of severe breakouts, diverged from the poreless, unblemished skin of wonder-femmes of beauty ideology and supposed reality. Late in that decade of my life I briefly dated a man who told me that we had similar skin—with oily, big pores. This identification with features that I found troubling and defeminizing appalled me, especially because not once had Steve complimented my appearance or said anything meaningful about it. Clearly, his comment was insightful, but it conveyed no sensual identification that connected our imperfect but perhaps desirable skins, desirable as part of two complex aesthetic/erotic fields. All I felt was my own ugliness, which had taken a specific form: it consisted of looking not only like a man but like a man who believed he was unattractive or, at best, ordinary. Beauty ideology enforces sexual difference, and I had failed to be clearly female.

Popular beauty literature often designates *large pores* as *enlarged pores*, and in my youth I was well aware of the latter designation. The former term characterizes a state (of ugliness), a finished picture that nonethe-

less holds a promise: by using toners or glycolic acid creams of reversal, a woman can manage bodily processes so that the visible outcome of her beauty labor is the creation of a prettier picture—a static picture. Every action within the economy of beauty attempts to make stasis possible. The phrase *enlarged pores* suggests a process (of becoming ugly), and it contains the possibility of increase, of greater ugliness. A woman's enlarged pores signify unmanageable change.

Fashion magazine interviews with beauty icons offer descriptions of unmadeup and flawless skin that have both struck and stricken me through the years.[10] I felt inadmissible to an implicit meritocracy of beauty.[11] At first I believed the adjectives—unmadeup and flawless; then I questioned their factuality. Sheer foundations are now available, and they create an even skin tone without dense coverage; often I can't tell whether or not someone is wearing foundation. Also, in the past decade my own skin has become a very satisfying complexion, and I see many women of different ages whose skin is lovely, so the concept of flawlessness mystifies me. (Aestheticians, trained in the beautification of skin, distinguish between *skin* and *complexion*. The latter exhibits clarity and beauty; the former is a covering.) My grandmother Ida's skin was its most beautiful when she was in her eighties, and she wore no foundation—only, occasionally, a light pink lipstick. *Flawlessness* feels like an exaggeration of attractiveness or glamour, an overstatement meant, not necessarily deliberately, to inflate an actual woman's appearance into the iconic power she bears as a representation of beauty.

I'm visiting a city where I used to teach, and as I leave a vintage clothing store a former student, whom I had barely known, calls my name. Her greeting includes, "You look perfect." I laugh and respond, "Hardly." While that may be read as rejection of a compliment, inability to accept let alone enjoy my beauty, the response comes from my disbelief in the reality of bodily perfection, of the perfect picture in real life.

Whenever I've walked past fashion shoots in New York—one starred Patti Hansen, a celebrated model of the moment—the words "I look as good as that" have immediately come into my head. Women's comparative looking at one another is almost impossible to avoid in many public and social situations, and fashion shoots are no exception. I'm complicit. As dictated by beauty ideology, I surveil members of my sex. At the same time, I depart from its dictate that I, as everywoman, am inadequate, for the models do not look any more

perfect to me than I do in makeup. They look conventionally attractive, never fascinating. If I were inclined to stop and watch a fashion shoot, it would be to see how conventional beauty performs for the camera. "I look as good as that" is probably defensive, but beneath the words is my pride in being more striking than the standard.

For a while when I was attending Sarah Lawrence College, the model Penelope Tree was also a student. I remember staring at her in the dining hall lunch line, noticing her pimples, her wonderfully wide face, her being no more ordinary, strange, or beautiful than the rest of us in the room, although she was taller than most of us and exceptionally thin. I liked the human dimension of her. It was a relief. And that this glamorous, high-fashion beauty is constructed became evident to me.

People have compared me to perfectly constructed beauties. Two months before my fiftieth birthday and near the beginning of my first meeting with a fellow art historian, she offers, out of the blue but as if she's been trying to place me, "I know who you look like! Winona Ryder." Throughout my forties and into my fifties students and acquaintances have told me I look like the fifties porn star Betty Page. My bangs resemble hers, as they did when I was a child in the decade of her porn ascendancy, but I know that the bangs alone are an insufficient sign of our similar attractiveness. Something more than hairstyle and features, than slender curves and distinctive colors—dark hair, light skin, red lips—designate me "sexy" like the porn star. My similarity to her is monster/beauty, an aesthetic/erotic aptitude, fleshed out and inspirited with the essence of Aphrodite.

"I am not, in my view, in any way what one would abstractly describe as beautiful because of my weight and the irregularity of my features," a scholar who is an acquaintance e-mails me on August 16, 1997. "Yet, I have so much success with men. I want to theorize that in a way that isn't bragging about it, just trying to understand it. Men often tell me that they are attracted to me because they can tell that I like sex, that I am not trying to 'tease' and then reject and mock them, but that when I give them attention I really 'mean it.' That may be the beginning of allure." I would say that her erotic confidence and comfortableness, her aphroditean monster/beauty, are the allure.

I'm sitting by myself at a conference, enjoying a moment alone over lunch. From behind, a woman asks, "Joanna, can I sit with you?" I barely know her. We met the previous year, and we know one another's writing

more than we know one another. Live, she fascinates me. We talk for way too short a time—I want more of her—and find seats together at a session. I'm excited to be in her aesthetic/erotic field. Hours later, after attending different sessions, we are in the same auditorium. She is diagonally several rows in back of me. I look at her when she asks questions of the speakers, and I want to keep looking at her long after she has spoken. I force myself not to look her way. She is astoundingly sexy, and I want to be able to absorb her soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body by looking at her and hearing her at the same time. Her aesthetic/erotic field most embraces me when I can see her expressive face and body and feel myself to be a part of her words as I watch her lips shape them. She is not conventionally beautiful. Gangly thinness, a sweater and pants that cover what a beauty might want to reveal, no makeup, lank brown hair: these visual cues say nothing of her radiant spirit and intellect, their generosity and erotic compassion that tell me she is monster/beauty, Aphrodite's daughter. A friend says later about our aphroditean kin, "We're all in love" with her.

Venus Verticordia, changer of hearts, look me straight in the eye, then hug me, then look me in the eye again. Tell me stories about your ancestor, Aphrodite, our mother of eros, whose child—his name, his works and play—have usurped Aphrodite's authority.

Aphrodite, full of grace long before the birth of Mary, sometimes I fear I've lost you in the slim pickings of sex-goddess incarnations who slightly reflect your radiance so wayward from the ironic lucidity I see in perfect pictures.

Venus Verticordia grieves: our mother Aphrodite, a wide-ranging aphrodisiac, an erotic pharmacopeia, is stripped down to one simple, insufficiently effective drug. Aphrodisiac: mistaken for merely a substance to ingest.

Aphrodite, you stimulate me in intricately erotic ways. You arouse the pleasure I feel in my own beauty. Erotic: you mothered the meaning of this word, whose profundity is minimized by the synonym sexy*—a useful colloquialism, shorthand for aphrodisiac.*

Monster mother, huge in the ability to praise yourself, I can look at you anytime I see myself.

Over a decade ago I began to make a point of thanking people when they complimented me on my appearance. Women, considered beautiful or

otherwise, rarely accept compliments. We act mystified or dismissive, or we seem to have heard nothing. "You look gorgeous," I told the blonde scholar after seeing a photograph of her. We had never met, and have still only seen one another in pictures. She didn't respond to my comment; when I mentioned her silence months later, she revealed, "I think I've only talked about it [being beautiful] explicitly, 'owned up to it,' so to speak, with a couple of people. Mostly . . . when people have said something about it, I tend to ignore it, and act like the beauty is utterly unimportant and isn't something I should be proud of or put any stock in because it has no 'real' value." If the beautiful woman values her beauty by clearly enjoying it, she may appear arrogant; so she chooses aloofness and denial, which lead to shame.

Aphrodite, save me from the self-contempt elicited by approximating the ideal beauty. She is a fluffcake and a stalker who has betrayed monster/beauty, the pleasurable corporeality that is your domain.

Aphrodite, help me to build the body of love.

I am a skeptic and a believer, a laborer and a sybarite, a fool and a wise-woman. Facials, first at Georgette Klinger Salon in Chicago when I was thirty-two—I would make appointments with Bella when I visited from Oberlin, Ohio, where I was living—then periodically in Tucson, St. Louis, and Rochester, New York, the cities to which I moved, or at Georgette Klinger in New York, and now monthly in Reno, where I've lived for a decade; treatment products from one company and another, Neutrogena (modestly priced) to René Guinot (expensive); Kyolic garlic capsules, Chinese herbs; happiness in love: all have regulated and boosted my feminine well-being.

Regulation—the management of beauty discomforts or the aesthetic/cosmetic maintenance of one's body—is not necessarily evil. As a technique of stasis, it is absurd and pointless, aimed at producing the desired and ever-deferred end point of ideal beauty; but sometimes regulation produces aesthetic/erotic comfort, a necessary balance that lessens painful obsessiveness or that permits a woman to finally understand, with joy, that she is beautiful. This does not mean that she has become a picture. Rather, it means that she has discovered monster/beauty by learning to build the body of love.

AESTHETIC/EROTIC SELF-CREATION

This book presents a theory and some practices of aesthetic/erotic self-creation by developing beauty as showiness that emerges from intimacy with one's aesthetic/erotic capacity rather than as the hopeless pursuit of perfect appearance. I define *monster/beauty* as an extremely articulated sensuous presence, image, or situation in which the aesthetic and the erotic are inseparable. Monster/beauty is a condition, and it can also describe an individual. Because extremity is immoderation—deviation from convention in behavior, appearance, or representation—and starkly different from standard cultural expectations for particular groups of people, monster/beauty departs radically from normative, ideal representations of beauty. Monster/beauty eroticizes the midlife female body, develops love between women, embraces without degrading or aggrandizing bodies that differ from one's own in age, race, sex, and shape. Monster/beauty is artifice, pleasure/discipline, cultural invention, and it is extravagant and generous: it is female hypermuscularity, the mother's eros, aphroditean radiance, the female professor's pleasure in her pedagogical-scopophilic power.

In *Monster/Beauty* I continue to develop ideas addressed in *Erotic Faculties* about the erotic, beauty, older women, sex, and pleasure by offering models for aesthetic/erotic self-creation: I revise traditional models, such as Aphrodite; challenge stagnant types, such as the nurturing or male-imitating female professor; celebrate a body of repulsion and allure, the female bodybuilder; and rethink the vampire, creating a figure who enlivens—eroticizes—the living. I develop models of agency for people who wish to be erotic subjects and objects: that is, who wish to enjoy themselves and to be enjoyed. They become the body of love.

Monster/Beauty considers the body as aphrodisiac in its representation and daily practices. Aphrodisiac capacity, which I discuss at length in chapter 9, is inseparable from daily practices, from the self-maintenance that can be minimal or, as with monster/beauty, highly articulated. One builds aesthetic/erotic capacity by educating and caring for one's body/mind with much deliberation and exertion, through ornamentation or weight training, perfume and makeup, identifying with the erotic sustenance of the mother's body, and enjoying one's own embedded gestures and vocal inflections. Daily efforts and pleasures build the body of love.

Monster/beauty is insistently and even defiantly fabricated. Individual monster/beauties do turn themselves into objects of pleasure, for both themselves and others. But monster/beauty is not solely a decorative or sex object, as ideal beauty tends to be. Monster/beauty does not stop at being a pretty picture, if indeed that is even a passing goal. Camera-ready beauty tames the aesthetic/erotic life out of the palpable and imperfect body, which, because it can only approximate perfect beauty, always signifies the "personal failure" that Chapkis relates to women's inadequacy conditioning: "no woman is allowed to say or to believe 'I'm beautiful.' "[12] The pretty picture is an impasse to richer ideas, experiences, and practices of bodily beauty, which may be activated by the visual but which the purely visual also always keeps at bay. For ideal beauty operates through distance and monster/beauty through intimacy.

People talk about their own and others' illnesses more freely than they are able to speak about their own and other people's beauty. They brag about sex, turning acts into escapades and adventures, and they reminisce about delectable meals. In these ways, they try to share organs, skin, and senses, because people want to be intimate with one another's bodies. They are searching for an erotics of intimacy.

I don't want to hold still. I would rather be talking together than scrutinizing your appearance, assessing how beautiful you look, as if I were a connoisseur of corpses. I would rather we embrace one embedded gesture after another of each other's. I would love our words to couple while our fluctuating looks and scents are doing the same. I want to smell you, pungent and pronounced just under my nose; or sweat or perfume drifting toward me then surrounding me as we sit in a caressing breeze, five feet apart. I would rather be fucking you than imagining how good it might be from staring at a crisp image of you in a magazine.

Russell, monster/beauty, after we share embedded gestures that lead to orgasm, you're thirsty. You walk to your kitchen for milk, while I lie in your bed, enjoying a rear view: your confident posture and light steps; your broad lats and shoulders; your high, round buttocks, so like mine, but smaller; your finely textured skin; your graceful energy as you lift the milk carton to your lips and drink. As you return to me, your beauty amazes my soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body. I love your sparkling green eyes, your extravagantly curly hair, and the creaminess of your skin. You are a revelation.

Almost ten years later you're washing dishes in our kitchen. You wear your usual worn jeans and T-shirt. You are as creamy, strong, and elegant as ever.

I stand near you and my eyes fix on your forearms as your strong sweat and sweet, warm voice impel me closer, as much as the muscles and tendons that focus my vision of you at this moment. The smell, the sound, and the sight of you impel me to say, "I want to fuck you."

People are trying to make aesthetic sense of themselves. An erotics of distance, which is all that the beauty ideal offers, makes this effort a joke, because an erotics of distance and an aesthetics of deprivation and despair walk hand in hand.

Monster/beauty destabilizes both the image and ideology of female beauty, and my desire to witness the body of beauty change from impossible ideal to achievable reality motivates the writing of *Monster/Beauty*. A large part of that desire concerns the perception and representation of older women. The blonde scholar, who reveals to me that aging "is now one of [her] biggest fears," urges me "to be brave and to say it—yes I was/am beautiful, and it has done these things for me, and it has done these things to me, and be unflinching in what it has done." She broods, "Beautiful women are the ones everyone hates because everyone wants it, so if you are beautiful, as I am, as I know you are, . . . you are expected to spend your whole life pretending you are not beautiful, being vigilantly modest. . . . You can never have joy in your own beauty, and when you most have it is when you most have to try to counteract it or you are accused of egotism, self-absorption and vanity." Her conflicting delight in her beauty and desperation about its assumed demise well up: "And then, the culture makes you absolutely panic about losing it!!!!!!" I am not in a panic, but I'm deeply concerned: do people think I'm beautiful? even though I'm a midlife woman? *Even though* profoundly motivates my writing. I do not want to lose what I am, which is not a simple beauty but rather monster/beauty. I care a great deal for and about my looks, notwithstanding my knowing that simple appearance is only one aspect of monster/beauty, which, unlike beauty, a possession one *has*, energizes one's looks into part of an aesthetic/erotic field that one *is*.

I have never felt hated for my beauty, perhaps because hairiness and acne galore kept me from ever feeling perfect, so that I did not comport myself, move and speak, with the confidence of a beauty. Unlike the blonde and beautiful scholar, who was very aware of her beauty and its powers in adolescence, I did not know, unequivocally, that I am beautiful until I was almost the age that she is as I write this.

Although I earlier criticized the moving figures of beauty celebrities in films and videos, it was while watching myself on a videotape that I recognized my own monster/beauty. I was thirty-two and had recorded a rehearsal of my first performance art piece. Grimaces, snarls, laughs, gleaming and swinging hair, a mellow and melodic voice, and a robust slender body energized with eros, with strong and graceful pleasure in itself, jolted me out of a lifelong unwillingness and inability to testify to my attractiveness. Because I was watching myself and not looking at some celebrity, I observed and felt what I saw with intimate attentiveness and knowledge: I recognized my skill at aesthetic self-preparation—the punctuation of dark bangs and red lips against light skin, the close fit of a sleeveless T-shirt baring my substantial upper arms, the casual polish of black pedal pushers, naked calves and ankles, and white jazz shoes—and the demand for perfection did not enter my mind to negate the revelation of pleasure in myself.

Sometimes, thinking about beauty and eros, I wonder if I'm a fool to believe that monster/beauty does not wither if one constructs oneself within its generous embrace. My monster/beauty has seduced men and women, drawn lovers-to-be toward me, and intimidated people so that they treat me as if I'm unapproachable. Monster/beauty helps students in my classes and audiences at my performances to pay attention. I believe in monster/beauty's vitality because I know that contemporary Western culture *constructs* women's aging as a dreaded, painful loss, a time when beauty, which can be possessed only by the young, is irretrievable. However, *having beauty* and *being monster/beauty* differ greatly. *Having beauty* determines the value of fading pictures, whereas the body of love that is monster/beauty is not a picture to be admired or feared. It is neither perfected nor ultimate in any way.

I am forty-seven, and a twenty-three-year-old male student tells me at an art opening, "You're a beautiful woman." I am forty-eight, and an extremely sexy male artist, with whom I have never spoken, sits down at a restaurant table next to me in order to begin a conversation and says, "I just bought your book. You look hot on the cover." I am fifty, and a former student, now around twenty-eight, asks me for a hug at a public event. His voice and demeanor indicate sexual more than friendly desire.

As I write this introduction, I have just turned fifty. I am a white middle-class woman who has researched and written about women's aging.[13]

Many women fifty and over say they feel that people no longer *see* them, but we must understand this crucial aspect of women's aging as only one significant element in the aesthetic/erotic disappearance that cultural forces—entertainment media, the fashion and cosmetic surgery industries, a long Western history and tradition of young, white, blonde, slim, and unblemished beauty—impose on women. Western culture constructs female aging as diminishment; so an ad in the February 1998 *Vogue*, for Estée Lauder's product called Diminish, especially caught my eye and left me feeling very melancholy. The ad reads, "You'll love what you don't see," and advises, "Use Diminish nightly and see lines and wrinkles become less apparent. Age spots seem to fade. Your skin will glow again." *Diminish* is the most prominent word in the ad. (The product name isn't always the largest word in fashion magazine advertising copy. Often the company name or the product's benefits are stressed.) Aging itself must become less apparent, must fade, so that a glowing quality—the radiance that we come to believe is and thus enact as the possession of youth alone—may return. The ad subtly encourages women's participation in their cultural diminishment in every respect, except as a cohort of consumers.

I visit my parents after not seeing them for several months. I'd recently intensified aspects of my midlife bodybuilding, working out more concentratedly and creatively than before, and show up in a tank top and jeans. My shoulder and back muscles, my larger delts and lats, create the illusion of a smaller waist. Dad observes, "You look bigger and smaller." I thank him and silently respond with delight to his first adjective. Like women I know and read about, I don't want to be told that I look fat, but unlike many of them, neither do I want to be seen as little. My father's bigger *and* smaller *conveyed what I considered to be attractive changes in my shape. Larger muscle resulted in an attitude and comportment shift: I felt larger, stood and moved with a greater sense of sovereignty over myself and in relation to the space around me, which resonated in my aesthetic/erotic field.*[14]

Johanna, my friend and surrogate daughter, tells me, many times, that I look littler than when she has last seen me. She intends a compliment, but it always takes me aback because I don't feel little. I never have.

I overhear a saleswoman at a local boutique complimenting a customer with "You're so tiny." My reaction is alert anxiousness. I'm hoping that the same remark doesn't come my way, because my response would be politeness

rather than my honest thoughts about the power that the diminutive wields over women. Monster/Beauty *redresses women's bodily dominion.*

I am five feet, four and a half inches tall, with a small waist and small breasts, broad shoulders, thick biceps, and thighs and calves bigger than my husband's. I carry more weight than a scale can measure. It is the aesthetically activated mass and spirit of monster/beauty; and it is erotic weight, which permeates Monster/Beauty.

At forty-six a friend of mine said she was beginning to witness her invisibility: men weren't looking at her anymore and she wasn't feeling desirable. While heterosexual women's investment in engaging men's sexualized looking as part of their pleasure in daily life might be critiqued for displaying a lack of autonomy in beauty, serious discussions about beauty cannot afford to dismiss the comfort and excitement that such erotic—not simply visual—relations provide. Aesthetic/erotic self-creation is a relational as well as a private pleasure, a fact that *Monster/Beauty* consistently addresses.

I feel desirable and desired. That reality and that feeling mark me, and it is difficult to address them publicly or, sometimes, to fully enjoy them whether in public or in private. It is difficult to proudly and graciously accept a compliment about one's attractiveness, let alone speak about it in positive or negative terms, or to acknowledge one's own beauty to oneself or in the presence of others.

Throughout *Monster/Beauty* parts of my discussion of everyday practices are significantly based in personal experience—not only mine but also that of subjects I interview and friends and lovers. My experiences situate the author of this book for the reader as they also establish the necessity of speaking about beauty, of beauty speaking for herself. As serious feminist studies of beauty either state or suggest, women's telling of their experiences is necessity. It need not be vanity. The personal has become much used in humanities scholarship, and it is a controversial and hotly debated subject. While the personal is useful in scholarship that treats identity, and personal narrative makes clear the subjectivity of scholarship, those employing such narratives have been accused of self-absorption, self-indulgence, and narcissism.[15] Without a resonant basis in the personal my argument in behalf of beauty as possible, as doable, would languish in the realm of theory—which, though necessary, is

removed from the everyday. Aesthetic/erotic self-creation as practice requires grounding in actual people's disciplines, loves, and daily lives. I theorize lived experience—bodybuilding, lovemaking, teaching, dressing. In *Monster/Beauty* lived experience encompasses the recognition that human beings and their bodies are culturally marked in ways that can be transformed by putting the knowledge gained through theorizing into practice.

Monster/Beauty also distills experience in poetic developments of ideas. I used this technique in *Erotic Faculties,* and it remains an unusual one in critical writing. African American and Latina feminist writers and poets who have produced significant but not high academic theory, such as Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa, have recognized the importance of poetry as a means for elucidating women's lives. Lorde's defense of poetry as "disciplined attention" and "a vital necessity" for women's existence in "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" supports my use of lived experience and reinforces my belief that poetry can be a vital tool for scholars who are intellectually invested both in social change and in the value of simultaneous thinking and feeling. Lorde critiques the "white fathers [who] told us: I think, therefore I am." Against this conditioned acceptability of being, she posits the "Black mother within each of us—the poet—[who] whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free."[16] By interweaving poetry with theory and the personal, scholars can sharpen and reveal experience and provide a language "to express and charter" the desire and demand for freedom.[17] They can create lexicons of pleasure.[18]

FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF PERFECT, VISIBLE BEAUTY

I have already mentioned and quoted from Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr's *Face Value*, Wendy Chapkis's *Beauty Secrets,* Naomi Wolf's *Beauty Myth,* and Francette Pacteau's *Symptom of Beauty.* These books are the foundation of a serious critique of beauty and they point to roads that scholars might journey, to practices that people might pursue, and to perceptions that their readers might alter in order to open the narrow parameters and expand the current content of bodily beauty, in which perfection and visibility are primary. Below, to clarify monster/beauty I discuss some of the authors' salient points regarding these constituents of ideal beauty. While beauty has been an implied or tangential

aspect of numerous feminist discussions, only the authors listed above have dared to write entire books that theorize beauty.[19] Una Stannard's "Mask of Beauty," published in one of the earliest second-wave feminist anthologies, *Woman in Sexist Society* (1971), provides (along with sections in Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* and Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, both published in 1970) one of the first contemporary feminist analyses of bodily beauty as a problem for women.[20] A subject that has given rise to only four books in three decades of feminist politics, practice, and theory might appear to be unimportant. But the paucity of writing instead underscores these authors' daring, because beauty is at once so painful and precious a subject—taboo, as I earlier pointed out. *Monster/Beauty* would not have been possible without the insight, bravery, revelations, and analyses that I find in the four feminist books on beauty. I use them as inspirations and touchstones, regardless of any disagreements I have with them. The books give me courage and urge me to speak about beauty in ways as yet unspoken.

Monster/beauty lurks within the feminist critique of beauty just as it underlies problems and definitions of beauty, which the authors analyze as a representation of a perfection that women pursue as if it were possible to achieve. The feminist challenge to the discursive reality of beauty that informs women's bodily practices and displeasures with themselves revolves around issues of control, management, transformation toward the improvements that will produce perfection, and auto-surveillance and its concomitant comparative and competitive surveillance of other women. Each writer personally responds to the issues that she critiques. Chapkis, as we have seen, struggles over her mustache.[21] Wolf reveals her teenage anorexia.[22] Scherr has been in conflict with the "dark self" of Jewish-Mexican difference from blonde beauty. Lakoff offers a self-assessment: "strikingly homely."[23] The seemingly simple statements in Pacteau's introduction are loaded, requiring exploration in the form of a book-length scholarly effort: "This essay is an attempt to talk about the problem of beauty—which is at one and the same time a theoretical problem, and an everyday problem for me as a woman," and "My own experience as a (White, European) woman in contemporary Western culture . . . is often one of distress at the impossibility of beauty."[24]

Monstrousness is an unnamed and implicit feminine condition at the heart of each author's explicit or implicit self-critique or -revelation.[25] The Western tradition is populated by terrifically exciting female mon-

sters, whose threat to men or male dominance is so great that they must be killed: Tiamat, the Sphinx, Medusa. Woman has been constructed as a hormonal and a sexual monster whose physical attractions lure man into the *vagina dentata*, where he will be emasculated; whose femininity must be controlled through the administration of estrogen and progesterone and through dieting, the constriction of appetite. Female monsters in film can be mothers whose protectiveness of their spawn and whose procreative powers are both deadly to the human species—witness female villainy in the *Alien* films.[26]

Chapkis, Pacteau, Wolf, and Lakoff and Scherr have each felt like a monster; each has suffered because of this feeling and has addressed other women's inescapable suffering, whether her methodology includes theoretical, statistical, historical, sociological, art-historical, autobiographical, or popular-cultural material. The following amusing yet poignant analogy from Pacteau asserts how global and deeply impacted women's suffering is: "Freud observed that no man escapes castration anxiety; . . . it seems to me that, at least within the so-called developed Western world in which I am situated, no woman escapes 'beauty.' "[27] I join the five authors in their suffering as implicit monsters: my hairiness and acne; my teenage name for my body from crotch to knees, "Elephant Thighs"; my lower belly—which I discover as a lovely curve of a little girl belly in photographs of me in a bathing suit at age six—extending beyond the exacting flatness of contemporary perfection. Like other women, Raquel, Francette, Naomi, Robin, Wendy, and I are monsters because we are anomalies in relation to the sameness dictated by the beauty ideal, not because we are deformed or hideous.

Depending on the individual who experiences monster/beauty, it may be grotesque—the "misshapen" female bodybuilder who develops hypermuscularity, the younger man's lust for a midlife woman, a person's very investment in her aesthetic/erotic well-being, or a woman's declared love for her mother's or a surrogate mother's body, which the daughter perceives as a source of eros and beauty. Monster/beauty's perceived grotesqueness, based in taboo and the unconventional, differs from the grotesquely—abjectly—attractive body that has become the star of a late 1990s low-life aesthetic.[28] Nor does monster/beauty satisfy a Sadeian or Battaillean erotics of horror based in an aesthetics of disgust. The modern erotics of damage, which I critique in chapter 13, enters some contemporary women artists' self-portrayals as mon-

strous—excessively confrontational and, for many, difficult to visually enjoy. Obvious examples are Cindy Sherman's *Disasters* and *Fairy Tales*, Orlan's operating room documentation of her cosmetic surgeries, Jo Spence's photographs of her midlife body after breast cancer surgeries, and Hannah Wilke's photographs that show weight gain and hair loss from cancer treatments, drawings composed of the artist's own hair, and watercolors of her hand pierced by an IV needle. In these works physical transformation as violence predominates. Critical elaborations of this phenomenon might consider violence to women as a social reality or might frame such self-figurations as protests against the aestheticized female body in both high art and popular culture. My book, however, elaborates the monster as essential to a condition that neither uses nor suggests disease, breakdown, mutilation, or the hospital. While monster/beauty may thus seem utopian, its exotic relation to the perfect appearance of ideal beauty makes the monster/beauty bizarre, incongruous, eccentric, strange, or ridiculous. More important, monster/beauty destabilizes both the image and the ideology of female beauty.

Women may be monster/beauties if we consciously depart from the idea that beauty is dependent on looks alone and instead create ourselves as aesthetic/erotic fields of simultaneously concentrated and resonant sensuousness. Doing so, we may begin to—or we may even finally—forget the anguishing "split between the dream [of beauty] and the observed physical reality" of ourselves.[29] I am not suggesting that we forget the historical reality of that split or its effects on the bodies or the unconscious of women. Rather, because monster/beauty is a far more pleasurable condition than is the split state that stirs self-condemnation, I hope for our bodies themselves to forget the pain of beauty as a promise and an abstraction, so that joy, excitement, pleasure, humor, and comfort can fill us and pervade our aesthetic/erotic fields. As monster/beauties we can be hyperbolic, heretical, and heroic bodies, as are the body-builder, the mother and the stepmother, the teacher, the vampire, and the goddess Aphrodite. We can take pleasure in our beauty and be self-consciously erotic, while also understanding that the whole enterprise of aesthetic/erotic artifice is, to some degree, ridiculous.

The vampire laughs at her evening attire and fangs. Naked, in front of a full-length mirror, Sade's Mme. Duclos smirks at the spider veins on her thighs while admiring her breasts, so loved by the marquis himself. Aphrodite

shakes her head in disbelief at the intimidation her appearance seems to provoke.

In an essay that was published six years after *Beauty Secrets,* Chapkis herself appears as monster/beauty, and her mustache, bleached and framing a lipsticked mouth, is one of the highlights of what she calls the "very best dyke drag."[30] (I quote the passage in chapter 6.) Chapkis is full of pride in her sensuousness and its effect—she is lecturing to students. In *Beauty Secrets* she critiques and envies the celebratory, eroticized, and public display of men's shaving paraphernalia and asks the reader to "imagine a similar celebration of a woman plucking her eyebrows, shaving her armpits or waxing her upper lip." Only "after" shots—the pretty pictures—are permissible in advertisements, she asserts, because " 'before' scenes apparently would be too shocking."[31] Monsters shock, and so can monster/beauty. Chapkis heroically emphasizes her mustache by letting readers know that she has one and that she bleaches it—so the reader imagines the "before" shot to be dark and thick—and by celebrating its beauty in print. Although blondeness allows mustaches to disappear, to imitate an ideal, Chapkis has both playfully challenged and loved blondeness, which is an idealization that I confront and honor in chapter 10.

Monster/beauty can reconcile a woman to her frustratingly real body so that she can stop playing the losing game that is a central focus of the feminist critique. Chapkis and the four other authors examining beauty have understood that personal bodily beauty is always deferred because it is always frustrated by the ideal and ideology of beauty as a pretty picture. None is antibeauty, but they agree that the beauty game exerts control such that women assume a passive position—I'll play and try to be beautiful, or I won't play and I'll be ugly. Roberta Seid's affirmation of beauty accurately expresses a feminist position that exists within a severe challenge to the pretty picture: "It would be a bleak world if we did not celebrate beauty and if we did not encourage the imagination and play involved in bedecking ourselves and molding our own images."[32] Either way, the game is a condition of one's female existence, and one is playing whether or not one is trying to win. If a woman is successful—she never really wins—then all that she achieves is passive power, and it will die along with her youth.

Each author except Pacteau urges women to invent new beauties, new images, new ways to see their bodies, to please themselves, and to love

what they see. Pacteau indicates, in her concluding chapter, that women's self-display, their being *captivated by* rather than being solely *captives of* creating themselves as images, deserves investigation. I would like to hope that she will offer a way out. But she presents a fraught rather than sunny future. Women needn't "relinquish all autonomy," yet they would be wise "to refuse the choice between two forms of reductionism: on the one hand, the delusory voluntarism of total liberty; on the other hand, the petrifying hopelessness of total determinism."[33] She offers no practical advice, and her epilogue casts further doubt on the possibility of women's stepping out of the mise-en-scène of beauty that she has analyzed in chapter after chapter—even with the help of one another. The epilogue is a less than one-page narrative by artist Mary Kelly from her 1985 installation *Corpus*. Two women, who are meeting after having met only once before, stand before one another having attempted to replicate the other's earlier dress. Each had admired the other's very different style and had wanted to please her. If the reader has absorbed the rest of Pacteau's book, she will understand that each woman's pleasure derives from the desire to please, from a sense of inadequacy in her own self-fashioning, and from the hope of gaining approval from the object of her admiration. Captivated by one another, the women cannot leave the staging of beauty. Each, in Pacteau's words from her conclusion, words that resonate when we read Kelly's narrative, is "alien to [her]self, can only be in an image: a 'beautiful work' formed in the gaze of another, and in the guise of another." And as an image she will always fail, as the end of Kelly's story makes clear: " 'See these boots,' I ask, 'HAVE I SUCCEEDED?' 'Well, ALMOST,' she laughs."[34]

The feminist critique focuses on visual beauty and advocates women's *seeing* themselves differently through personal, cultural, and artistic invention. Becoming *visibly* different from normative beauty will prove women's powers in self-love and social transformation. The feminist critique is also filled with analyses and sentiments about Western culture's formation of woman's beauty almost exclusively as a visual ideal, which so distills the body from the living reality of gestures, scents, and voice that such beauty, fashioned and then read as plenitude and perfection, requires corporeal dearth if not absence. Thus, the critique simultaneously maintains and challenges the visual.

Pacteau returns over and over to the irony of the beauty's decorporealized body, an irony because the culture's aesthetic/erotic focus is on

the visible. Her book analyzes the "absence of the 'real' woman that is the necessary support of the attribution of beauty."[35] The beautiful woman as a pretty picture, she argues, is a symptom of male psychology: it "seduces by offering a coherence and a unity that is foreign to the existential body. The fascination with this disembodied ideality is contingent upon the disavowal of one's own corporeality in the real—a disavowal which supports the anticipation of an ever-deferred more 'perfect' body." When, as she claims, the "material body dissolves into . . . abstraction," then great bodily satisfaction and delight—paradise—are out of reach; and if beauty evacuates the woman, then beauty is a killer and beauty lifeless.[36] Superior to the world and a paragon of virtue—she eats little and submits to the rigors of beauty dogma—the beauty belongs in the paradise that is the dwelling of the righteous after death.

This paradisiacal beauty, a "petrified image," a corpse of sorts, is less than flat.[37] She is dead(ening), an unerotic ideal in Seid's estimation: "When the body has been efficiently reduced to a flat surface, it offers no softness, no warmth, no tenderness, no mysteries—qualities once integral to images of sexuality. Our erotic ideal has become as hard and unyielding, perhaps, as the love relationships that dominate social life."[38] In her preface Wolf posits, against a bonily hard anorectic icon that damages girls' capacity for embodied pleasure, an imagined health that is a "full spectrum" of images "in which young girls could find a thousand wild and tantalizing visions of possible futures." She returns to those possibilities in her conclusion, proposing a new visibility whose terms would allow women to actually win at beauty. The winner "calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to truly see her." *The Beauty Myth*'s last sentence stresses the visual: "What *will* we see?" asks Wolf.[39] These final words may be read as figurative, but within the framework of her polemic we are pushed to take them literally.

Janet, a student in a performance art course I taught in the mid-1980s, faces the class to deliver a piece about looking and being looked at. She wears one of the fifties dresses that many of us have admired on her outside of school. The sky-blue satin complements her thick and almost coarse blonde hair. The cocktail dress shows her off: a scoop neck and tight belt emphasize large breasts and a proportionately small waist; the skirt flares around her bare legs. I remember glitter—rhinestones—and vampish high heels. Robust and awesomely sensuous, Janet, who was in her early twenties, sat and stared at us. In all the power of her young,

blonde, but not ideally slender beauty, she was trembling as she engaged each of us, singly, eye to eye, for as long as we could bear it. This was never more than a minute or so, often just a matter of several seconds, and the looking was devastatingly erotic and intimate. I shared her combined nervousness and excitement at the experience of observation. It cut through the objectification and enigma that pretty pictures produce. In the flesh, monster/beauty demystifies woman's reduction to image. What *did* I see? Not an image of beauty but the "body of content" that is monster/beauty.[40] Not only Janet's, but also my own.

Feminist encouragement of women to find better ways to represent ourselves suggests that visibility, on women's own terms, means power. But the body of content, a recurring theme in this book, exceeds the visual; and basing political as well as personal power in visible beauty—even expanded, "wild and tantalizing" versions—is problematic. In 1975, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey called for the ruin of (male) visual pleasure, which fetishizes the ideally—cinematically—beautiful female face and body through the male gaze. It is this male gaze that creates the petrified picture of woman. Theories of the male gaze's construction of visual pleasure dominated feminist and art theory in the 1980s and were a significant aspect of the problematizing of female pleasure, visual and otherwise. More recently some theorists, such as Lorraine Gamman, Margaret Marshment, and Teresa de Lauretis, have been revising gaze theory, opening up avenues of visual pleasure for women.[41] Yet when visual pleasure as an essential aspect of women's beautifying themselves mixes with issues of self-representation and of social and political visibility, beauty is clearly as troubled a way as ever through which to gain power.

Philosopher Susan Bordo reminds us that body practices such as dieting and weight training, which promise beauty as an outcome, are likely both productive and counterproductive. They may reproduce conventional feminine behavior, pleasing the eye by disciplining the body. Still, she acknowledges that body disciplines may indeed liberate women from "gender normalization."[42] The woman who is a beautiful sight partakes of spectacle in contradictory ways. As a monster/beauty she is unusual, even daring or ridiculous looking. She is midlife bodybuilder Diana Dennis in pinup gear; professor Jane Gallop in a dramatic red suit; my mother naked, leaping like a ballerina; the vampiric terror who sucks the blood out of the pretty picture in order to transmogrify it, to enliven

dead images with new blood. However, as imitations of ideal beauty, women may be pathetic "consumer[s] of illusion," a phrase Guy Debord uses in his damning critique of commodity spectacle to describe passive victims of a world "mediated by images."[43] Such women identify with the celebrity beauty, a commodity spectacle who is the illusion of feminine perfection. In Debord's terms, the woman who aspires to commodity spectacle can only be banally artificial—a "falsification of life," of truly fleshly desire and satisfaction.[44] Such a woman desires appearances, wants herself to become an abstract value: beauty. She is the ineffectual spectator whose identification—a superficial intimacy—with the spectacle is pitifully and bitterly ironic. For spectator and spectacle never merge, and desiring spectators unite only in their separateness from one another. Isolation disempowers the would-be spectacle. Sight deceives, asserts Debord. So the woman who wishes to be seen as a spectacle has been deceived by its ubiquity, its "monopolization of the realm of appearances," into believing that emulation will boost her own ever-inadequate visibility.[45]

Visibility does bring attention, and it is politically appealing because those who are seen get a chance to be heard. In the late 1960s the women's movement brought women's bodies, frustrations, intellect, and savvy into the limelight. From the sexual revolution to the academy's questioning of canons to the establishment of women in positions of professional authority, visibility for women has resulted in greater personal and professional confidence and power. At the same time, increased visibility generated the insidious 1980s barrage of news stories, films, and TV shows that Susan Faludi unremittingly documents in *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (1991). She asserts that perpetrators of the backlash, who included the fashion and beauty industries, tried to convince women that feminism was their enemy. Wolf claims in *The Beauty Myth* (published the same year) that "beauty backlash arose specifically to hypnotize women into political paralysis."[46] Women's political, professional, and sexual power so threatened the social order, according to her, that women had to be put back in their place—the feminized house and prison of beauty, where "wild" bodies and ideas could be domesticated and surveilled.

Performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan articulates ways in which visibility "is a trap . . . ; it summons surveillance . . . ; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism."[47] The spectacle, whether beauty, anorectic, or

"fatty," is fetishized into an icon to fault, chastise, or shame women; and the marketers' gaze fixates on those in all three categories, who are visible in politically new formations due to women's enhanced public presence. Phelan suggests that "Visibility politics are compatible with capitalism's relentless appetite for new markets."[48] Beauty, exhaustively sold to women, becomes the price exacted for just a little liberation from gender norms.

Monster/Beauty develops new modes of beauty that *are* visual. I agree with Phelan that "visual representation is 'not all,' " because it marks a loss, in commodity culture, of the underasserted senses.[49] For Pacteau, sight misrecognizes the beauty: she is the mother, perfectly inviting and comforting in a "sartorial skin" that is evidence of human beings' " 'sublimation' of touching into looking."[50] Monster/beauty reverses that process with a palpability essential to touch's existence and operation. But I cannot betray the monster's visual plenty through some theoretical sleight of hand. The monster's purpose has been to show and be shown. *Monster* derives from the Latin *monstrare*, "to show"; and within the Western tradition, monsters are meant to be shown as warnings that visibly reveal unreason.[51] *Monster* also derives from the Latin *monstrum*, "divine portent of misfortune." The monster defies expectation, and therefore I use it as a symbol and agent of change. Monster/beauty heralds misfortune to beauty and its particular rationalizing of the human body into measurements, such as 36–24–36—the mantra of perfection in my adolescence—height and weight charts, or the French Renaissance *blason anatomique* analyzed by Pacteau. Monster/beauty deviates from the beauty ideal in which form, inflexibly ordered, is content; for monster/beauty shows off the more fully sensuous and intelligent content of soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body.

PLEASURE IN THE PROSAIC

"Pursue pleasure," Wolf exhorts, as a way for women to claim beauty for themselves.[52] Good enough idea, though it pretty much remains a slogan, along with others that advocate an end to the self-inflicted pain that women endure in order to achieve beauty. She makes pleasure—playfulness, choice, and self-love—a clear antidote to pain; yet without a substantial exploration of pleasure, she leaves me with the feeling that pleasure is something giddy and that it can be willed. I am at least as firm

as Wolf in advocating pleasure as a basis for change, and I believe that pleasure is feasible and necessary momentum in the process, not just a goal. But pleasure as one's general state of being, as a prosaic—here I mean daily, not banal—reality, is not within everyone's easy reach or even realm of belief. Pleasure, for many people, does require pursuit—trying, striving, seeking.

Pleasure is an ultimate antidote that detoxifies women's bodies both of intimates' criticisms and of the medical and beauty industries' poisons that provide false comfort. Women in their twenties tell me that their thighs jiggle, their buttocks are huge, their stretch marks horrify them, and they dread growing older; and their parents and lovers reinforce the women's belief in their ugliness, which becomes heartbreaking commitment to self-abnegation, to their inability to be goddesses of perfection. I listen to midlife women grappling with cultural imperatives to undergo cosmetic surgery and hormone replacement therapy, to continue to atone for being female. "Under a patriarchal regime," states philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, "religion is expressed by rites of *sacrifice and atonement*."[53] The idea of sacrifice for beauty runs throughout Wolf's book, and the chapter titled "Religion" impresses upon the reader the momentousness of what would seem to be a most trivial secular devotion: looking divine.

Victim: *a person killed as a sacrifice to a god in a religious rite*

Women: *immolated on the altar of Dionysus, victims not of divine but of daily frenzies, the beatings and rapes, the anti-abortionists' verbal and physical attacks, the wild martyring of themselves for one after another vision of an Aphrodite they have never invented*

Victim: *a hormonal horror possessed by estrogen, which, when she becomes postreproductive, the medical profession must replace in order to maintain her derangement, her feminine essence and excess that drive her to the edge for beauty*

Woman: *immolated in the orthodoxy of hormonal biologism*

Victim: *delirious from lack of pleasure*

Representation impinges on pleasurable everyday practices, making them or individual experience untrustworthy as sites of cultural transformation, according to many feminist theorists: women cannot represent

themselves, nor can they experience their own desire. Film theorist Mary Ann Doane explains: "the representations of the cinema and the representations provided by psychoanalysis of female subjectivity coincide. For each system specifies that the woman's relation to desire is difficult if not impossible. Paradoxically, her only access is the desire to desire."[54] Feminist theorists' recognition of the need for a revolution in the symbolic order, in representation, led many in the 1980s away from writing (as) real bodies or from writing or trusting experiential pleasure. A politics of experience, equated by some theorists with 1970s activist feminism, which in the United States often grew out of consciousness-raising groups in which women spoke of their own experiences, was called naive. In 1983 Jane Gallop wrote about such naiveté in an article about Irigaray.[55] In *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) Toril Moi discusses Irigaray's analysis of woman's lack of access to the pleasure of self-representation.[56] In *The Bonds of Love* (1988) Jessica Benjamin asserts, "Insofar as a woman's desire pulls her toward surrender and self-denial, she often chooses to curb it altogether" and, concerning self-representation, "the element of agency will not be restored to woman by aestheticizing her body—that has already been done in spades."[57] Much of 1980s feminist theory problematized woman's desire and experience to such a degree that beauty could easily be construed as complicity with man's desire, as was pleasure—if indeed pleasure (her own pleasure) was even possible.

If, as a site of visual pleasure, a woman is only a reflective Other who, as Phelan claims, "cannot be seen,"[58] then how is she to establish her own aesthetic/erotic pleasure? Chapkis offers a strategy, "defiant pride in challenging convention"; and her chapter "Toward a More Colorful Revolution" includes testimonials of pleasure.[59] A seventy-nine-year-old woman enjoys brightly colored contemporary fashions and believes that old women should "take pleasure in dressing up at our age." A black woman adopted by a white family—"my natural mother was a white Dutch woman impregnated by a man from Ghana"—relates her fear about encouraging the "stereotype of the hot Black woman who is good in bed" if she were to wear the very short skirts that she herself has made. Finally, she wears them "on the streets" so that she would not be like a "lot of women [who] do their utmost to be good rather than following their own fantasies." A longtime feminist who likes makeup and dressing theatrically ruminates about the talent, skill, time, and, "most

important of all, . . . self-confidence" necessary for "matching what you think you are inside with what you want to look like outside."[60] The women's stories are positive, hopeful, and inspiring, and Chapkis frames them within a picture of necessary social change: women must recognize and contest the sources and maintenance mechanisms of "our sense of inadequacy."[61] Individual boldness and defiance are significant, because they bolster one's self-respect; yet daring aesthetic/erotic self-creations, identified as or reduced to only individual acts, may be seen as dismissible eccentricities unless we organize our thinking to consider them as part of a larger restructuring of beauty performed, enjoyed, and labored on by a community of monster/beauties.

Individual pleasure is difficult to find. Several years ago a student who knew that I was thinking critically about pleasure gave me an exercise, a photocopied sheet titled "Find Out What Would Give You Pleasure," that she had found in an empty classroom. The addressee is advised to make lists of pleasures—current, onetime, and untried—that seem appealing. Some suggestions appear as activities for morning, afternoon, or evening. The bottom of the page reads, "You now have the possibility of waking up each morning with something to look forward to immediately and again later in the day and of finishing off the day with the knowledge you can have some pleasures in life if you'll take them. Make it a reality by giving yourself some joy at least three times a day." The exercise seems directed toward women because many of the activities bear female associations: crocheting, telephoning a friend, watering plants, buying black satin sheets, visiting. All the others are gender neutral.[62] Although pleasure in the prosaic matters is indeed the focus—riding river rapids is the only anomaly in this regard—it must be pursued, because pleasure is not habitual. Also, it can be made to seem like a chore: the two sections of the exercise are headed "Activity 19A" and "Activity 19B."

In a realm of eros worlds apart from Activities 19A and 19B, the marquis de Sade's novels, the relation between people and pleasure is no less hapless and disconnected. Sade's libertines are forever exclaiming that their sexual pleasure has never been so good. Such hyperbole suggests that pleasure is an ultimate experience; yet one can repeat it many times. His characters' self-observations epitomize what appear to be common feelings about pleasure: it comes and goes, it is extreme. That pleasure might be fairly constant in some people's lives seems

absurd, for wouldn't it then be boring, indicative of inertia or stagnation, or even delusional?

For someone reading a review of performance artist Penny Arcade's *Bad Reputation* in the May 1997 *New Art Examiner,* a response to the question "delusional?" could easily be "yes." Reviewer Ed Rubin compares Arcade to Piaf, displaying "suffering at its most artistic." Recountings of rapes (her own and other women's), manifesting "visceral anguish" by eating then vomiting twelve raw eggs, and exploring "society's tendency to blame the victim" leave Rubin "speechless" at one more "dazzling" piece by Arcade, whose career of almost three decades is marked by her "confessional," "vulnerable," "in-your-face" content.[63] *Bad Reputation,* like Sue Williams's ribald painted attacks on men's violence to women; Cindy Sherman's dismembered and truncated bodies, constructed of prostheses; and Kiki Smith's sculptural exposures of fleshly fragility, reports aesthetically on painful social and corporeal facts and receives praise for doing so.

In contrast, a major art magazine feature on Carolee Schneemann's 1996 retrospective exhibition—her career, like Arcade's, was then about thirty years long—is at best ambivalent about Schneemann's engagement in pleasure. "The Arrogance of Pleasure" is the title of Nancy Princenthal's October 1997 *Art in America* review. Schneemann is best known for work that features her own beautiful body as a site of pleasure. Indeed, in Princenthal's article, Schneemann is a "pioneer of freewheeling body art" and one of "several groundbreaking feminist artists" who dared to present herself as sexual subject and object, or in Schneemann's words, as "an image and an image-maker." Although Princenthal affirms Schneemann's importance within both contemporary and feminist art, she seems leery of the artist's most praiseworthy achievements; while recognizing "the merits of its still stunning boldness and joyousness, and above all its pride," its "shapeless, shameless celebration of pleasure, unqualified by irony, ambiguity, danger or past pain" seems to her "difficult" and "embarrassing."[64] Apparently, pleasure must have a point—perhaps orgasm, or a reward, such as a bowl of chocolate ice cream at the end of the day, for a task well done.

Princenthal suggests that Schneemann was ahead of her time in the mid-1960s, "creating performances and installations definitely not meant for the faint-hearted."[65] The reviewer treats erotic pleasure as if it were an aggressor; but it is "damage," as Schneemann asserted when I asked

about her response to the review—specifically the notion of pleasure as arrogance—that truly threatens human being.[66] Schneemann compassionately acknowledged the very real sources and consequences of social and psychic damage, and she said, too, that it is always women who are labeled shameless. In chapter 13, where I discuss shame and the erotics of damage, I also point out the difference between the shameless and the unashamed soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body. Neither indecent, impudent, immodest, nor brazen, Schneemann's pleasure is unashamed. It only appears arrogant in an art world that likes its pleasures cut by irony, ambiguity, danger, or past pain, that elevates an abject or grotesque aesthetic, so that an aesthetic of unadulterated pleasure in an aphroditean body is "too much" because it is more than many of us can imagine to be possible for ourselves.[67]

I am for an aimless pleasure, like a stroll in a familiar city, like swinging my arms for the hell of it. I am for shapeless joys, chocolate melting in my mouth, listening to a voice I love saying anything at all. These unforced moments shape soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body into monster/beauty. Leisured pleasure, given a chance to become habit, is a foundation for building the body of love.

When damage exceeds pleasure as a primary mode of existence, pleasure stigmatizes the body. Lack of aesthetic/erotic failure is the "arrogance" that marks the body of pleasure as dismissible. Pleasure permits and exudes self-validation, but, as Princenthal's reservations indicate, the body of pleasure, though powerful, cannot be granted outright authority.

The "GLAM Manifesto," authored by two undergraduate art students, is a paean to the authority of the body of pleasure built through aesthetic/erotic self-creation. Julia Steinmetz and Jessica Peterson, founders of the GLAM Dyke Rescue Unit, handed out their manifesto at the Style Conference held at Bowling Green State University in 1997. The wryly written, theoretically informed broadside gives serious practical advice about how to intrusively trouble the "gender, class, and sexual signifiers" of popular culture, fashion, and the capitalist system in order to construct oneself in a "sexy, positive and self-respectful way."[68] GLAM is work, is chosen, and is irreverent, self-conscious, and nonconforming, and it is meant for everyday use. GLAM queens, dykes, and princesses do not aspire to be spectacles by arranging appropriately mixed consumer items. Rather, they become spectacles by skillfully mis-

matching normative codes of commodities and behaviors. Steinmetz and Peterson display an implicit understanding of the feminist analysis of beauty's formulation as class-based in two senses. Beauties exist in a class by themselves; and beauty is closely related to wealth—a point made clear by Lakoff and Scherr in their discussion of *Vogue,* a society magazine that early in the twentieth century featured photographs of moneyed women but post-Depression began to show beauty as a "commodity in and of itself," as exemplified by the professional beauty who necessarily promoted a high-class aura and expensive clothing.[69] GLAM practitioners joyfully flaunt their deviance from *Vogue*'s prettily ordered "classy" picture by being "actively beautiful."[70]

This kind of agency plus the habit of leisure may rescue people from damage as well as from the unpleasurable labor, the tedious to punishing practices, that the feminist critique decries. Wolf is especially relentless as she details physical and political effects of anorexic starvation and tortures of cosmetic surgery. In a chapter titled "Violence," surgeons "invade" women's healthy bodies, "atrocities" flourish, and "mangling" and "mutilations" are perpetrated in the search for perfect breasts and faces.[71] Women's hunger, not their fat, is the latent content within self-punishing efforts to be thin. Female fat is the surface moral and aesthetic issue; but as Bordo asserts in *Unbearable Weight* in chapters on hunger, thinness, and anorexia, which were first drafted or published in the late 1980s, "Mythological, artistic, polemical, and scientific discourses from many cultures and eras certainly suggest the symbolic potency of female hunger as a cultural metaphor for unleashed female power and desire."[72] The "beauty" of diet labor is that it "reduces" women's appetite and energy for, in Bordo's words, "inner development and social achievement." Anxious and passive: this is the body/mind produced by eating restrictions, and it manifests what Bordo calls a "psychopathology as the crystallization of culture."[73] Or the effects of "beautifuckation."

Beautifuckation was the title of another of Janet's performances. Her props were grooming tools; she was naked beneath an open robe, and I remember her shaving her legs and clipping her pubic hair. This was sexy, funny, and horrifying all at once. Preceding publication of *Beauty Secrets,* with its envious yet severe comments about the celebratory media representation of male grooming rituals, Janet heroicized and condemned beauty maintenance as something that fucks over women. Her authoritative performance as a body of pleasure—plump, self-

loving, wonderfully aphrodisiac—leads me to think that the process of beautifuckation, of tending oneself into fuckability, helps to build the body of love. Janet was a substantial, very material body, but the beauty ideal, with its demand that women suppress their appetites for fulfillment outside of the pretty picture, produces desire for a nonbody. Beautifuckation procedures may entail getting rid of one's body—literally, through dieting or liposuction, and figuratively, through surgical alterations—in order to become "superior to the world."[74] But monster/beauty is in and of the world, taking up space, casting a shadow, dirtying the virtues of sexual difference in appearance, of age-appropriate behavior and costume, of the blonde bunny goddess whose deification I debunk in chapter 10. Monster/beauty is not an answer to compulsive behaviors, but it *is* an appetite for pleasure and an investment in pleasure.

While bodybuilders' grueling workouts may proceed from fat- and age-fearing self-punishment, from desire for strength and protective armor, they may at the same time be rooted in the pleasure of intense training and of changing the body's shapes and comportment. Bordo's keen insight is helpful in thinking about the contradictory nature of beautifuckation: "I view our bodies as sites of struggle, where we must *work* to keep our daily practices in the service of resistance to gender domination, not in the service of docility and gender normalization. This work requires, I believe, a determinedly skeptical attitude toward the routes of seeming liberation and pleasure offered by our culture."[75] Ready-made formulas such as dieting, exercising, eating five or more fruits and vegetables a day, balancing one's psyche through meditation, or alleviating emotional venom sound like parts of a sane routine. Or perhaps it's just a boring routine that desensitizes us to pleasure. *Monster/Beauty* speaks strongly in behalf of susceptibility to pleasure.

People's erotic ease in their bodies is a dream of mine that impels me to write poetically—and some might think utopically—about midlife bodybuilders, mothers and daughters, and older women and younger men. When I say in chapter 1 that bodybuilders Emilia Altomare, Christa Bauch, Diana Dennis, Laurie Fierstein, and Linda Wood-Hoyte manifest "paradise now," I wish to foster the delight that we are able to feel in ourselves, a delight that comes, in part, from our confidence to create ourselves as the "stuff of erotic fantasy" that Chapkis suggests is an important part of personal beauty.[76] I wish also to eradicate beauty agonies and ironies that revolve around the decorporealized "body" of the

beauty. My wish is unforced. It grows out of inclinations, intuitions, and feelings that, through analysis and articulation in critical and poetic language, appear to be strategic. I do not think of my motivation for writing in those terms; but if *Monster/Beauty* suggests to the reader that pleasure is a strategy for well-being, then I am for that plan of action.

In the Name of Monster/Beauty

I'm a standup nightmare, a blistering perfume
I'm offering salvation when I glide into your room
I'm a folktale told at midnight, a young girl's freshest dream
I'm Aphrodite's long-lost child and just like her I gleam

Hey! My name is Legion. Hey! My name is Truce
Hey! My name is Sleepless Nights when I am on the loose
In hearts that tried disowning me and eyes that tend to see
Visions like they're pictures to scan on your TV

Hey! My name is Tenderly. Hey! My name is Cute
I am full of flesh and hair and plenty queer, to boot
I love chocolate, I love sun, I'm beauty and the beast
I'm an invitation to your own erotic feast

NOTES

1. Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) provides a rich ground for thinking about the pursuit of one's own beauty as a way to achieve self-love. When she argues that "the very symmetry of beauty . . . leads us to, or somehow assists us in discovering, the symmetry that eventually comes into place in the realm of justice" (97), and that "Beauty seems to place requirements on us for attending to the aliveness . . . of our world, and for entering into its protection" (90), I begin to think that the self-love discovered through our own aesthetic/erotic self-creation is a kind of justice toward ourselves, a kind of aliveness that engenders the desire to care for—protect—our own and others' well-being.
2. Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 95.
3. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 9.
4. Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 15.

5. Ibid., 14–15.
6. Elizabeth Hayt, "Pretty Poison," *Vogue*, February 1998, 160. Hayt explains that "Botox, the latest craze among cosmetic dermatologists and plastic surgeons, does, indeed, come from Botulinum Toxin Type A, a neuromuscular blocking agent that, when ingested in large doses, causes food poisoning, leading to complete paralysis, respiratory failure, and death. . . . Right now, . . . tens of thousands of Americans are receiving Botox injections to smooth facial lines." She also calls Botox "a fin de siècle miracle against aging."
7. Martha Rosler, *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, 40 min., Art Metropole, Toronto, 1977, videocassette.
8. E-mail, August 24, 1997. The writer wishes to remain anonymous.
9. Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 3.
10. *Flawless skin* is one of many phrases in the beauty jargon of hope. Makeup artist Laura Mercier makes it clear that flawless skin is a constructed look: "My whole career I've been obsessed with trying to make the complexion flawless." Several products in her own makeup line create what she calls "the flawless finish." Mercier is quoted in Amy Astley, "Artistic License," *Vogue*, February 1998, 238.
11. In an article on Ossie Clark, "*the* swinging London designer" of the sixties, Hamish Bowles designates Clark a formative member of a "meritocracy of talent and looks" that included Mary Quant, Mick Jagger, Jean Shrimpton, David Bailey, the Beatles, and Richard Lester. See "Ossie Clark, 1942–1996," *Vogue*, November 1996, 142.
12. Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets*, 6.
13. See Joanna Frueh, "Visible Difference: Women Artists and Aging," in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 264–88, and "Polymorphous Perversities: Female Pleasures and the Postmenopausal Artist," in *Erotic Faculties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 81–112.
14. In "Ghettos of Obscurity: Individual Sovereignty and the Struggle for Recognition in Female Bodybuilding," in *Picturing the Modern Amazon*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Laurie Fierstein, and Judith Stein (New York: Rizzoli, 2000), 72–85, Leslie Heywood thinks both positively and critically about women's corporeal sovereignty in relation to female bodybuilding.
15. For pros and cons on the personal in scholarship, see "Forum," a series of twenty-six statements, in *PMLA* 3, no. 5 (October 1996): 1146–69.
16. Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984), 37, 38 (earlier version published as "Poems Are Not Luxuries," *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Woman's Culture*, no. 3 [1977]: 8).
17. Ibid., 38.
18. I hope that I'm contributing to Susan Gubar's "more mirthful lexicons[—] . . . delicious linguistic practices . . . that . . . can heal feminist discourse" of its "debilitating rhetorics of critical election, abjection, and obscurantism." See Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (summer 1998): 902.

19. Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), discusses beauty as an issue of race and class from historical and political perspectives. As is true of the authors more focused on beauty per se, Rooks is concerned with women's self-representation and -definition and their fears of physical imperfection. Nancy Etcoff's position in *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) goes against the grain of feminists' assertions that beauty is a myth and a cultural construct. She argues that human beings' beauty is a biological adaptation, a "core reality" (233).
20. Una Stannard, "The Mask of Beauty," in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 187–203; Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1970), 33–38, 55–63, 259–62; and Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1970), 171–75.
21. A recent issue of *She*, an Irish fashion magazine, includes a feature on women who "are flaunting their facial hair." Four women, photographed by Trish Morrissey, reveal their facial hair traumas and reconciliations. See Sophie Davies, "The Gender Agenda," *She*, February 1998, 41–44.
22. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 201–8.
23. Lakoff and Scherr, *Face Value*, 3, 12.
24. Pacteau, *Symptom of Beauty*, 15, 19.
25. In *Hair Raising* Rooks discusses turn-of-the-century beauty advertisements that "relied heavily on 'before' and 'after' photographs that promised to change African American women from beasts into close approximations of white women, or beauties" (119). Rooks's discussion throughout *Hair Raising* implicitly conjures up the African American woman as a monster if she does not approximate whiteness with her hair texture.
26. Gail Vines, *Raging Hormones: Do They Rule Our Lives?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), challenges the notion that women are hormonal "monsters" whose biology needs to be medically controlled. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 154, explains that the anorexic syndrome manifests "deep fear of 'the Female,' with all its more nightmarish archetypal associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability." Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), considers, among other subjects, the monstrous mother. The *Alien* series, all Twentieth Century Fox films, comprises *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott), *Aliens* (1986, dir. James Cameron), *Alien*^{3} (1992, dir. David Fincher), and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997, dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet).
27. Pacteau, *Symptom of Beauty*, 14.
28. Mary Russo's "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53–73, is a classic feminist consideration of the female grotesque. Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), became the foundation for scholars' and artists' think-

ing and projects about abjection. See below, chapter 3, note 7, for documentation of Kristeva's influence. Much of the November 1997 *New Art Examiner* is devoted to the low-life aesthetic, which I discuss in chapter 13.

29. Lakoff and Scherr, *Face Value*, 9.
30. Wendy Chapkis, "Explicit Instruction: Talking Sex in the Classroom," in *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians, Teaching, Queer Subjects,* ed. Linda Garber (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.
31. Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets*, 6.
32. Roberta Seid, "Too 'Close to the Bone': The Historical Context for Women's Obsession with Slenderness," in *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders,* ed. Patricia Fallon, Melanie A. Katzman, and Susan C. Wooley (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 13.
33. Pacteau, *Symptom of Beauty,* 183–84.
34. Ibid., 186, 197. "Capital letters signify red highlights in the original text" (197).
35. Ibid., 12.
36. Ibid., 189, 91. Pacteau writes, "In an essay of 1979, examining the status of all the 'Lauras' of fifteenth-century poetry, Mario Pozzi has traced what may be called the 'evacuation' of the woman to the level of the poetic discourse itself" (26).
37. Ibid., 108.
38. Seid, "Too 'Close to the Bone,' " 13.
39. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 2, 290–91.
40. "Body of content" was a phrase used by bodybuilding philosopher Al Thomas in a conversation with me in May 1995.
41. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1989); Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
42. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 184.
43. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12, 32 (originally published as *La société du spectacle* [Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967]).
44. Ibid., 45.
45. Ibid., 15.
46. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 7. See Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).
47. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6.
48. Ibid., 11.
49. Ibid., 32.
50. Pacteau, *Symptom of Beauty,* 157, 158.
51. Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6, briefly discusses Western traditions that connect the monster with ideas of warning and showing.
52. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 291.
53. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies,* trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 190 (emphasis hers).

54. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 9.
55. Jane Gallop, "Quand nos lèvres s'écrivent: Irigaray's Body Politic," *Romanic Review* 74, no. 1 (January 1983): 77–78, 83.
56. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), 135.
57. Jessica Benjamin, "Woman's Desire," chap. 3 of *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 90, 124.
58. Phelan, *Unmarked*, 6.
59. Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets*, 174; see her chap. 5 (170–93).
60. Ibid., 180, 186, 189, 193.
61. Ibid., 174.
62. The other activities are trying caviar, gardening, bowling, reading in bed, putting up a shelf, browsing in a bookstore, roller-skating, riding river rapids, writing poetry, lingering over a newspaper, and reading mail.
63. Ed Rubin, "Penny Arcade," *New Art Examiner* 24, no. 8 (May 1997): 51.
64. Nancy Princenthal, "The Arrogance of Pleasure," *Art in America* 85, no. 10 (October 1997): 106, 108.
65. Ibid., 106.
66. I asked the question during an interview of Schneemann by David Levi Strauss at the Subject to Desire: Refiguring the Body conference, the State University of New York at New Paltz, November 8, 1997.
67. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 160–63, is insightful about woman being "too much" within a Western "gender/power axis."
68. Julia Steinmetz and Jessica Peterson, "GLAM Manifesto" (1997). Steinmetz and Peterson were students at Carleton College.
69. Lakoff and Scherr, *Face Value*, 80.
70. Steinmetz and Peterson use the phrase "actively beautiful" in "GLAM Manifesto."
71. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 238–39, 242–43.
72. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 116. On women, weight, hunger, and food restriction, see Joan Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) and *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating, and Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Laura Kipnis, "Life in the Fat Lane," in *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 93–121; and Susie Orbach, *Fat Is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide to Permanent Weight Loss* (New York: Berkley Books, 1972).
73. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 160. "Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture" is the subtitle of her chapter titled "Anorexia Nervosa."
74. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 22.
75. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 184.
76. Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets*, 7, admits that feminists "are beginning to suspect that while a genderless sisterhood may have made for wholesome family relations, it may not be the stuff of erotic fantasy."