

JUDY CHICAGO'S POWERPLAY AND THE IRONY OF MASCULINITY

BY JONATHAN D. KATZ

Judy Chicago had lousy timing when she first exhibited her monumental series *PowerPlay* in 1986. By this point, she could claim perhaps the most sustained and committed practice of an art of social protest in all of American art. Yet the series was greeted with something that was entirely new to Chicago's very public career: silence. As the artist herself noted in the second volume of her autobiography, following the opening of the *PowerPlay* (circa 1982-86) series at New York's ACA gallery, she was chagrined "to discover that there had been almost no sales at the gallery and, curiously, a near-total silence in terms of articles and reviews, the first time such a thing had ever happened to me."¹ For the creator of *The Dinner Party*, a work that catalyzed—and was catalyzed by—feminism, perhaps the dominant US social movement of its time, critical and popular silence was a foreign territory.² But in restoring Chicago's *PowerPlay* to the context of its creation and first exhibition in the 1980s, we can better understand not only why this work failed to produce its expected impact, but also follow its lead into a broader understanding of defining shifts in the profile and purpose of an art of social protest in the United States—shifts we now, with the arrogance of the present, wrongly assume to have always characterized a dissident American art.

PowerPlay, though more or less coterminous with Chicago's better-known *Birth Project*, represents an un-precedented departure in her work. Its most obvious difference, the emergence of men as the denoted subject (denoted, because all of Chicago's work connotatively address men as the necessary pole of a gendered binary) is wedded to another significant variation in her usual working method—many of the images have roots in Italian Renaissance painting. Chicago traveled to Italy for the first time in 1982, and extensively studied major works in Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples and Ravenna—an art lover's standard first trip to Italy itinerary. The emergence of *PowerPlay* was keyed to that Italian trip not only because the Italian Renaissance represented the first

time since classical antiquity that the male nude had reemerged as the dominant subject in Western art, but also, and perhaps of greater import, this reemergence thus at least temporarily spared the traditional female subject the allegorical, erotic and emotional weight it had largely been forced to bare solo throughout the long centuries of the Western tradition. In *PowerPlay*, men are not only vested with the allegorical import long the province of the female nude, they are equally made over into representative figures, for these paintings are never of specific men, but of masculinity as typology. Deploying variations on the Renaissance's heroically-scaled male nude, she began work on a series of over-life size paintings that would cast a critical eye on the construction of masculinity as a defensive posture, one conceived in order to mark out the obverse from what was taken as feminine, marking gender out as performative almost a decade before the early works of queer theory began to advance similar claims. For Chicago, the fact that men were born of, and in an indicative relationship to, the feminine was at the root of much male repressive violence.³ Thus in one fell swoop, Chicago inverted that familiar Biblical genealogy in which the female, Eve, was born of the male, of Adam's rib, and reconceived that relation of priority such that it was now masculinity born out of the feminine—literally and symbolically—and thus always haunted by the prospect of the feminine within it.

There is not better evidence of this than those works from *PowerPlay* that directly reference the feminine, as in *Trying to Kill the Woman Inside Him* or *Struggling with the Womanly Feelings in His Heart*. In working to blur any definitive outline between the male and female, on both a formal and ideological level, these paintings and their related drawings notably swim against the modernist elevation of form over content by making form and content one. In *PowerPlay*, the crook of a man's elbow can become a woman's breast, his hand metamorphoses into her head, his hands become hers. Everything is dynamic



TRYING TO KILL THE WOMAN INSIDE HIM, 1983
Prismacolor on paper, 26" x 19"

Curiously, despite the structural and thematic ambiguity that animates these works, they still fell flat when they were initially shown. The first half of the 1980s—when Chicago conceived and executed *PowerPlay*—would emerge as ground zero for a seismic shift in the profile of protest in the American art world, and she unwittingly got caught in the middle of a changing of the guard. What changed? In a word, it was the return of irony as the favored mode of political dissent in art. By virtue of its indirect, equivocal nature, irony proved increasingly more palatable as a means of resistance in the Reaganite 1980s. Remember that this was the time that engineered the advent of what both sides would call the culture wars, when a revolutionary social and political art and the most phobic vision of social change retailed by conservative politics were about to become sworn enemies, and anti-avant-garde antipathy would become deployed as an instrument of state.⁴

change, unstable distinctions, a constant flipping back and forth between opposing gendered signifiers so as to finally underscore their fundamental imbrication. Chicago furthers this conceptual and formal merging of male and female through the careful shading of boundary lines to minimize any sharp transitions or clear demarcations. In the prismacolor pencil 1983 *Trying to Kill the Woman Inside Him* legs, arms, bodies, breasts shuffle back and forth until the man and woman reveal yet a third figure, a woman in profile composed of the shadowed negative space between his legs. Chicago found she could even meld male and female through careful manipulation of simple outline drawing. In *It Hurt So Much It Made a Coward Out of Him* the elbows of a man grasping his head in anguish does double duty as pendulous breasts, turning a man into a woman and back with minimal sleight of hand. Even the title of the series cultivates ambiguity, for *PowerPlay* connotes both the definitive, brutal exercise of power and, at the same time, a performative, anxious relation to it.

In contrast, the 1970s, with its manifold social upheavals from feminism, to lesbian and gay liberation (and lesbian separatism) to incendiary protests over our invasions of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and our clandestine support of right-wing dictatorships in Latin America such as Pinochet's brutal rule in Chile, assured that irony could scarcely register among the manifold explosions of the decade. As yet unnoticed by social conservatives, the art world in the 1970s moved unchecked, blissfully unaware of any overlords save money and fame. It was hardly uniformly progressive—the conjunction of big money and high value commodities in a market economy mitigated against that—but it had also not yet become colonized by a tendency to recast non-conformity from a social or political term to a purely formal or aesthetic phenomenon. Most centrally for my purposes, until the early 1980s identity politics were in full swing and a host of newly audible voices opened the art world to differences in race, sexuality and gender. As a result, social protest as a form of art making was in no way unusual or remarkable, and

even big, powerful institutions tied to the establishment got into the act. Chicago first showed *The Dinner Party* at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Hans Haacke even got MoMA to agree to his 1970 installation *MoMA Poll*, in which he asked museum visitor to vote whether then NY Governor—and powerful MoMA Board member—Nelson Rockefeller’s refusal to denounce Nixon over the invasion of Vietnam would cause them not to vote for the Governor in his coming re-election. (Though by a two to one margin museum visitors said they would not vote for him, he was re-elected anyway, evidence that the split between the art loving public and mainstream politics was in evidence even then.) I doubt whether either work would have made it out of any curatorial committee in the land during the 1980s.

Whereas an art of social protest accurately echoed the tumultuous disturbances and dislocations of the 1970s, by the beginning of the 1980s, this newly conservative ethic sweeping the country fueled ever more vicious attacks on an art of aggressive dissent, culminating, in the late 80s, with Republican attempts to defund the National Endowment for the Arts and instrumentalize the posthumous Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition *The Perfect Moment* to go after any art that addressed social protest. Senator Jesse Helms’ rhetoric is indicative, as in this typically unnuanced bit of his Senate floor oratory: “It is an issue of soaking the taxpayer to fund the homosexual pornography of Robert Mapplethorpe, who died of AIDS while spending the last years of his life promoting homosexuality.”⁵



IT HURT SO MUCH IT MADE A COWARD OF HIM, 1983
Prismacolor and acrylic, 28.5" x 22.5"

As a result of these strong-arm tactics, the art of the 1980s moved increasingly towards forms of indirect resistance through sarcasm and a performative insincerity—the cultivation of an ironic mien. A quick review of other high watermarks for the deployment of irony in the art of the 20th Century reveals a similar advance at moments of rising conservative reaction, as evinced in the cultivation of Dada as the Third Reich consolidated power or the rise of that closeted post Abstract Expressionist generation of so called Neo-Dadaist—figures like John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns—amidst the excesses of the McCarthy era. This revalidation of a strategically deployed irony would adversely affect the reception of *PowerPlay*, and to a lesser extent, Chicago’s work as whole.

In contrast to much art, even feminist art, of the 1980s, *PowerPlay*, despite its careful cultivation of multiple forms of ambiguity, seemed almost embarrassingly earnest, declarative and filled with conviction. A new generation of feminist artists in the early 1980s, figures such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer, would instead prove more in synch with the times in their archly ironic appropriation of aspects of male dominance. Of course,

one of the dangers of irony is its resemblance to that which it opposes, and thus its potential for misreadings—and in fact, some early critics didn't at all register the feminist content of Sherman, Kruger and Holzer's work, reading it as more fundamentally concerned with the operations of meaning-making in general than any particular meanings made.⁶ Nonetheless, whatever their success or failure politically, a more ironic feminist art certainly caught the mood of the times. Judy Chicago, though only six years older than the oldest of the three seemed instead to be of a different generation and even today, her work is rarely addressed in the same context as theirs. It's just too different; hers is a protest art, a message art, with an emphasis on communicating directly to the viewer without need of an apprenticeship in the theoretical byways of contemporary practice: there is nothing that seems arch or ironic about it.

And yet Chicago's art was the necessary ground for this latter, ironic generation to work its charge. Without her feminist example, the ironic performances of Sherman or the underlined clichés of Kruger would have not have been visible as in some powerful way *other* to what they literally denoted, which is to say they would not have registered as ironic. Their irony is made visible qua irony in part against the presumption born of artists like Chicago, that femininity isn't a natural state, but a policed one. Had we not already "known" this to one extant or another, Sherman's careful catalog of feminine postures wouldn't have registered as dissident, but merely have been made an artifact of, and transparent to, her gender. In some sense then, irony is enabled by a larger, constantly shifting socio-historical perspective that allows us to understand that what we once believed to be merely "natural" is in fact not natural at all, but the product of changing historical forces. In this sense, irony is every bit as much an historical artifact—a product of its times—as Chicago's style of straight-out, confrontational protest art in the 1970s. But whereas the historical moment we now occupy,

and in some sense have since the eighties, routinely finds a 1970's style incitement to political collectivity (not least as accomplished in Chicago's work) to be mere illusion—a nostalgia ridden exercise in papering over our manifold distinctions in an endlessly lengthening list of our smaller and smaller differences—it can't supply any new model or alternative for collective action. In place of a once rock solid collective identification, be it feminist, queer, working class, whatever, we now wade in the swamp of small differences, our identities diffused, but still longing for that once coherent collectivity that made our sense of otherness at least useful, active and powerful. Our response to our own patent nostalgia for what we tell ourselves was a mistake in the first place is irony.

This tendency to favor the ironic as a means of dissent has thus proven enduring; even today, decades later, we continue to prefer our art of protest lightened with irony, with the seductive prospect that whatever is meant is, in the final analysis, up to us to name. Forms of direct and un-ironic protest art necessarily seem now to carry the whiff of that earlier social moment—a markedly uncontemporary one consisting of faded images of pickets and rallies in black and white. These earlier images now speak in terms of adherence to a unifying creed, of mass marches, and unions and strikes, perhaps even, for older Americans, of clandestine Communist party meetings and an all-together too earnest sense of rectitude. By contrast, we postmoderns feel more comfortable defying the collective than working within it. In our art, we cultivate an ironic take on power, seeking dominance but never using its terms. To forthrightly protest, to counter power with power, seems to make a categorical error, for it reinscribes a dynamic of dominance at precisely the place where it should be most challenged. Rather than figure power's game of musical chairs, in which the only thing that changes are the butts in the seats, not the seats themselves, we'd do better, we hold, to recast the representation of power under the sign of irony.

And the trope par excellence for the abandonment of a collective power politics is irony. Irony sidles up to domination, allowing you to address it while not talking to it, about it, or against it. As a consequence, irony is fundamentally geared to the individual not the collective—irony is what *I* read, what *I* see, not what we, as united front, want or believe. As a result of its spectral individualism, irony is seductive and narcissistic, a trope of seeming complicity: it offers the viewer the gratification not only of determining the final or “real” meaning of the artwork, but moreover of doing so in tacit sympathy with the artist. Irony invites us in, claims we’re special, gifted with unusual powers of discernment. How seductive, we think, to arrive at a sophisticated understanding that we’ve made fully our own, as opposed to the banality of reading a message, which anyone with even a rudimentary grasp of the alphabet can do! So flattered are we, that we forget that the work was not authored by us, but by another, one who truly deserves the name author, and we have just danced to a tune we didn’t call, nonetheless thinking the music our own.

Yet, protest as a social act is hardly dead in America, for all its rarity in our art. The art world may sniff at images born of committed resistance and find ideology representable only at the brink of parody, but as I write this the Occupy Protest has spilled thousands onto streets, parks and plazas from one coast to the other, major state battles are being fought over immigration and same sex marriage, as warmongers, anti-choice zealots, and Tea Party extremists threaten the meager social gains of the last few years. That there is a profound disconnect between our culture of protest and the suave unflappability of our art world is obvious, but of course it’s hardly new: even as the decade of protest art dawned, Andy Warhol was producing his now famous *Flower Paintings* as the dead from the Kent State Massacre on May 4, 1970 were being buried. But this disconnect has grown over the intervening years to the point that my college-age students view Chicago’s

work today as if they were seeing the artifacts of an older, more powerful civilization, one that perhaps knew itself better—or was at least more honest about what it knew—and had as a result canons of representation for showing what we can only indicate through meaningful, sidelong glances.

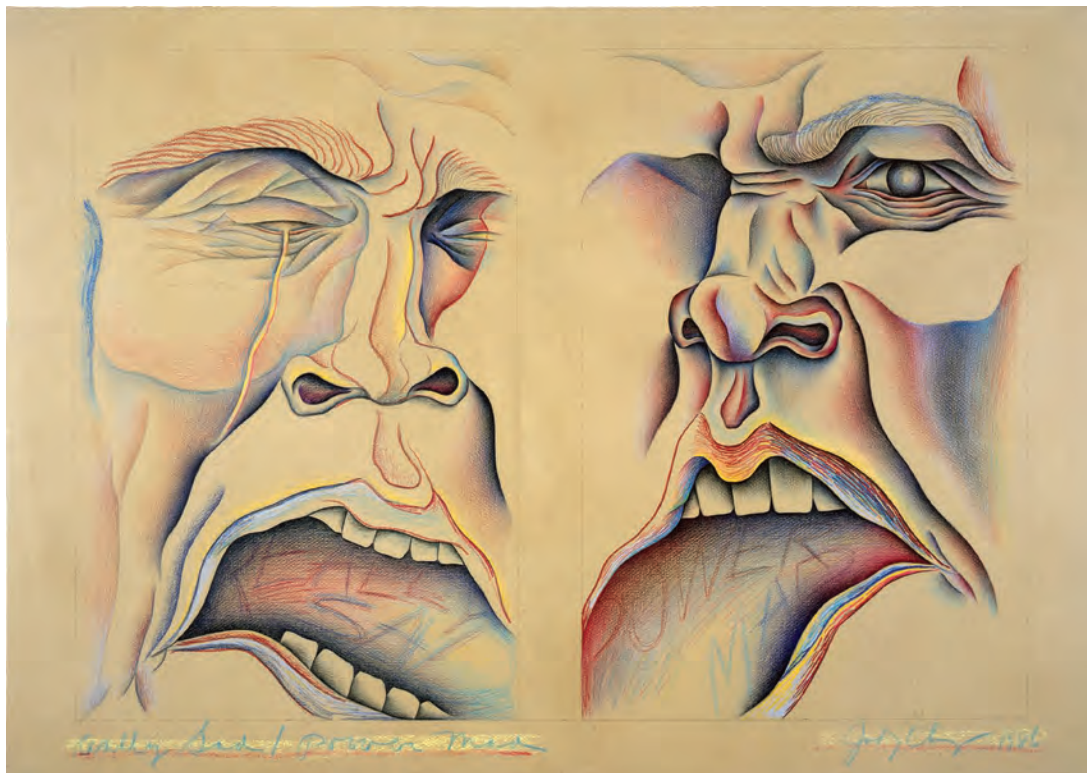
The fact remains that feminism as a social movement wasn’t born of irony, nor propelled by it. Fueled instead by anger, it was a mass pressure group akin to earlier resistance movements, a contest of opposing interest and creeds far less concerned with the dynamics of power than with who had it and how it was to be used. Nor was irony in any way a useful response to organizing for real and permanent social change, what we used to mean when we said, without irony, “the revolution.” But a few years prior to Chicago’s first development of what would become *PowerPlay*, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) went down in flames, scuttled by three states’ refusal to ratify what seemed to many a purely logical extension of constitutional protections to women but which quickly became embroiled in an early version of the dissimulating scare tactics now routinely employed by the radical right (in this instance, the ERA, it was said, would eliminate sex-segregated bathrooms). With the receding prospect of revolution, irony became the means through which we could feel powerful and autonomous—even when we knew we weren’t.

Irony does not, perhaps cannot, seed social change—the best it can do is confirm an internal dialog, but internal dialogs are, by dint of being internal, rarely productive of social change. Thus a gulf has sprung up between collective social movements like feminism and the art that addresses or thematizes these social movements. To protest male dominance directly and unambiguously has become so complicated and fraught that when the feminist collective *The Guerrilla Girls* have sought to do so, they don gorilla suits, obscuring their identities not

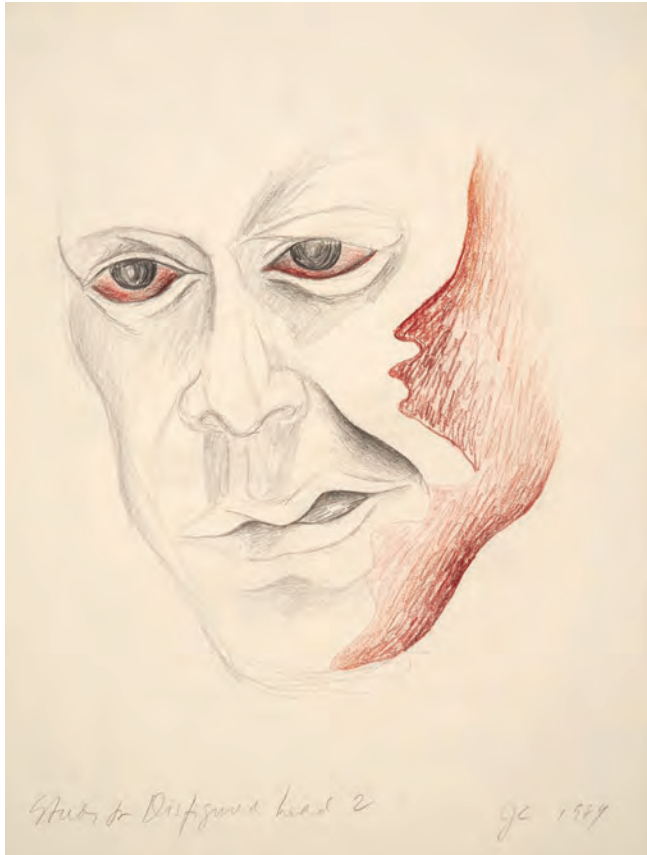
only lest their protest seem too nakedly self-interested—on behalf of their careers, rather than women in general—and thus too enamored of power for its own sake, but also because the act of protest itself is just so outré that anonymity protects them from any negative repercussions in the art world itself.

Thus, it is through the lens of irony that we can finally square Chicago's reputation as the outstanding feminist artist of our time with the fact that her mode of art making is distinctly out of favor in the art world today. Not only is it probable that more people have seen her *Dinner Party* than any other single work of feminist art, but of all the feminist artists at work, her oeuvre is the one most identified with the politics of social change, most resonant and moving as an account of what happens when women seek to figure their perceptions in collective

terms. Towards making sense of these diverging accounts of her art, *PowerPlay* is indicative, in part for being so exceptional. And the first thing to notice about it is how curiously misunderstood it has been. Here is a work that in fact places at least several forms of irony, including ambiguity and appropriation, at the very center of its project. It takes the transcendental Renaissance male nude, the one who lives outside of time and the social, and disfigures him, giving him the red eyes of a man crying (as in *Study for Disfigured Head 2*) or contorting his face with emotional extremes, as in *Really Sad/Power Mad* where these ostensibly polar emotions are instead expressively linked, such that only a rivulet of tears distinguishes sadness from fury. Man becomes suddenly men, and there is a world of difference between the two. *In the Shadow of the Handgun*, Chicago even appropriates perhaps the most defining of all Renaissance nudes, Michelangelo's



REALLY SAD/POWER MAD, 1986, Prismacolor and pastel, 27.5" x 39.25"



STUDY FOR DISFIGURED HEAD 2, 1984
Prismacolor and graphite, 12" x 9"

the pectoral muscles hangs slack and feminine—thereby reintroducing at least the shadow of the female into the scene. Tellingly, in her *Beyond the Flower* autobiography Chicago recalls wielding a borrowed handgun in order to frighten a persistent, masturbating peeping tom, and thus comes to recognize that the gun's power isn't necessarily always gendered male. In the final large-scale painting, the negative space bordering the "handgun's" eruption also coalesces into Chicago's signature upturned female face in profile, a face literally forged by the handgun's eruption into violence.

New, too, in these works is the use of oil paint (perhaps the defining Renaissance technique) over Chicago's more familiar airbrushed surface. Whereas a fully hand brushed and expressive surface would work to index the artist, to make her hand expressive, a striking aspect of *In the Shadow of the Handgun* is the way the expressive brush and the literally mechanical spray painting cancel each other out. This is significant because one of the defining difficulties with Chicago's work in the era of irony is its assumed declarative, authorial or expressive character, and thus her long engagement with airbrushing, and *Powerplay's* flirtation with oil, have not been given their due as a self-conscious attempt to make more complex and open-ended the question of the autographic touch. In *Crippled by the Need to Control/Blind Individuality*, numerous authors have noted the male figure riding the female and gripping her hair like a horse's bridle. But again, the work is much more ambiguous than has been generally credited, since the woman's profile is not only indistinguishable from the man's but he is moreover depicted as missing the upper half of his face. Is she, in short, a distinct and autonomous figure he's riding, or is she an aspect of the male, even his very eyes, and one, which he desperately seeks to master? She is opened mouthed, nearly horizontal and her breasts radiate generative potential like a beneficent hovering angel, while he is close mouthed, constrained and vertical. It



IN THE SHADOW OF THE HANDGUN 2, 1983
Prismacolor and acrylic on rag paper, 22" x 30"

famed *Creation* on the Sistine Ceiling (a work which, rather counter-intuitively, succeeds in eliminating the female from the act of creation) and turns that famously poised finger into a visual pun on the term handgun. But note how even here, the shadow of the arm betrays, beneath the figure's armpit, yet another elbow/breast—and one of



CRIPPLED BY THE NEED TO CONTROL/BLIND INDIVIDUALITY, 1983
Sprayed acrylic and oil on canvas, 108" x 72"

seems in no way clear, at least to me, why this can't in fact be a scene of a self divided. The abrasions evident on his bloodied riding leg amplify this reading, suggesting that his attempts at self-control are wounding. And the title, *Crippled by the Need to Control/Blind Individuality*, perhaps underscores that the necessary analog of mastery, whether mastery of the self or of another, is a profound loneliness, a failure to grasp the web of connections through which most of us realize ourselves, for identity is always relational; a self elaborated only through a relation to itself—one uninterested in the cold bath of otherness cannot leave the orbit of its own limitations and hence becomes blind.

So far, I've emphasized how factors more or less external to feminist politics help us understand why and how *PowerPlay* has been misunderstood, but there were also some notable shifts in the construction of feminism

itself that proved relevant. The second wave feminist movement, begun in the 1960s, succeeded in making the outlines of feminism as an ideology and a political program broadly familiar, if still misunderstood. In its wake, major legal and legislative victories like Title IX and *Roe vs Wade* permanently changed the face of this country. But despite its victories, by the mid 1980s a growing discomfort with second wave feminism was common in university circles, spurred in part by the publication in 1981 of the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a feminist anthology edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. The book's critique of second wave feminism centered on what it argued were universalizing or essentializing tropes of a feminine identity too indebted to the experience of middle-class white women, with correspondingly little to no attention to the intersectional identities of women of color, women for whom gender, race and/or ethnicity and class were inseparable categories. From this theoretical and social historical grounding, a new, third wave of feminism developed, offering a sustained critique of what it deemed to be too reductive categories of identity, beginning with the most basic ones—like man and woman. Instead this third wave posited that neither man nor woman was a useful category except in polemical terms, for the two terms are locked in a necessary mutuality, defined against the other, constituted as the sum of what the other is not.

By the last years of the 1980s, this third wave critique had spawned a corresponding recognition that gay and straight were similarly locked in an unyielding polarity—one that, paradoxically, like the terms man and woman, reinscribed and reinforced the dominance of the first term of the binary, i.e., "straight" and "man," every time its devalued polar opposite sought to challenge its secondary status. In short, under a third wave critique, queer theory, following feminism, came to realize that to rally under the label female or gay was to win the battle

but lose the war, for the binaries male/female or straight/gay left unchallenged the real oppression, which is the very idea that male and straightness can only achieve coherence against the devalued other, that we can only describe what we are by reference to what we are not.

I hope the final irony of *PowerPlay*'s critical inattention in an era of ironic resistance is now obvious. For Chicago, a product of second wave feminism, had in fact anticipated the defining critique of third wave feminism, namely that the easy binarizing of identification through reference to a devalued other will never escape the ominous contest, the ceaseless push and pull, that the two terms, locked in battle, reproduce again and again. Woman alone, as a term, an ideology or a politics, can't free us from male domination, for woman necessarily cites man every time it seeks to describe itself. The defining terms of *PowerPlay* therefore aren't simply "male," despite the obvious gendering of its protagonists, but rather how man, as a category, achieves coherence and significance only in and through its self-repression of qualities it has devalued as female. Thus Chicago's men are always caught at some point in the act of defending themselves against a threatening other that is, they know, actually themselves; they are caught in the act of freezing out one part of themselves as an act of self-preservation, only to find the process leaves them cold.

Thus we see in *PowerPlay* repeated evocations of the twinned identities that a masculine performance requires. From *Really Sad/Power Mad* to the punning *Woe/Man*, Chicago excavates a masculinity at war with itself and even the doubled titling echoes the terms of this conflict. With one eye staring out in an expression of preemptory challenge and the other eye tearing up, *Lavender Double Head/Hold Me #5* further places the words "hold me" in the figure's mouth. The color lavender, long associated with effeminacy and thus marked out as gay, shades the far outlines of the figure's face and predominates in his crying

side, but doesn't color the image as a whole. Chicago, again echoing the terms of what would be a *subsequent* queer theory, thereby implicates sexuality in any account of gender, such that fear of gayness become the border patrol on the gender divide, quick to police and prevent any crossing of that putative border through the merest insinuation that to do so would be read as gay. The result for the figure is the pure pathos of his subconscious plea. In the bronze relief *Woe/Man* a heavily muscled, bull-like neck, the fortified neck of macho performance, is tilted up in a gesture of openness and offering, but the figure's tight grimace and wary eyes suggest that this performance of vulnerability is not entirely easy nor comfortable. Chicago suggests the potential consequences of this vulnerability in making the rope-like muscles of the neck do double duty as labial folds.



LAVENDER DOUBLEHEAD/HOLD ME 5, 1986
Sprayed acrylic and oil on hand cast paper, 51" x 39.5" x 3"



WOE/MAN 1, 1986, Lost wax cast bronze bas-relief with multi-colored patinas, 48" x 36" x 5"

In appropriating a tradition of heroic masculinity in order to dissect and undercut a tradition of heroic masculinity, Chicago thus makes irony her handmaiden, the very irony that was, at the time these works were first shown, increasingly in evidence as a means of resistance across the art world at large. Why then was *PowerPlay* not viewed as a prime exemplar of this newly ironic critical tradition, as opposed to the outlier it has since become? I think it's because a third wave, newly deconstructive feminism was wary of any attribution of gender coding as the property of one or the other biological sex. Following the anti-essentializing thrust of this theory of gender performance to its logical conclusion, "maleness" and "femaleness" as gender performances, and a male body and a female body, as biological entities, bear, it was said, no necessary relationship. A female could just as well engage the performance of masculinity as any man, with similar symptoms and consequences. Judy Chicago, by her own admission in her autobiographies, did just that, early on adopting a masculine swagger and tough guy persona to, as a female, make herself visible as a serious artist and run with the boys. Thus, the implication in *PowerPlay* that masculine performance is a male problem swims against

this anti-essentializing tide. But here Chicago, having lived this theoretical perspective, offers a useful corrective or middle path. Masculinity, as Chicago knows well, may be a gender performance adopted by any biological sex, but only those disinherited by masculinity—women, children, queers, the effeminate of all genders—understand the performance of masculinity as just that, a performance. And understanding masculinity as a performance entails understanding the difference between a performance and a natural attribute. Attributes are permanent, but performances, as any performer knows, constantly change. I put my hope in performers.

1 Judy Chicago, *Beyond the Flower*: 198

2 In 1979, the year the Dinner Party premiered in San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, the Equal Right Amendment failed ratification by three states.

3 This was also a perspective common to lesbian separatism of the 1970s—see for example the December, 1973 issue of *Cowrie*, which plays with the terms woman, women and womban, and wombmén to drive home a similar claim.

4 In fact, in December of 1981, Nancy Reagan could be on the cover of Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine, having granted that very queer publication her first in-depth interview since occupying the White House. She shared that issue's pages with photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe out on the town, homoerotic photographs by George Platt Lynes, Herbert List and an illustrated interview with Prince, the singer provocatively posed as an upright, full-length odalisque in the shower, dressed only in a low cut thong with his pubic hair curling over and a crucifix dominating the wall behind him. Prince's pubic hair and a crucifix, Nancy Reagan and Robert Mapplethorpe, all in Andy Warhol's magazine—the battle lines for the coming culture wars had clearly not yet been definitively drawn. See *Interview*, vol. 11, no. 12 (December 1981).

5 Senate Congressional Record, 101st Congress, 1st session, vol. 135, issue no 127, Proceedings of September 28, 1989.

6 See Hal Foster, *Subversive Signs*, in *Recordings: Art, Spectacle and Cultural Politics*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985)