

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix

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Defense committee: Johanna Householder, Catherine Black, Bentley Jarvis, Jess Dobkin



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Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix

Exploring Women's Sexual Agency through Collaborative Media Artworks

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Abstract

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix

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Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media & Design, OCAD University

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is an interactive media art installation, which forms part of a larger series of artworks entitled *Euphoric Femme*. Inspired by sex-positive feminism and sacred sexuality, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is created in collaboration with a network of women who are reinventing sexual expression. Using a social media platform, collaborators create autoerotic video and sound recordings as source content for the installation. These images and sounds are placed in a database that forms the technical and conceptual basis for the artwork.

In the installation, audience members use a hand held disk interface to remix the women's recordings into the imagery that comprises the artwork. The video material is remixed into kaleidoscopic forms projected overhead. The sounds are similarly processed and reverberatingly fill the space. *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is an aniconic exploration in mediating inner erotic states. It aspires to politicize women's sexual agency.

Acknowledgements

*in dedication to my mother Teresinha
for her unrelenting personal strength and unconditional love*

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On a final note, I'd like to say that I don't experience collaboration as a process limited to those directly involved in a project, but through a dynamic interconnectedness we share on a daily basis. There were so many fleeting bits of information and inspirational moments I shared with many people, including those within the sex-positive, sacred sex, academic and art communities that shaped this project and cannot be captured in words. A warm thanks to all of you!

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Preface

Since I became aware of my sexuality as a teen, I have been troubled by popular representations of women's desires, which are actually rooted in ideas of sexual repression. I have come to the conclusion that the images that proliferate throughout the mass media in the form of "empowered" but still sexualized women are not the answer to the implicit notion that sex is shameful.

I was born and raised in a devout Catholic family shortly before the rise of third wave feminism¹ in the 1990s. While still focusing on improving the economic and social status of women, third wave feminism also places a strong emphasis on individual empowerment over more organized political activism². Third wave feminism also makes central the celebration of the diversity of women and their experiences within an ever-complex contemporary world. Third wave's exploration of sexual "options" within this tenant of diversity and the accompanying freedom to express oneself sexually in self-determined ways has been an inspiration to me.

Considering the contradictory attitudes I was exposed to, ranging from the repression of women's sexuality (by the media, the church and family) to the self-empowering promises of the sexual liberation revolution of second wave feminism, the third wave's attention to sexual self-expression became important to me. I

¹ Rockler-Gladen, Naomi. "Third Wave Feminism; Personal Empowerment Dominates This Feminist Philosophy." Suite 101. <http://www.suite101.com/content/third-wave-feminism-a20276>. (accessed April 2, 2011).

² *ibid.*

remember the very moment at age seventeen, when I made a conscious and firm choice to lead my life with an attitude of sexual freedom. Almost thirty years later, I remain firmly entrenched in the battle for liberation. I consider myself to be a sex-positive feminist³ exploring creative, subversive and critical strategies for the progress of women's sexual agency.

Sex-positivity came into feminist consciousness during the debates of the 1980s and '90s, at a time when the term "sex-positive" was used to define oneself in opposition to the anti-pornography feminists. The term sex-positive also became interchangeable with "pro-sex" to include the idea that sexual expression can be not only transgressive, but also progressive. For example, I believe feminist pornography, directed and acted by women and people of diverse racial and sexual orientations, has the potential to explore women's desires and pleasures beyond the superficial tropes of male-centred porn.

Specifically I am interested in exploring women's desires and pleasures from as diverse a perspective as possible. My personal engagement with sex-positive feminism involves a collective sexual liberation rooted in personal sexual exploration. I seek the formation of sexual agency through creative and critical innovation, and I hope to facilitate sex-positive dialogue and collaborative media artworks through a social media platform.

³ Silverberg, Cory. "What Does Sex Positive Mean?." *About*.
http://sexuality.about.com/od/sexualhealthqanda/f/sex_positive.htm. (accessed March 22, 2011).

Chapter 01: Introduction

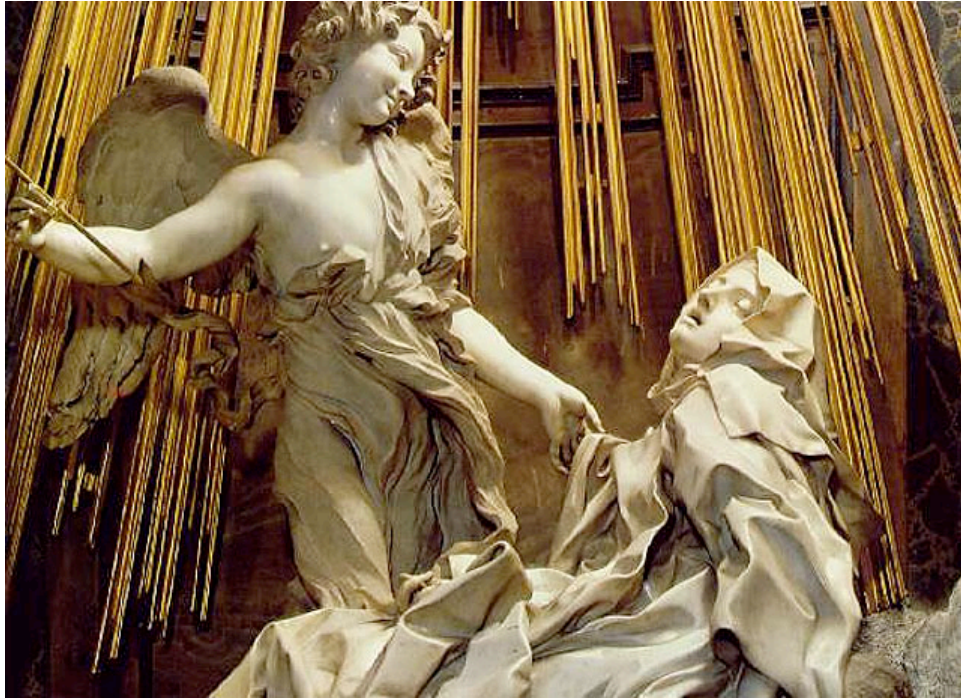


Figure 1: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Marble, Santa Maria Della Vittoria, Rome, 1652.

On a trip to Rome in my early twenties, while visiting *Santa Maria Della Vittoria* church, I encountered the iconic *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (fig. 1) by Giovanni Bernini⁴. I was inspired by what I perceived as an intertwining of divine bliss with orgasmic pleasure in Bernini's Baroque statue. Here was an artwork that positioned women as sexual beings within the context of Catholicism - a religious system with a troubled history around issues of sex and spirit and various forms of

⁴ Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) was a master sculptor of the seventeenth century in Rome. He is well known for his sculptures imbued with movement and intense emotion.

sexual taboo⁵. It wasn't only the sculpture's challenge to sexual repression, nor its material genius that mesmerized me, but the intangible magic it exuded. Over twenty years later, its power melds with my growing interest in sacred sexuality.⁶ While I don't practice a particular form of sex magic, I am inspired by its potential to heal the schisms between sex and spirit and for its contributions to sexual liberation.⁷

Ecstasy of Saint Teresa

Saint Teresa of Avila⁸, the woman depicted in Bernini's sculpture, kept a journal of her religious ecstatic experiences, which can also be interpreted as erotic. She describes one of her elated moments at an encounter with a fiery celestial being:

I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I

⁵ Sexual taboos of the Roman Catholic Church include those related to sex before marriage, homosexual acts, and adultery. Speaking from experience, Catholic cultures shaped by Virgin Mary worship, such as on the island of Terciera, Azores where my parents were born, especially hold women's premarital sex as taboo.

⁶ Hugh Urban clarifies that "sacred sexuality," or "sex magic," is an umbrella term for contemporary Western appropriations of traditional Asian Tantrisms. He points out that Tantra is not "a singular, monolithic, or neatly defined entity." Tantrisms are varied and complex Hindu and Buddhist texts, sects and rituals from India, China, Tibet and Japan, beginning in the forth century. Urban explains that sacred sex is greatly distorted from traditional Tantrisms. (81-83)

⁷ Urban explains that since the late Victorian age sacred sex has served as a form of "exhilarating freedom from the oppressive prudery of nineteenth-century Christian society." Tantra was a "wonderfully "other" form of spirituality – a kind of empty mirror onto which [one] could project their own most intense anxieties, fears, hopes, and forbidden desires." Our contemporary fascination with sacred sex, in its now commodified form, continues to reap a similar appeal. (83)

⁸ Saint Teresa of Avila (1515 - 1582) was a Carmelite nun and a mystic who was critically ill. In her sickness, and through the use of the devotional book "Tercer Abecedario Espiritual" (Francisco de Osuna, 1527), she experienced periods of religious ecstasy.

*could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one.*⁹

In the sculpture, Avila's lips are parted and her head is tilted back. Her entire habit is rippled to express her corporeal and soulful undulations.

Further research into Bernini's personal life reveals that he had an interest in depicting sexual mood. A love affair with a woman named Costanza Bonarelli inspired him to sculpt her bust in an unusual and lovely disheveled state.¹⁰ It is not difficult to imagine that he also infused the sculpture of Saint Teresa with a similar erotic disposition.

I had been making politically and figuratively overt artworks that were critical of Catholicism's effects on women's social and sexual identities. They revealed the artifice in the construction of "woman," and questioned whether or not the essence of *real women* exists in those iconographic representations. I was excited by Bernini's captivating sculpture because it *connected* ideas I had been exploring in previous artworks; I became interested in transcending representation. I wanted to go beyond subverting sexual taboo, to illuminate the inner euphoria of sexual pleasure.

⁹ Avila, *St. Teresa of. The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*. New York: Cosimo, 2006; pg. 226.

¹⁰ In explaining this unusual and erotic depiction of Costanza, Lubow says "in those sculptures, [women] were typically portrayed in elaborate hairdos and rich dresses - not depicted informally, as Bernini had Costanza, clad in a skimpy chemise with her hair unstyled." Lubow goes on to describe how Bernini made her "radiantly alive," as if breathing and moving through a little show of her breast and "her mouth slightly open and her head turned." (3)

Consequently, my artwork has shifted away from iconographic depictions of women, to non-figurative and immersive media art explorations of erotic ecstasy. As I began the research for this creative project, I realized that the work raised issues around sexual objectification. Expressing women's sexual pleasure in a public exhibition might pose challenges that I investigate in this paper through aesthetic, technological, spiritual and feminist perspectives.

Sexual Objectification

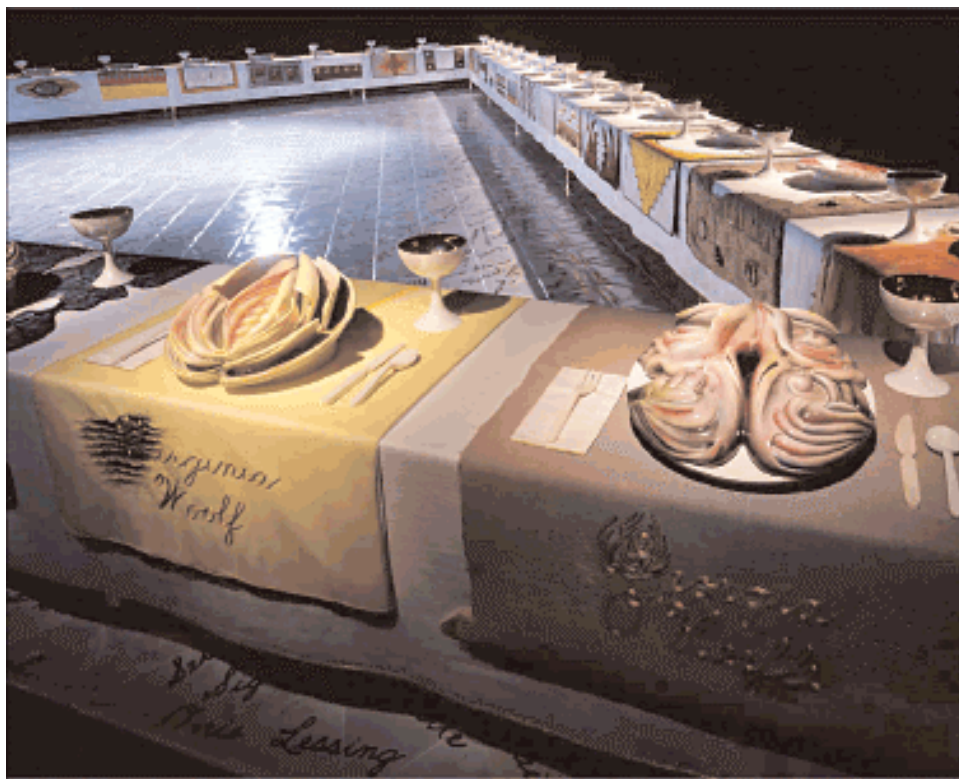


Figure 2: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*. multi-media installation, 1974-1979.

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (fig. 2) is an artwork and the site of prevailing tropes of sexual objectification, despite it being a complex work about women's agency. It was dubbed "female genitalia on plates" in the media, despite Chicago's explanation that she was engaging in:

an image-making whose focus was both an alternative female identity and also the assertion of an oppositional set of values. These values were oppositional in the sense that they challenged many prevailing ideas as to what art was to be about (female rather than male experience); how it was to be made (in an empowering, cooperative method rather than a competitive, individualistic mode); and what materials were to be employed in creating it (any that seemed appropriate, irrespective of what socially constructed gender associations particular media might be perceived to have).¹¹

Not only did women's self-represented iconography lack visibility in the art world (and society at large), but once it appeared through Chicago's creative and political efforts, it was quickly sensationalized and reduced to a sexual object. The story of *The Dinner Party* not only demonstrates the problem with women's iconography in general, but also stresses an urgent need for transformed self-representations.

Self-representation continues to be a creative and political challenge, not only for artists and feminists like Chicago, but for multitudes of women. Regardless of whether she identifies as a post-feminist reaping the benefits of sexual liberation, or is a third wave feminist explicitly active in sexual politics, sexual objectification continues to pose a threat to women's self-representation, especially in context

¹¹ Chicago, Judy, and Edward Lucie-Smith. *Women and Art; Contested Territory*. New York: Watson-Guptill, 1999; pg. 17.

of sexual expression. In criticizing a contemporary mainstream form of what many (especially younger) women are calling sex-positivity, Ariel Levy distinguishes between what she calls "raunch culture" and sexual liberation. She describes a wide spread American trend, whereby women imitate strippers and porn stars through body language and fashion apparel. She highlights the rise of pole dancing as exercise, "butt cleavage," and tiny t-shirts embellished with the Playboy bunny logo. In reference to "Girls Gone Wild," a media phenomena of the late '90s, whereby film crews scout wild parties at spring break, vacation resorts and nightclubs to entice young women to strip and kiss each other in public and for the camera, Levy states the concern that this form of expression is confused with a new feminism, rather than being seen as the same sexual objectification that feminism has battled for decades.¹² Levy asserts that:

*women's liberation and empowerment are terms feminists started using to talk about casting off the limitations imposed upon women and demanding equality. We have perverted these words. The freedom to be sexually provocative or promiscuous is not enough freedom; it is not the only 'women's issue' worth paying attention to. And we are not even free in the sexual arena. We have simply adopted a new norm, a new role to play: lusty, busty exhibitionist. There are other choices. If we are really going to be sexually liberated, we need to make room for a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire. We need to allow ourselves the freedom to figure out what we internally want from sex instead of mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy. That would be liberation.*¹³

¹² Levy, Ariel. *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press, 2005; pg. 81.

¹³ Levy, Ariel. *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press, 2005; pg. 200.

I agree with Levy. Considering that this form of sexual expression is anchored to male desire, to the exclusion of a potentially rich development of women's desire, one cannot say that women have fully achieved sexual liberation. For this reason, I engage in creative and collective explorations of women's sexual self-representation in ways that challenge these desires at the source. I initiate a series of artworks rooted in the powers of masturbatory fantasy, whereby women can explore sexual pleasure in seclusion. This is part of a process, wherein women first explore sexual pleasure privately to later reassert desire in a social context. My goal is to be part of women's sexual liberation; to see myself and other women determine our own sexual agency, without being reduced to sexual objects.

Context of the Artwork and Research Questions

The outcome of my thesis is the creation of an interactive media artwork, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*. It forms part of a larger series of artworks entitled *Euphoric Femme*. These artworks are created through collaborative processes, founded in discourse and community building with a diverse a group of women. For this reason I embrace social media¹⁴ as a tool with a broad potential for social interaction, in order to collaboratively create artworks and to share related ideas and experiences.

¹⁴ In his online open source and collaborative book, Yochai Benkler refines the illusive concept of "social media" as "networked information economy," a complex "system of production, distribution, and consumption of information goods characterized by decentralized individual action." He says these are "carried out through widely distributed, nonmarket means that do not depend on market strategies" and that non-market information and cultural production play alongside market and property production. (ch. 1)

At this point it is relevant to reveal that, although I connect with third wave's focus on individual self-empowerment through social media formats such as blogging, I also employ a second wave form of consciousness-raising strategy to develop "a larger analysis of the relationship between individual and collective experience, culminating in theory and political action."¹⁵ I extend the outcomes to include, and be focused on, artworks. My consciousness-raising processes take shape through a network of women over social media sites. They are aimed at releasing internalized oppressive beliefs about desire and pleasure through critical discourse, and the reinvention of sexual expression through masturbatory acts that culminate in media artworks.

In the production of *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*, I invite a variety of women to create personal autoerotic video and audio recordings as the source content for the installation. The women involved in the project videotape and record their sounds while masturbating. Later, they transmit their personal recordings to me using a variety of channels such as email and FTP. A real time interactive program transforms their sounds and images into aniconic imagery during exhibition. Audience members engage with the artwork by lying down, and using a hand-held interface device they remix the autoerotic materials into reverberant sounds that fill the room and a moving kaleidoscopic video that is projected onto the ceiling.

¹⁵ Henry, Astrid. *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004; pg. 44.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is positioned within the scope of feminist politics of self-representation and spiritual theories of subjectivity and well-being. It is dedicated to facilitating sexual agency through “the personal is political” consciousness-raising processes. In doing so this project explores relationships and contradictions between self-representation, subjectivity and sexual objectification. It also explores the role of artist, creative collaborators and audience participants as producers of meaning, as well as context. The following are research questions that have arisen in tandem with the creation of *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*:

1. What new art forms can be developed to express the elated mysteries of erotic pleasure and wholeness of being?
2. In what ways can women's sexual pleasure be illuminated while challenging sexual objectification?
3. How can sexual agency be facilitated through creative collaboration within a social media context?
4. How does interaction with women's autoerotic materials affect audience members?

The Women

I titled this project “Euphoric Femme.” “Euphoric” suggests the heightened sensual and mystical state experienced during erotic engagement, while “Femme” (the French word for woman) is chosen for its alliterative resonance with the word “Euphoric.” I intend for “Femme,” to align with popular contemporary

associations to feminine lesbian identity¹⁶ and to include anyone who identifies as a woman. Therefore, "Euphoric Femme" is both an expression of women's sexual ecstasy and a declaration of women's sexual agency.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is a work within a larger series of *Euphoric Femme* artworks. Women are involved in different aspects of research and creation in relation to the greater project agenda. First, I situate myself as the (female) artist directing these projects. I come with a history of cultural and political struggle that springs from tensions between my Azorean¹⁷ Catholic upbringing and my newer position as a Canadian immigrant¹⁸. As a teenager, I perceived Toronto as a sexually liberating city, in comparison to my home life and aspects of my cultural heritage, which held rigid double standards with respect to men and women's sexual lives. My father repeatedly beat me in an attempt to control and deny my sexual agency, as he feared I was sexually active and about to lose my virginity. I refused to accept the frequent violent messages that sex was taboo, knowing that I, as a woman, had erotic desires and a right to sexual pleasure before marriage. As I was beaten, I would shout the words "I have sexual desires just as any man!" and "I have the right to sex as any man!" I left home by the time I was nineteen. I believe my resistance and conviction were strengths and attitudes I cultivated from televised expressions of sexually

¹⁶ "Femme" and "butch" are descriptions of masculine and feminine lesbian traits, such as behavior, style, expression, self-perception. These have many possible interpretations and are not necessarily connected to heteronormative female to male relationship roles. (Inness)

¹⁷ The Azores is a group of nine volcanic islands in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and an autonomous region of Portugal.

¹⁸ I arrived in Canada at three years of age.

empowered women, and observing my girl friends' families' more liberal attitudes to dating. I present this personal experience publicly (without rancor for I have forgiven my father) to situate myself as a feminist with a vested self-interest in women's sexual liberation and sexual agency. I believe an important part of the progress toward sexual freedom is the disclosure of oppressive or negative forces.

It was during my first Pride parade¹⁹ in the early 1990s that I consciously connected with sexual liberation in the broadest sense. Despite my being heterosexual (I currently identify as predominantly heterosexual), the queer demonstrations of Pride resonated with me through the bodies and energies of diverse people engaged in the celebration of their sexualities and in defiance of sexual oppression.

The people who engaged in the creative collaboration and theoretical development of *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* are people who self-identify as women. Although the project is open to biologically born men, the collaborators were female and intersexual, ranging in age from early twenties to late forties, and who identify as lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual and transsexual. They are Native American, African American, Caucasian, Portuguese, Bangladeshi, and Malaysian and live in Canada, the United States and Australia. Most have access to a computer and Internet and are active through social media. A few collaborators are local women who are not comfortable with computer technology, are distrusting of or disinterested in social media and are not heavy

¹⁹ Pride parades celebrate sexual diversity and are also a platform to lobby for GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer) rights and to protest injustices. (Rapp)

users of common technologies such of digital cameras and sound recorders. In order not to limit the project to women who are technologically connected, I also meet and worked with a few women in the city of Toronto where I reside. The women who form the *Euphoric Femme* online community through its Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and blog sites²⁰, are culturally, racially, sexually, spiritually, and globally situated. On Facebook (the most active project site) they are from as far away as the United States, Poland, Egypt, Turkey, England, Argentina, India, Brazil and Portugal.²¹

Chapter 02: Subjectivity

Riding Subjectivity and Objectification

"From there, after six days and seven nights, you arrive at Zobeide, the white city, well exposed to the moon, with streets wound about themselves as in a skein. They tell this tale of its foundation: men of various nations had an identical dream. They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked. They dreamed of pursuing her. As they twisted and turned, each of them lost her. After the dream, they set out in search of that city; they never found it, but they found one another; they decided to build a city like the one in the dream. In laying out the streets, each followed the course of his pursuit; at the spot where they had lost the fugitive's trail, they arranged spaces and walls differently from the dream, so she would be unable to escape again.

²⁰ These are the *Euphoric Femme* social media sites: euphoricfemme.com, facebook.com/pages/Euphoric-Femme/138151099556774, twitter.com/#!/EuphoricFemme, youtube.com/user/euphoricfemme?feature=mhum.

²¹ A few of the Facebook members are men. I do not know if they identify as men or women, but am happy that this project is connecting with diverse people.

This was the city of Zobeide, where they settled, waiting for that scene to be repeated one night. None of them, asleep or awake, ever saw the woman again. The city's streets were streets where they went to work every day, with no link any more to the dreamed chase. Which, for that matter, had long been forgotten.

New men arrived from other lands, having had a dream like theirs, and in the city of Zobeide, they recognized something from the streets of the dream, and they changed the positions of arcades and stairways to resemble more closely the path of the pursued woman and so, at the spot where she had vanished, there would remain no avenue of escape.

These who had arrived first could not understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap."²²

In her book *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis uses this powerful story of the fictitious city of Zobeide, as a metaphor to initiate a discourse on how language and images (cinema) assume that woman's image is an object constructed of man's desire:

The city is a representation of woman; woman, the ground of that representation. In endless circularity (streets wound about themselves as in a skein"), the woman is at once the dream's object of desire and the reason for its objectification: the construction of the city. She is both the source of the drive to represent and its ultimate, unattainable goal. Thus the city, which is built to capture men's dream, finally only inscribes woman's absence."²³

De Lauretis explains that subjectivity is founded in the male subject, and formulated from the male imagination. In essence, this is a story that encapsulates man's desire to the exclusion of woman's desire – thus the exclusion

²² This is Teresa de Lauretis' slightly altered version of: Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. Translated by William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972; pg. 52. [de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984; pg. 12.]

²³ de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984; pg. 12-13.

of her entire being. My understanding of De Lauretis' interpretation of this story suggests that women can be present if women's desires are included in the construction of women's imagery.

But what are women's desires and how can women construct self-representations outside of men's desire? The story of the city of Zobeide reminds us of the urgent need for women to be active in, and in control of, their own representation.

In a contemporary social context, de Lauretis connects this story to women's place in language and cinema. She explains that women's position "is one of non-coherence; she finds herself only in a void of meaning, the empty space between signs – the place of women spectators in the cinema between the look of the camera and the image on the screen, a place not represented, not symbolized, and thus preempted to subject (or self) representation."²⁴

²⁴ *ibid.* pg. 8.



Figure 3: Jennifer Ringley, image from JenniCAM, 1999.

The story of Jennifer Ringley is a powerful example of how one woman challenged this position as the void between the look of the camera and the image on the screen. In a high-tech world where women can now own and interact through technology, the camera no longer belongs only to the cinematographer.

In 1996, Ringley began webcasting images of herself around the clock, in her dormitory through her website JenniCAM ([jennicam.org](http://www.jennicam.org)) (fig. 3). Viewers could experience her everyday mundane activities, such as eating, talking on the phone and reading. On occasion, Ringley appeared nude or engaged in sexual intercourse or masturbation, which quickly drove her voyeurship into the millions.

This is a story of a woman who is no longer the empty space between the camera and the screen – she fills the entire space in between as an actor exploring her own desires.²⁵ As Ringley engages in self-representation she constructs her own subjectivity. But her situation is complex and contradictory, as her subjectivity rides along side spectacle and voyeurism. Krissi Jimroglou, the author of the article, *A Camera with a View; JenniCAM, Visual Representation, and Cyborg Subjectivity*, explains this complicated situation:

*JenniCAM uses its own images to rewrite a new relationship between the camera, the photographer, and the viewer by announcing the status of Jenni as an object yet refuting and resisting the traditional representations of objectification. By investing the object with vision and a camera, the multiple subjects of JenniCAM inhabit a space of plurality and abundance. Never pinned to positions of either subject or object, Jenni snaps her own picture, oversees her own viewing.*²⁶

So the paradox is that in constructing self-representations women may not be able to escape objectification entirely. The JenniCAM phenomena is important because it demonstrates how a young woman can adapt contemporary technology to produce images and expressions of her self and her desires, while challenging traditional notions of objectification. As a female artist vested in facilitating women's sexual agency, I embrace contractions of subjectivity and

²⁵ In an interview with CNN, Jennifer Ringley explained that JenniCAM was a social experiment, like a "window to a virtual human zoo." She explains, "what you'll see is my life, exactly as it would be whether or not there were cameras watching." Ringley says "I keep JenniCAM alive not because I want or need to be watched, but because I simply don't mind being watched." (Voyeur Web Site JenniCam to Go Dark)

²⁶ Jimroglou, Krissi. "A Camera with a View: JenniCAM, Visual Representation, and Cyborg Subjectivity," *Information, Communication & Society* 2, no.4 (1999); pg. 444.

objectification in the creation of new self-representations and expressions of sexual being.

In exploring creative methods of self-representation I am interested in de Lauretis' idea of returning to feminist consciousness-raising strategies. This is a return to "the personal is political," through which Ringley's story can be perceived. De Lauretis asserts that the most effective solution for constructing women's imagery has to depart from mere deconstructions of patriarchal sign systems as in the example of the city of Zobeide. Her solution lies in theorizing a notion of experience, which she establishes through a deconstruction of Charles Peirce's semiotic theory of "habit,"²⁷ but then extends as an active and effective strategy for attaining subjectivity. De Lauretis explains that habit:

*as "energetic" attitude, a somatic disposition at once abstract and concrete, the crystallized form of past muscular/mental effort, is powerfully suggestive of a subject physically implicated or bodily engaged in the production of meaning, representation and self-representation.*²⁸

Through a deconstruction of Peirce's notion of habit de Lauretis breaks free from a fixed view that ignores "what kind of body is it, or how the body is itself produced as a sign for the subject and variously represented in the mutually constitutive interaction of inner and outer worlds."²⁹ By this she asserts a full form

²⁷ Peirce's "habit" is a series of "significate effects," or meaning effects produced in semiosis. de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984; pg. 182.

²⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 183.

²⁹ *Ibid.* pg. 183.

of experience - something involving subjectivity by the very nature of the body being interconnected with the systems and productions of meaning.

Through this she weaves in a proposal to return to consciousness-raising – a critical process of private and public interrelations that has invented new meanings, transformed society and “produced a new social subject, women.”³⁰ De Lauretis revives “the personal is political,” whereby women can make subjects of themselves by consciously and critically engaging in the practices, discussions and institutions that shape their lives. In viewing Ringley's work through this lens, we can see that she was consciously engaged in a new private versus public dialogue. Although riddled with contradictions, her interactions challenged the traditional productions of meaning through which she asserted herself as a subject.

Like Ringley, Jess MG³¹, a sex-positive radio pioneer and sound artist based in Montreal, has been practicing consciousness-raising through technological interactions with her world. MG stirs up politics around women's sexual agency through private and public means. She uses humor and storytelling to loosen us up and transport us through her powerful autoerotic sound artworks.

Promoting her newly released digital album, MG tells a playful personal story in her Facebook³² advertisement: “A girl once put a contact mic up her petunia.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pg. 185-186.

³¹ Jess MG also collaborated in two of the *Euphoric Femme* artworks: *Autoerotic Mediations* and *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*.

³² Jess MG publicizes her artworks through the Facebook page “Audio-Smut.”

She's done it again. And of course pressed record!" (For this album, MG literally placed a contact mic inside her vagina while masturbating.) The album is comprised of the sounds recorded in her body interspersed with her storytelling. Listening to the album's feature track, *The Real Vagina Monologue*, it's not what one might expect of sounds inside a vagina while self-pleasuring – no squishy liquidness, but soft muffled rhythms, like a heart beating on soft fabric. MG describes them as "a rumble in a dark velvet room." Her bodily sounds intermingle with her storytelling; "A girl touched herself, said, "Hmmm." Touched herself again and said, "Hmmm." Touched herself again and said "Hmmm" again...."³³ MG expresses her desires and pleasures through the digital technology of the mic and the editing suite. She not only claims sexual agency, but humourously thwarts objectification.

Jess MG knows well that sound is a powerful way to reunite the body and mind. By surprising her listeners with an aroused vagina that sounds like a "rumble in a dark velvet room" she reforms our perceptions of a woman's body in pleasure and elevates subjectivity to an aesthetic and harmonious state.

³³ MG, Jess. "Vadge of Honour." <http://ladynorn.bandcamp.com/>. (accessed March 10, 2011).

Wholeness of Being

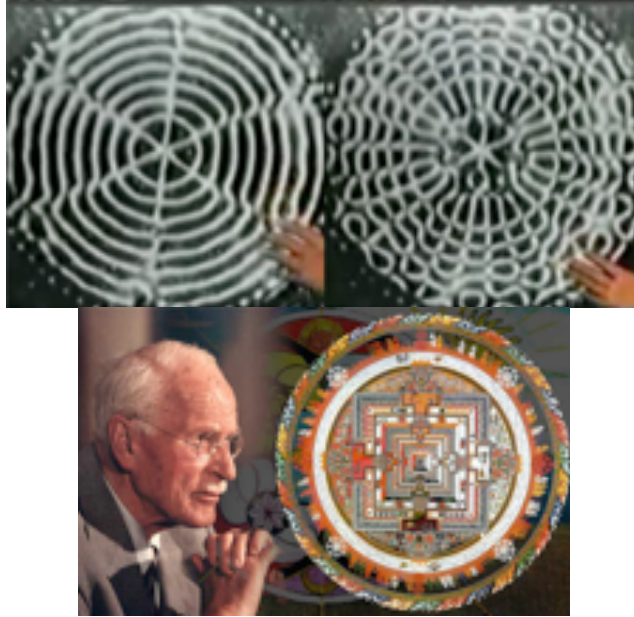


Figure 4: (right image) Carl Jung and a mandala.

Figure 5: (left image) example of cymatics.

Being “centred” is a concept often heard in connection to well-being. It is the idea of grounding, calming and even rejuvenating one’s mind and body through a process of listening to a personal inner world in the context of exterior influences. The ability to listen and act within complex private and public dynamics is also critical to consciousness-raising. Therefore, through a sense of knowing and acting through personal awareness in the context of one’s social sphere, centeredness can be a powerful means to achieve subjectivity and a sense of wholeness in context of one’s world. The following are sonic examples, which connect conceptual and aesthetic experiences between these interconnected inner and outer worlds.

Cymatics is an artificial process of visualizing sound by transferring its energy through a physical and malleable membrane such as water or sand (fig. 4). It is an example that connects the material and the immaterial (sound). These phenomena, pioneered by Swiss scientist Hans Jenny in the 1970s, are visual evidence of sound translated into physical form through the use of different materials and a pure tone. It is the connection between the physical form and intangible sound of cymatics that inspires me to think of the metaphysical relationship between the sound and image. The rhythmic pulsations and evolving circular forms produced in a cymatic field resemble mandala-like forms with the potential to provoke a sense of centredness and well-being.

Although cymatics is an inspiring investigation of the properties of sound and image, it doesn't explain how these patterns are powerful. Consequently, I turn to psychoanalytical theory for answers. The influential Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung, made an extensive study of the use of Hindu, Buddhist and other cultural mandala forms (fig. 5). Jung explains that these patterns are centred on representations the self within context of a greater world. He deduced that mandalas are a "construction of a central point to which everything is related"³⁴ and that they are also a "psychological expression of the totality of the self."³⁵ "Mandala" is a compound word derived from manda, Sanskrit for "essence," and the suffix la meaning "container" or "possessor." Hence, a mandala is not just a

³⁴ Jung, Carl. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2nd ed. Vol. 9. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, 304.

³⁵ Jung, Carl G. *Mandala Symbolism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973; pg. 20.

circle but a "container of essence."³⁶ Jung's idea that the mandala is at once a representation of a centred collectiveness as well as personal symbol of entity, suggests that the exterior world and the inner self are one and the same, as contained within a single circular form. For a period of time, Jung used mandala creation in treating his patients and as self-therapy. He proposed that these circular self-representational patterns could fundamentally evolve as part of a process in attaining a state of well-being.

I began to understand that the goal of psychic development is the self. There is no linear evolution there is only a circumambulation of the self.... This insight gave me stability, and gradually my inner peace returned. I knew that in finding the mandala as an expression of the self I had attained what was for me the ultimate.³⁷

³⁶ Religion Facts. "Mandalas; Sacred Art and Geometry."
<http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/things/mandalas.htm>. (accessed March 14, 2011).

³⁷ *Ibid.* pg. v.



Figure 6: *Muqarnas dome, Hall of the Two Sisters, the Alhambra, Granada, 1500s.*

Jung's depiction of the mandala as "a central point to which everything is related" is similar to Laura Marks' description of multiplicity and unity in the aniconic forms of Islamic art (fig. 6). Marks discusses these forms in ways that implicate the body and the spirit. In describing what she says is an unfolding of experience when beholding the mihrab of the Sultan Hassan mosque in Cairo, Marks writes "the pleasure, both spiritual and aesthetic, of contemplating it lies in the marvelous inventiveness by which multiplicity is shown to spring from unity."³⁸

³⁸ Marks, Laura. "Infinity and Accident; Strategies of Enfoldment in Islamic Art and Computer Art." *Leonardo* 39, no. 1 (2006); pg. 39.

Her use of the words "spiritual and aesthetic" suggest that the experience is felt both consciously and energetically through the body.

Marks also connects contemporary mainstream forms of mandalas to aniconic Islamic forms explaining that "new age-type consumption of fractal images suggests that [these] images have become, in our time, as quasi-religious objects of contemplation as they are in Islamic art." They "are seen as an allegory for the ordered cosmos."³⁹

The connections between mandalas and aniconic forms in this section suggest that artists can work to represent and express most dynamic and holistic concepts of the self and greater world in ways that inscribe the body and spirit through circular and aniconic forms.

Unfolding Experience

Laura Marks theorizes the ways in which we experience aniconic imagery in the context of an infinite and multiple world, which for the most part is transmitted to us via information – data. In order to understand and apply her theories to media art, I look to her online project "Enfolding and Unfolding; An Aesthetics for the Information Age."⁴⁰ It is a demonstration of her theories on the aesthetics of enfolding and unfolding⁴¹. She collaborates with designer Raegan Kelly to create

³⁹ Marks, Laura. *Enfoldment and Infinity*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010; pg. 59.

⁴⁰ The online project is located at <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=72>.

⁴¹ Marks' theories of enfoldment and unfolding are based in Gilles Deleuze's "enfoldment" as he wrote about in, *Deleuze, Gilles. Le Pli; Leibniz et le Baroque*. Paris: Minuit, 1988. [Marks, Laura. "Infinity

a textual and animated summary of the ways we perceive our digitally constructed world. Marks says that what we experience in artworks and objects are merely "tips of imperceptible, information icebergs."⁴² What she means is that most of the things we see and call "images" are digitally created. She illustrates with examples; carpets designed with weaving software, fashion items that are market researched, digitally generated music and pictures of celebrities that we tack to our walls. Consequently, what really hits our senses – what we call "experience" – are bits of data or "information." To paraphrase her, "what arrives as image or in experience itself, has already been mediated by information." The following is Mark's detailed description of this dynamic system of enfolding and unfolding:

Information and Image are also planes of immanence. Like Experience, they are infinite, though, as mathematics permits, they are smaller infinities. Experience is the most infinite of these three planes of immanence because all Information, all Images, cycle around to be re-enfolded in Experience. In turn, only a very few of its contents are actualized, or unfolded. This can happen in two ways: Experience unfolds directly into an Image, or experience unfolds into information.⁴³

This means that what we experience and unfold as a digital artwork through its information is a small portion of the whole plane of immanence enfolded in the artwork. In her book *Enfoldment and Infinity*, Marks connects new media art with aniconic Islamic art and architecture (fig. 7) explaining that their qualities are the

and Accident; *Strategies of Enfoldment in Islamic Art and Computer Art*." *Leonardo* 39, no. 1 (2006): 37-43.]

⁴² Marks, Laura. "Enfolding and Unfolding; An Aesthetics for the Information Age." *Vectors*. <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=72>. (accessed March 8, 2011).

⁴³ Marks, Laura. "Enfolding and Unfolding; An Aesthetics for the Information Age." *Vectors*. <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=72>. (accessed March 8, 2011).

same.⁴⁴ They both unfold over time; first, image unfolds from information within the work through its "algorithmic instructions"; and then information unfolds from the infinite through the "attentive recognition of observers."

Marks' theory of enfolding and unfolding is not only a powerful tool media artists can use to explore dynamics between image, information and experience, but also one that inspires creative potential for expressing of the mysterious aspects of spiritual and sexual bliss. In the seventh viewing tab of her online project, Marks analyzes how marketing (as well as surveillance and espionage) attempts to replicate experience through information in detailed form:

Spiritual awakenings, sexual ecstasy, unconscious techniques (of cooking, communicating, finding inspiration, etc.), and spontaneous jokes are all events of Experience that Information/Capitalism seeks to replicate for profit. They appear the same at the level of Information but they have no history; this is why many people have the same spirituality, sexuality, facial expression, and way of stirring a pot. These knowledges spring not from particular Experience (longing for the divine, experiments making love, experiments in the kitchen) but from the same Information (weekend spiritual workshops, articles on 7 ways to drive your man wild, cookbooks, manuals on how to speak with conviction, etc.)⁴⁵

Although Marks writes about how the market drives replications of the sexual and spiritual, I find it potent and provocative to recognize that it is not capitalism, but the tools and methods it uses that offer the potential to express sex and spirit, while simultaneously transgressing those very hegemonic forces. (In chapter 03 I

⁴⁴ Marks, Laura. *Enfoldment and Infinity*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010; pg. 61.

⁴⁵ Marks, Laura. "Enfolding and Unfolding; An Aesthetics for the Information Age." *Vectors*. <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=72>. (accessed March 8, 2011).

expand upon the idea of transgressing market strategies for social good in a discussion around the book, *Crush It.*)



Figure 7: Pipilotti Rist, *Pickleporno*. video still, 1992.

Pipilotti Rist is an artist who explores sexual expression and what I perceive as the spiritual in her work. Her monumental video installation, *Pickleporno*, depicts blissful and lush expressions of sexual desire and pleasure (fig. 7). *Pickleporno* is a sound and moving image collage, saturated with intertwining bodies, sounds of breathing and wind, heart beats, child-like singing and whispering, trickling water and birds, microscopic skin pores and facial hairs, ethereal and rhythmic instrumentation, soft insides and outsides, x-rays, ultra saturations - a liquid merging of bodily desires and pleasures from a female artist's perspective.

The male and female bodies in this artwork seem not to perform their sociological gender⁴⁶, rather their sexual act is implied and subdued for the sake of emphasizing the experience of sex. They are depicted in fragments, sensually experiencing each other's bodies as if on the verge of becoming one through a melding of body, senses, emotion, and naturalistic imagery. Here, instead of proliferating gender constructions through performance (as in mainstream pornography), gender is de-emphasized for the sake of pleasure and desire – the powerful site of Rist's work.

Significantly, this genderlessness and holistic merging of two people is reminiscent of what many religions and spiritual practices describe as a sacred sexual experience. Paschal Randolph,⁴⁷ a founder of the sacred sex movement in America, writes:

When pleasure results from the meeting of the electric currents of the male with the magnetic flow of the female, in the nerves of each, as in the touch of loving lips, the two currents spread out into waves, which flow all over the nervous network of both until they die out upon the foot of the throne whereon each souls sits in voluptuous expectancy. [T]he joy...is diffused over both beings and each is bathed

⁴⁶ Judith Butler claims that a person cannot be striped down to a pure biological sex, as sex is only understood through gender. For Butler, gender is something we construct through the daily social acts we perform: Butler, Judith M. *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York And London: Routledge, 1990. pg. 50.

The bodies in Rist's video seem to enact a reversal of what Butler proposes. Here, instead of proliferating gender through performance, gender is de-emphasized for the sake of pleasure and desire – the powerful site of Rist's work.

⁴⁷ According to Hugh Urban, Paschal Randolph is credited as one of the founders of the sacred sex movement in North America. (65) John Patrick Deveney documents Randolph's life revealing that he "was a free Black-American who founded America's first Rosicrucian society, who claims to have been a "personal friend" of President Abraham Lincoln. Deveney, John P. *Paschal Beverly Randolph: a Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician*. Albany: State University of New York, 1997. pg. 161.

*in the celestial and divine aura - the breath of God, suffusing both bodies,
refreshing both souls!*⁴⁸

Until now, we have seen how mind, body and spirit are connected within artworks through the experience of sounds and visuals. This makes me wonder how the artist enfolds these experiences with the potential to affect audience members. Here, I illustrate how media artists can encapsulate powerful experiences into technological artworks, to be unfolded by receptive audience members.

In his book *Techgnosis*, Erik Davis unsettles a widespread belief that the logic of scientific thinking wiped out society's faith in the spiritual. He explains that this new logic, did not kill spiritual imagination, rather, it drove it undercover. Scientific practice masked and embedded our religious desires inside its material bits of information. "The spiritual imagination seizes information technology for its own purposes. In this sense, technologies of communication are always, at least potentially, technologies of the sacred, simply because the ideas and experiences of the sacred have always informed human communication."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Randolph, Paschal B. *Elius!; the History of Love*. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004; pg. 71.

⁴⁹ Davis, Erik. *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003; pg. 11.

Davis explains that pre-modern shamans⁵⁰ used "language, costume, gesture, song and stagecraft, an application of "techne to the social imagination, actively tweaking the images, desires, and stories that partly structure the collective psyche."⁵¹ He says that the dominant magic of today is "marketing perception management," a powerful form of this being advertising. He wittingly points to Disney's "Imagineering" as a "corporate colonization of the unconscious."⁵² I don't take his use of the word shaman literally, but understand it as an analogy in explaining a collective desire to restore the spiritual in our lives.

In revisiting Marks' concepts of capital-driven replications of sexual and spiritual experience at the level of information, we find a similarity to Davis' spiritual imagination embedded in technology. In isolating the market and technological strategies highlighted by Marks and Davis, I propose that these methods of "replicating" the sexual and spiritual be appropriated for the purpose of social change, rather than for profit. Here I enjoy a comment by Marks, in critique of market replications of sex and spirit, that we should not loose sight of the importance in "longing for the divine" and "experiments making love."⁵³ I apply these key attitudes in my theoretical and creative explorations.

⁵⁰ the word "shaman" was created by anthropologists and has been applied to practitioners (including modern ones) all over the world. It has been over used and marketed to the point of diluting the sense of what real shamans are and what they really do. (Atkinson, 307-330)

⁵¹ Ibid. pg. 207.

⁵² Ibid. pg. 211.

⁵³ Marks, Laura. "Enfolding and Unfolding; An Aesthetics for the Information Age." Vectors. <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/projects/index.php?project=72>. (accessed March 8, 2011).

Marks also offers an example of how change can occur through performative interaction with an artwork. She says most artists are actually more concerned with the process of enfolding and unfolding than with producing images. She says that enfolding-unfolding aesthetics "accounts for whether artworks are representational, focusing their activity at the image level, or performative, focusing on the movements of enfolding and unfolding between levels."⁵⁴ In discussing John Simon's webwork, *Unfolding Object*, Marks describes how a visitor interacts with this artwork by clicking and revealing an endless and non-linear series of new planes. The more a visitor clicks, the more new planes for unfolding appear. Marks says the artwork's "potential is contained in its source code and unfolded by the user. The longer one engages with, the more complexity, logical depth and social extension the simple shape reveals."⁵⁵ Her idea that artists privilege performativity over representation and that audience members unfold deeper planes of experience the longer they engage with an artwork, is a strong indication that art can affect willing audience members.

⁵⁴ Marks, Laura. *Enfoldment and Infinity*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010; pg. 11.

⁵⁵ Marks, Laura. "Infinity and Accident; Strategies of Enfoldment in Islamic Art and Computer Art." *Leonardo* 39, no. 1 (2006); pg. 40.



Figure 8: *DissoNoiSex, Soundanism. interactive artwork, 2006.*

Soundanism, an interactive sound installation created by the Spanish art collective DissoNoiSex (fig. 8) is a significant example of how audience performativity unfolds experience and can potentially affect someone through interactivity. A visitor sits in a chair, straps on a hood containing built-in speakers, and breathes into a front-end microphone. The breathing triggers and transforms pornographic, animal, and machinery sound clips into unique rhythmic compositions. Triggered by voluntary and involuntary breathing, unique sequences of sounds are produced which resemble a musical composition and are reminiscent of the sounds of masturbation. Because the user can relax or intentionally create a composition, engaging with this artwork raises questions of

control, domination and skill with respect to the sexual act and how it is performed. It can alter a participant through awareness of breathing and what they can or cannot control. It can also make an audience member reflect upon his/her own sense of sexual expression.

In relation to earlier discussions about consciousness-raising, I also point out that through *Soundanism* the participant engages in an intimate act within a social setting. *Soundanism* also raises a public and private discourse that can be considered within a context of creating subjectivity and social change.

Euphoria

I'd like to end this section on subjectivity with a discussion of the spiritual and erotic meaning of euphoria.

In religious terms, "euphoria" means a state of ecstasy through which the outer world seems to dissolve and the self stretches out and loosens its boundaries into the exterior world.

*This is simultaneously a projection of the self into the whole environment and introjection of the whole environment into the self. It is a return to what some psychoanalysts call the "oceanic reunion," whereby all "one's pleasure impulses are withdrawn from external objects and located inside oneself."*⁵⁶

This definition of euphoria suggests that a sense of spiritual well-being can be attained in connection with the social and cosmic worlds. Women who are in

⁵⁶ Ostow, Mortimer, and Scharfstein Ben-Ami. *The Need to Believe; The Psychology of Religion*. New York: International University Press, 1954; pg. 122.

psychic harmony with their exterior world may be empowered by this soulful experience and this strength may be carried forward into social activism. I see potential for exploring these ideas in the context of expanded consciousness-raising, blending inner and outer worlds in ways that realize healthy and empowering connections between the private and the public. Although I reserve this metaphysical topic for further research outside my thesis, I also note that some of the women who participated in this project share my interest in exploring aspects of this spiritual feminism.

Research into the origins of the word "euphoria" uncovers the Greek root "eu" meaning goodness, happiness or contentment and "phoria" signifying the act of carrying. This suggests an effort-driven act through which an individual bears upon him or herself a sense of joy. In essence, the origin of this word proposes that contentment and joy are inner states acquired and initiated by persistent and active engagement.⁵⁷

An entry by Rhodri Hayward in the *Oxford Companion to the Body* reveals that euphoria carried "the key to a fundamental transformation in the Western conception of the self" which originally carried a more active and moral role. This sense of the word later disappeared and with it a less active role in contentment and joy. Hayward explains:

With the advent of Christianity and the rise of Calvinism, in particular, a more passive view of the self and its emotions emerged. Euphoria is now regarded as a

⁵⁷ Hayward, Rhodri. "Euphoria." *The Oxford Companion to the Body*. Ed. Colin Blakemoore and Sheila Jennett. New York: Oxford Press, 2001; pg. 255.

state which overwhelms the personality. In medical terms euphoria is defined as a form of mood elevation inappropriate to circumstances, brought on by diseases of the nervous system such as syphilis or multiple sclerosis. In religious terms it connotes the epiphanies and awakenings of the passive soul. The American psychologist, William James, described the state as one 'in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to hold our mouths and be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God.' James offered his own explanation for this connection between euphoria and passivity, arguing that the emotion emerged only when the self gave up its struggle with the world and instead surrendered to the uprushes of the subconscious life.⁵⁸

The idea that euphoria lost its meaning as an active and persistent approach to a sense of well-being only stresses its importance to consciousness-raising efforts. If we are no longer able to listen to our inner world and are incapable of making ourselves content, then how can we fully engage in the personal side of what we want to make political? Perhaps a return to the active spiritual and erotic sense of euphoria may offer paths to new productions of meaning.

Chapter 03: Her Pleasure, Her Desire, Remix

Euphoric Femme was conceived from life experiences, introspection and intuitive thought processes, including transcendental meditation and a desire to explore sexual expression in creative new ways. These are contemplative processes of working through prevailing interests and concerns occupying my psyche (in the form of concepts, images, and sounds). I interpret these into drawings, poems and notes. Over time, I revisit my sketchbook to find thematic undercurrents or

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

specific ideas, which I gradually develop into the artworks. Some of the images, experiences and information that inspired *Euphoric Femme* were ones of women in ecstatic sexual and spiritual states, especially Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, mandalas, kaleidoscopic imagery, cymatics⁵⁹, mantra chanting and personal moments of euphoria during Zen Buddhist meditation and explorations of sexual pleasure.

Once I engaged in the process of creating the artworks, I became involved in mixed, interconnected, and simultaneously occurring reflexive methodologies, whereby:

*different elements or levels are played off against each other. It is in these relations and in the interfaces that reflexivity occurs. This approach is based upon an assumption – and implies – that no element is totalized; that is, they are all taken with a degree of seriousness, but there is no suggestion that any one of them is the bearer of the Right or Most Important Insight.*⁶⁰

What follows is a breakdown of a variety of methods involving collaboration, archiving and documenting, all of which play off each other in dynamic ways. These elements were integral to how this work evolved and no one method was more important than another. The following sections describe the characteristics and application of my methods and their relation to my artistic creation and theoretical framework.

⁵⁹ Cymatics is an artificial process of visualizing sound by transferring its energy through a physical and malleable membrane such as water or sand.

⁶⁰ Alvesson, Mats and Skoldberg, Kaj. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications, 2000; pg. 101.

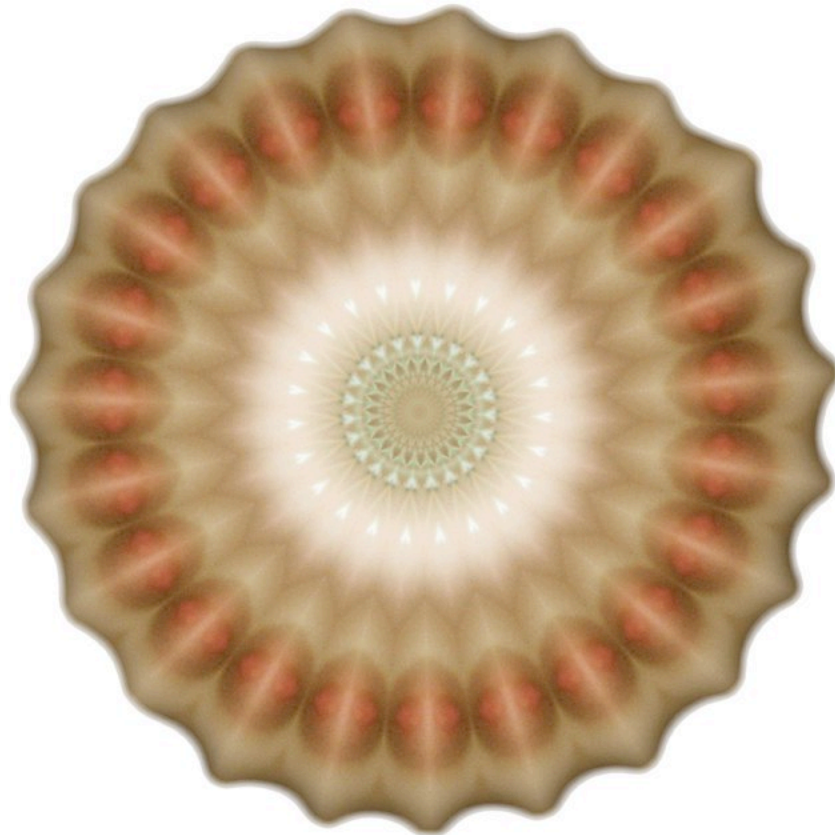


Figure 9: *Autoerotic Meditations* (Patricia Silva, collaborator). still image, 2011.

Autoerotic Meditations, an online artwork⁶¹, is the first iteration of *Euphoric Femme* (see figure 9). This work is an ever-expanding Flash compilation of images and sounds contributed by women in a collaboration.

Using a simple online image compositing filter, the women create personalized mandala-like imagery from autoerotic photographs taken in solitude. On the

⁶¹ *Autoerotic Meditations* is located at euphoricfemme.com/artworks/onlineproject.

Euphoric Femme blog site collaborators log in⁶² to access the details for collaboration. They are asked to be alone while masturbating. They may record during portions, or the entire expanse, of their sexual moment including orgasm. The women can be clothed, partially clothed, or not. I clarify that the philosophy of the project is process-oriented and that orgasm is optional. Creative exploration and expression are stressed. The women are asked to play and be aware of their body, gestures, clothing amid their surroundings such as bed sheets, carpeting, curtains etc. They take into consideration how the textures, tones and colours of their skin, hair, lips, fabrics and materials, as framed through close up or distant shots, will affect their resulting mandala-like image. Once their image is photographed, they are given step-by-step instructions for an easy-to-use online "Kaleidoscope" filter by *SumoPaint*⁶³. The women open their photograph in the software, select the indicated filter, and play with a few variables to change the rotation and number of segments until they see an image that resonates with them. At this point they save the image and email it to me.

For sound contributions, women engage in masturbation, but this time are asked to consider and be aware of breathing, swallowing, sighing, moaning and verbalizing. They are asked to think about incorporating sounds such as music, a vibrator, street noise, birds chirping from their window, or even a pressure cooker steaming in the background. All these may be incorporated into the resulting

⁶² Once age of majority is confirmed, collaborators are given a password to access the details of creating their artwork. For image contributions they visit http://euphoricfemme.com/?page_id=112 and for sound contributions they visit http://euphoricfemme.com/?page_id=92.

⁶³ *Sumo Paint* is an online image editing software, similar to *PhotoShop* that one can use online at sumopaint.com.

sound composition. The women may use a free audio recording program like Audacity⁶⁴ together with a built-in or external computer microphone. The women save the file and send it to me via a secure and encrypted FTP service.⁶⁵ Using Audacity. I then layer and compose the sounds and images into the visuals and soundtrack featured in this artwork.

Autoerotic Meditations functions as an active backdrop to the philosophies and creative forms that sustain the project. The individual images in this artwork have also served as "branding imagery" throughout the project's social media sites.



Figure 10: An early work in the development of the *Euphoric Femme* project, 2010.

⁶⁴ Audacity is a free easy-to-use program that runs across all three platforms, Windows, Linux and Mac OS <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>.

⁶⁵ Drop Box secures all transmission of data over an encrypted channel. All stored files are protected through encryption and the user's password [passworddata.https://www.dropbox.com/home#:::](https://www.dropbox.com/home#:::)

I experimented with a series of works based on these images, giving them a (literal) material form. They were to be custom one-off prints of each woman's imagery on various personal home decor or clothing items of their choice (fig. 10). I would mail pillows, shawls, throws, shower curtains and underwear and ask them to photograph the item in the context of their daily life. Through this initial exploration of collaborative exchange, I developed the strong desire to create an interactive media artwork. The decor and clothing project may be pursued in the future.

What was beginning to appear as an extensive collaborative process for the creation of these artworks led to the idea of setting up a platform to facilitate the work. I was inspired by *Crush It*, a business book about social media, such as blogging, videocasting, and podcasting through sites such as Tumblr, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. This book demonstrates how social media may change the way we live our lives and conduct business and I set up *Euphoric Femme* on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and a dedicated website⁶⁶. *Crush It* was influential, not because of the business bent, but for its convincing argument that social media is "where the eyeballs are going."⁶⁷ Let me be clear, I am interested in subverting technological market strategies, the tools of the market, for personal and social change.

⁶⁶ The Euphoric Femme social media sites are: facebook.com/pages/Euphoric-Femme/138151099556774, twitter.com/#!/EuphoricFemme, youtube.com/user/euphoricfemme?feature=mhum, euphoricfemme.com.

⁶⁷ Vaynerchuk, Gary. *Crush It*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009; pg. 6.

Yochai Benkler illustrates how social media's radically decentralized structure allows for information and cultural production to play alongside market-based production. Benkler is a Harvard professor examining the transformative potential for economy and society through information technology. He explains that through social media "Individuals can reach and inform or edify millions around the world."⁶⁸

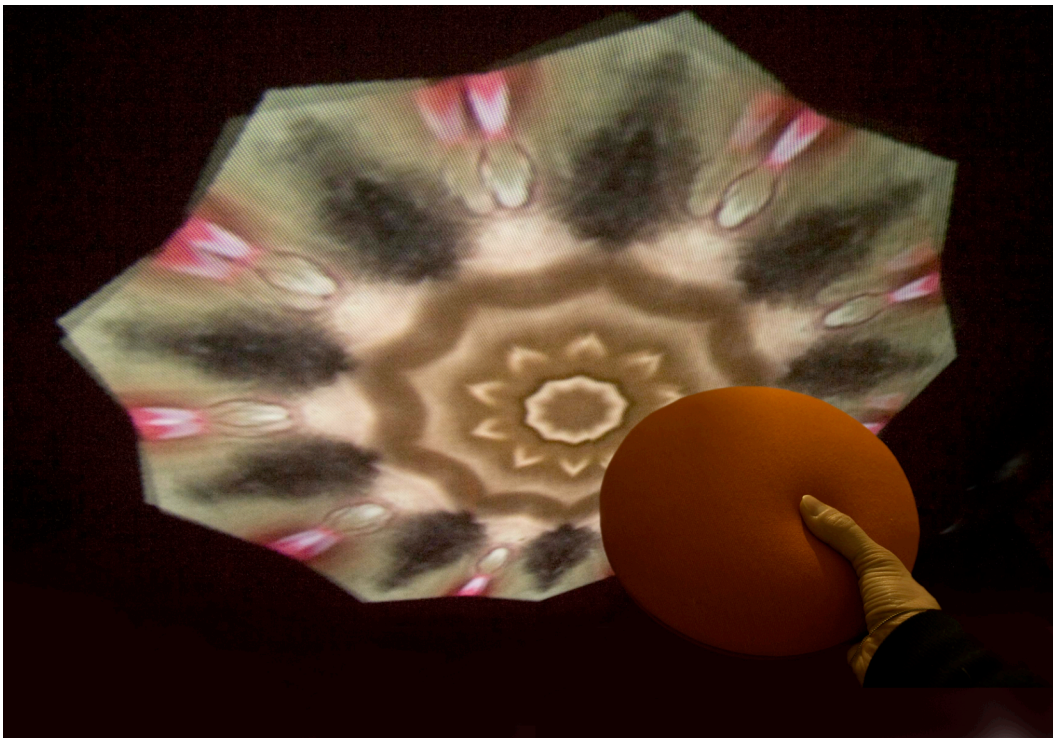


Figure 11: *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*. still image of installation showing a hand-held interface, 2011.

⁶⁸ Benkler, Yochai. "The Wealth of Networks; A Moment of Opportunity and Challenge." Yale University Press. <http://yupnet.org/benkler/archives/8>. (accessed April 2, 2011); ch. 1.

During the design phase of the *Euphoric Femme* social media sites, I began working on what would unfold as the focus of my thesis work, an interactive audio-video installation entitled *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* (fig. 11). In the production of this artwork, women created personal autoerotic video and sound recordings to be implemented as the source material for the digital and audio components of the installation.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is activated by audience participants, who remix the recordings into a kaleidoscopic video projection and a meditative soundscape. Visitors lie down, and using a hand-held interface they experience the artwork through interaction. Radiant imagery (projected on the ceiling) and meditative sounds emerge. A more detailed description of this work is found in chapter four.

Collaborators are given the option to contribute sound and/or video for this artwork. Using the same audio recording considerations and methods as *Autoerotic Meditations*, women record their sounds and send them to me via FTP. If they contribute video, the process is similar to photographic considerations of *Autoerotic Meditations*, whereby colours, textures and gestures of their bodies and surroundings are critical to the resulting image. In this case the only difference is that the women are recording gesture in motion is an additional expression that enriches the work. The women use a camcorder to record themselves masturbating in solitude and send me their file via the indicated FTP method.

Social Media

My overarching creative, collaborative and consciousness-raising processes with the women participants of *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* are similar to how Judy Chicago worked with needle workers to translate her paintings into embroidered artworks in the *Birth Project*. Chicago "would go around the country to look at the work as it was being done" and "learned about ordinary women's lives."⁶⁹ In the same sense, I use social media to connect with women who are either interested in the *Euphoric Femme* project, or become involved through discourse or collaborative creation. Whereas I provide the medium and creative guidelines for my artistic collaborations with women designing their own imagery within the creative guidelines, Chicago devises guidelines, selecting the medium as well as designing the artworks, which are translated into the chosen medium by her collaborators.

My work and Chicago's work not only involve collaboration on the level of creation and social interaction, but also share the purpose of feminist activism. We understand the importance of infusing personal energy and intent into political artworks. For Chicago, in the *Birth Project*, that means creating images of birth that are missing in Western art, through women's needlework, a visually rich medium ignored and trivialized by the mainstream art community. Similarly, in *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*, women's personal autoerotic pleasures are

⁶⁹ Chicago, Judy. "An Evening with Judy Chicago ." GRCC, Grand Rapids Community College. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4OyjsPcLr0&feature=player_embedded. (accessed March 12, 2011).

enveloped into an immersive sound and visual artwork that challenges sensationalized and seductive mainstream images of women.

My methods are also similar to Action Research, "an interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving actions implemented in a collaborative context with data-driven collaborative analysis or research to understand underlying causes, enabling future predictions about personal and organizational change."⁷⁰ Using "interactive inquiry" and collaborative "problem solving," whereby social media sites offer a place to share and engage in common concerns, such as sex-positive feminism, sexual expression, desire, erotic pleasure, and issues around subjectivity and sexual objectification, I foster understanding and aggregate shared causes. However, I don't engage in "collaborative analysis" or research that predicts change or is data-driven.

In the creation of, and research related to, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* and within the context of the greater *Euphoric Femme* project, I archive and share research and engage in dialogue with women through the project's Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter sites. To invite collaboration I don't advertise, but rather build community with other online groups of feminists, women in the arts, sex-positive activists and sacred sex enthusiasts. As the *Euphoric Femme* sites contain the motto "facilitating women's sexual agency through the sharing of ideas and artistic collaboration" and links to the call for collaboration at the project website

⁷⁰ Reason, Peter, and Hilary Bradbury. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research; Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage, 2001; pg. 20.

euphoricfemme.com, women who are interested in the collaborative aspects of this project easily find the information they need.

My process of interactive inquiry and problem-solving is greatly facilitated through the archiving and documenting of my research on social media sites. The Facebook page is especially powerful because I write concise concepts or questions in character-limiting status fields, write brief critical essays in the form of notes and engage in dialogue and resolution of research concerns with members of the page. Facebook also allows me to follow and connect with people and organizations of interest. Twitter is a powerful tool that expands my reach and YouTube videos offer a way to personally communicate broader-picture aspects of the project. In addition, I host a separate and personal (but public) blog⁷¹ that functions as my sketchbook for documenting more extensive, in-depth and personal research in the form of images, videos, sounds, mini essays and lists of books, exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and website links. I use this space to document the scope of my research, and as a means to explore uncertain, but potential research areas.

I invite anyone to collaborate who identifies as a woman (this can include men) interested in exploring and reinventing personal sexual expressions and representations. The women email me, we confirm they are over twenty-one years old, and then I email them the consent form and submission information. The submission information gives details about how to contribute through audio

⁷¹ My personal blog is located at Euphoricfemme.blogspot.com.

and visual means, such as recording sounds and images via common-use audio-visual digital technology like the digital camera, camcorder and built-in computer speakers.

It is important to mention here that although I did not require Research Ethics Board approval, I still had to come up with a way to ensure that all collaborators were over the age of majority. The challenge was the unavailability of guidelines on how to verify this. This uncharted territory allowed me to break ground with respect to acquiring sexual content over the Internet. This new process can now be utilized as a template by future artists and researchers to solicit sexual content through social media sites. Please see "Appendix A. Consent and Age of Majority" for further details.

The Interface

The soft hand-held interfaces are where audience participants can enter into the women's experiences. They are a physical bridge I created to connect and transfer the private experiences of the women onto the public – the place where the personal becomes political. *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* includes three fabric padded disk-like interfaces that contain Wiimotes⁷² for Bluetooth signal output to Max/MSP software.⁷³ Their shape was designed to repeat and unify the

⁷² 'Wiimote' is the colloquial term for Wii Remote, the primary controller for Nintendo's Wii console. The Wiimote offers motion sensing through an internal accelerometer and optical sensor technology, including Bluetooth.

⁷³ Max is an Interactive visual programming environment for music, audio, and media downloadable at <http://cycling74.com/>.

circular forms also found in the kaleidoscopic video and the eleven-foot diameter floor throw for audience members lie down on while experiencing the work. I use the circular form to refer to the mandala, Sanskrit for a circular container of essence. Audience members can also enter into the work through the intangible interfaces, the visual projection and surrounding audio. When the physical hand held interfaces are resting, the volume diminishes to a soft state and the video moves in a slower motion, indicating that the women's experiences are alive and waiting to be unfolded by the user. An audience member can simply lie back to absorb the stirring images and sounds enveloping him or her.

The colours of the interfaces are a playful orange, purple and peacock blue to entice play. The exterior shell is padded with quilt batting and covered in a comfortable jersey knit, rather than more pleasurable and seductive materials such as memory foam and velvet. I don't want users to become fixated on the tangible. I want the interfaces to invite touch, but once a participant is engaged with the artwork, for the interface presence to dissolve, much like joy sticks and mice upon entering and becoming one with a mesmerizing world of sounds and images beyond the hardware. In the same way, I hope that participants leave their bodies and enter into the work through their imagination – that they connect emotionally and psychically with the women's experiences enfolded in the artwork. In essence, the interfaces take audience participants into the women's worlds. Through this process, I hope that subjectivity is carried further into the public sphere. By connecting with the women, I hope participants cease

to look at the women as “the other” and as objects of desire, but rather as a correlated extension of themselves – as beings exuding comparable subjectivities.

The Experience

In *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*, I act like a head deejay guiding audience members in the creation of an audio-visual composition. Nicolas Bourriaud, in his book *Postproduction* on relational aesthetics, says “the remixer” has become more important than the instrumentalist and the rave more exciting than the concert.”⁷⁴ He explains that contemporary art tends to destroy the ownership of forms and shake up the old rules.⁷⁵ This is what *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is about. I pre-establish a range of kaleidoscopic patterns and abstracted sounds and distribute the creative power amongst audience members to “shake up” or reshuffle mainstream notions of erotic women.

Bourriaud offers further insight into how artists reconfigure meaning by remixing audio and visual forms from real life “screenplays.” He calls these “postproduction artists,” who:

reedit historical or ideological narratives, inserting the elements that compose them into alternative scenarios.... to decode and produce different story lines and alternatives narratives.... By manipulating the shattered forms of the collective scenario, that is, by considering them not indisputable facts but precarious

⁷⁴ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction*. New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2002; pg. 35.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 35.

*structures to be used as tools, these artists produce singular narrative spaces of which their work is the mise-en-scène.*⁷⁶

This passage is analogous to my methodology as an artist. Through a process of destabilizing idealized, preconceived imagery of women's sexuality, I recompose media in the alternative forms that I conceive. As the "principal DJ" in this artwork, I work with audience participants to realize my personal vision for sexual expression.

Like Davis' idea of the shaman who uses techne to manifest a spiritual imagination in others, I employ media art to invoke a magical world for audiences. Coming from a fine arts practice that values independent artistic creation, I strike a balance between working independently and collaboratively with women and audience members. I situate myself between independent traditional art creation that empowers and privileges the artist's vision and collaborative creation as a means to build and realize the artworks. In positioning myself in the middle of these two modes of creation, I am able to maintain strong control over the imagery, while offering a modicum of creativity to my collaborators and audience members. That said, the women in the work are more than providers of autoerotic materials; they creatively and critically engage in a process of sexual self-discovery and experimental recordings. I view audience members as more than standing or sitting observers in front of a work of art. I ask them to engage and unfold the work through performative interaction.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pg. 45-46.

⁷⁷ Augusto Boal et al.

I do not anticipate their reactions,⁷⁸ but rather set up a dynamic system wherein they experience and reflect on their own.

Chapter 04: Conclusion

At an exhibition of *Autoerotic Mediations* last year, a male audience member asked if the artwork was about pornography. I was not surprised because the sounds in that particular artwork are somewhat realistic. However, it made me wonder how much of women's sexual expressions are stereotyped because of mainstream media and online porn. This scenario confirmed that I should keep exploring new art forms that challenge conventional ideas of how women look and sound during erotic engagement.

In returning to the city of Zobeide, I am reminded of why I chose to involve women in creations of self-representation. As a female artist and sex-positive feminist, I realize it is not enough to just free my own image, but to be part of a process that may also free other women's images from external constructs, controls, and sexual objectifications. Hence I embarked on a creative and theoretical project to facilitate women's self-expression and representation.

⁷⁸ In reference to Ibn al-Haytham's treatise on optics, Marks explains that "it is the individual's choice whether to perceive something in an immediate or contemplative way. In the case of the latter, perception calls on memory, imagination, and other internal faculties to make sense of the object." Marks, Laura. *Enfoldment and Infinity*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010; pg. 129.

I am inspired by women's self-representations that utilize digital technology to challenge mainstream notions of sexual objectification. As I carry forward the legacies of *JenniCAM*, *Pickleporno* and *The Real Vagina Monologues*, I subvert mainstream sensationalized images of seductive women. As I do this, I embrace contradictions (with respect to sexual objectification) in a process that confronts the hegemonic forces in the commercial sphere that control women's imagery. My art may be an experiment in contradiction that moves towards progress.

I see my role with women collaborators and audience members as that of facilitator - one who opens up possibilities that only participants can inseminate and birth. I set the parameters for audience remixing of the women's materials in a way that, for the most part, settles the imagery in an aniconic form. I am not interested in thresholds between figuration versus aniconic form as much as the processes of enticement and facilitation of experience.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix, and all *Euphoric Femme* artworks, are creative and collaborative consciousness-raising projects that take place between the private and public. Despite the fact that I am mostly in control of the imagery in the artworks, the work depends on the women collaborators' collective energies and intents and on audience members to realize the women's enfolded experiences. In essence, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is an artistic exploration of "the personal is political" through a facilitation of sexual agency. It invites the production of new meanings by physically implicating and bodily engaging

women in a process of collaborative self-representation.⁷⁹ Collaborators employ private masturbatory energies and intents that are enfolded into and mediated through a digital artwork - waiting to be unfolded through public interaction. When this overlapping of private and public spheres occurs, the artwork is complete.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is foremost an exploration of the expression and reception of women's sexual pleasure. It asks "what new art forms can be developed to express the elated mysteries erotic pleasure and wholeness of being?" In addressing this subject I am reminded of my original inspiration, the intangible magic exuded by Bernini's sculpture *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Later, I was captivated by Erik Davis' writings on how techne is a manifestation of the spiritual imagination. He inspired me to express the magic of sex through media art.

Through this project's research I came across Marks' assertions that capitalistic market forces replicate sex and spirit for profit. This convinced me of a need to ignite social change through a subversion of market strategies. Like *Pickleporno*, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is a large-scale immersive video and sound installation exploring inner erotic experiences. Similar to Rist, I deemphasize how

⁷⁹ de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984; pg. 183.

the body looks to illuminate and express inner sexual experiences.⁸⁰ Like Rist, I do this through the very media that sensationalizes and objectifies - "the big screen."

Through expressions rather than representations of inner sexual states, I hope that audience members will experience women as holistic entities, in and of their sexual bodies and spiritual minds. The idea that body and mind can be expressed in multiple and yet unified forms is critical in generating women's subjectivity through *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*. Jung's explanation of the mandala being a "psychological expression of the totality of the self"⁸¹ as well as "a central point to which everything is related."⁸² becomes key to understanding the role of the projected kaleidoscopic image as a reference to the mandala. The circular form represents and contains the essence of the women, present and active in the context of their greater world. They are dynamic and diverse beings within a unified circumambulating universe.

⁸⁰ (Rist AtelierRist) Rist, Pipilotti. "Pipilotti Rist; Pickelporno ." AtelierRist. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fn-NID4GhU>. (accessed March 10, 2011).

⁸¹ Jung, Carl G. *Mandala Symbolism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973; pg. 20.

⁸² Jung, Carl. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2nd ed. Vol. 9. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969; pg. 304.

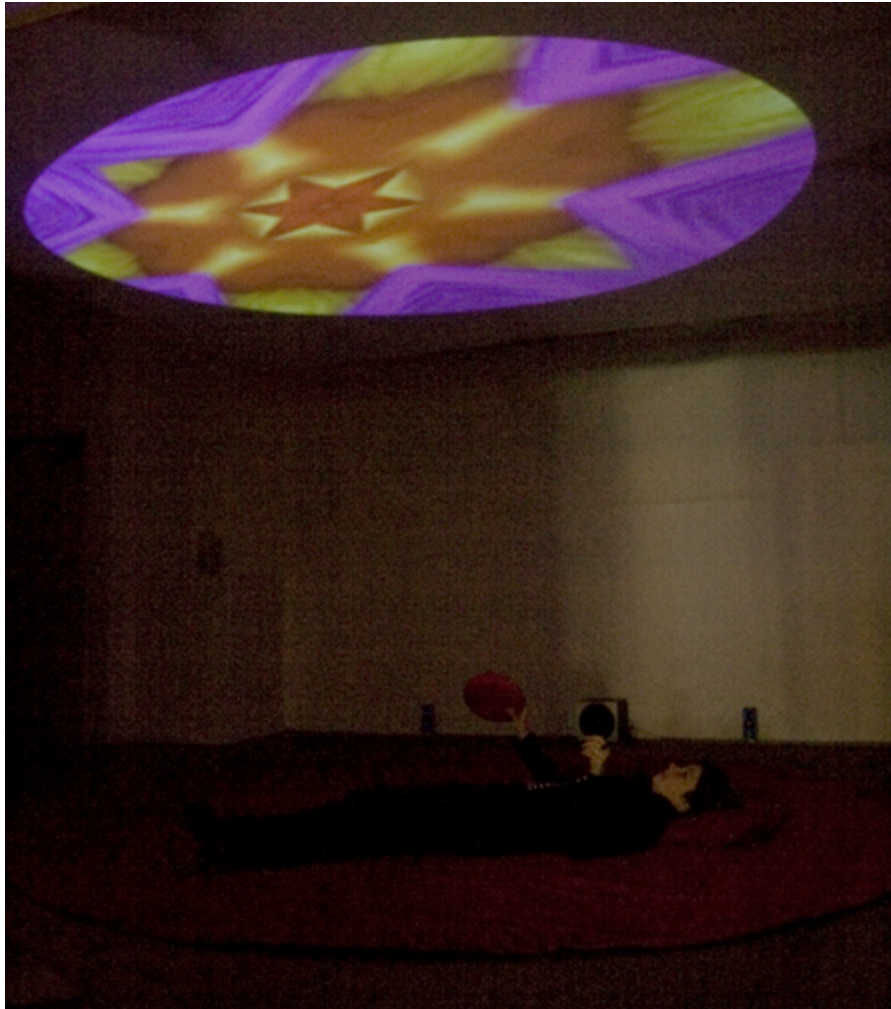


Figure 12: *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*. still image of installation showing an audience member laying down and playing with a hand-held interface, 2011.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is an immersive audio video experience of women's sexual pleasure (fig. 12). When resting on the large floor throw, one can be alone, or there might be company. If there is company, there is talk, but soon one becomes engrossed by the work. He or she forgets they are holding a physical interface, enters the women's world and delves into a meditative state. The video projection encompasses a large area of vision enveloping one in

pulsating, shattered, shifting, ever-evolving imagery. The image transforms from light to darkness and back again. The sounds are powerful and piercing with an ecstatic power, but then they subdue into lingering cries interspersed with the soothing sounds of tinkling glass, like jewels rotating in a kaleidoscope. Occasionally one becomes consciously aware of the imagery passing before the eyes, noticing skin, hair and a woman's moaning.

Ideally, *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is an energized analogy for women's inherent power – a spiritual birth of her deepest creative centre with the potential for personal and social transformation.

A fragmenting and shifting of tremendous surfaces

Plate against plate, converging and diverging

A pushing and searing through fissures

Suspended crystals and bubbling gases seeping

Into the ears and eyes of those who lay before her

Participating in the birth of her creative centre

As she lets out a big bellow

That shifts the aging symbolic masses

And reveals her potent molten core

When I first set out to do this work I began with the idea that it would be about expressing erotic pleasure and desire in a way that spoke to that alone – without

seducing the viewer. I wanted to carve a space to highlight women's sexual agency. In conducting research for my paper on feminist theories of sexual expression and liberation, I began to question how to illuminate women's erotic experience in light of the risks of sexual objectification. Ariel Levy's book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs* was important because it made me realize women are still battling sexual objectification, perhaps more so now than ever before, because media sells the idea that sexual liberation is attained through spectacle and by being the object of man's desire.

Through the research I conducted, including prototype testing, I initially believed I was playing with thresholds of aniconic and representational imagery – testing the boundaries between sexual subjectivity and objectivity. One evening, shortly before the exhibition date, I couldn't sleep because I was bothered by this uncertainty. I reasserted myself in the artwork because the theory began to twist and challenge my creative intuition. I realized that I was not playing with thresholds of aniconic and representational imagery, but rather with experiences that range from absorption to observation. It seemed that when I absorbed myself in the artwork I became one with its enfolded contents and when I consciously played with the interface I observed the artwork from a more distant place making it seem like an object. This initiated the idea that objectification happens when we distance ourselves from something perceived as outside and disconnected to ourselves, but when we allow ourselves to empathize, we immerse ourselves and become one with the other. This made me wonder if objectification is not situated in figurative imagery per se, but rather in the idea

that sensual, emotional and bodily immersion can draw out a subject through a realization of connective experience. In *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix*, receptive audience members can enter into and immerse themselves in a new aesthetic expression of women's erotic experiences. In conclusion, I embrace the challenges of sexual objectification that *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* addresses, and realize the complexities of this issue are not necessarily simply tied to figurative representation. In my view, sexual objectification pivots between absorption of experience and observation of object, rather than between figurative and aniconic forms.

The collaborative aspect of this project was critical to facilitating sexual agency. Early in the first year of this interdisciplinary program, I was inspired by the idea of collaborating with people on an artwork. I quickly realized that social, political and creative advantages would strengthen my personal and feminist interests in sexual liberation. Through collaborative methods I could also explore sexual agency without the pressure of creating a personal artwork, which would be too emotionally challenging to embark on alone. I wanted the presence of many to address this larger issue of sexual agency, to which I know is not only my own. I sought to create an artwork that would involve diverse women and so I embraced what social media could offer in this respect. The social media community that was built around *Euphoric Femme* has become a space for empowerment, whereby women share information on issues related to sexual desire and pleasure. A wealth of information, such as ejaculation and G-Spot workshops, feminist porn screenings, and sacred sexuality events inspire critical

self-awareness and personal explorations in erotic expression. In reading de Lauretis I realized that the women involved in *Euphoric Femme* were creating subjects of themselves simply by being involved in the project's social media and creative collaborative aspects of consciousness-raising.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is an open-ended work. I am unsure how audience members experience the work, but talk about my own experiences, listen to what audience members say when engaging with the work and ponder on the possibilities based on the theories I've researched. Audience members are critical to understanding this artwork, for they are the ones through which the work comes alive. Marks' idea that change happens through performative engagement with artworks, through a process of unfolding experience is helpful. She says that experience is the medium for change itself. In citing John Simon's webwork, *Unfolding Object*, Marks explains the artwork's potential to be unfolded by the user increases the longer she or he engages with it, and the user experience intensifies as the art form takes on complexity, depth and social breadth. In the end, the artwork relies on the audience member to be unfolded. I extend this to say that audience members are not only potential empathizers of women's subjective experiences through the work's interfaces, but that they can take the artwork's meaning to new levels, as producers of meaning themselves. By engaging with the artwork's embedded sexual energies, rather than merely observing them as content, audiences not only participate in the fragmentation of ever-evolving imagery, but also unfold and immerse themselves in it. By

physically, emotionally and even spiritually investing themselves in the work, audience members are the final generators and conduits of meaning.

The interface, through which audience participants enter the work, is a door that opens and invites visitors into a new immersive space where they can remain for durations of time. It is the middle ground between the experiences of the women participants and the audiences' realities. Through a merging of women's experiences enfolded in the art and audience members' realities – between subjects and objects – there can occur a breakdown of objectification and a birth of subjectivity. It is a place where we begin to understand the other through connection. The interface is the bridge to experience and therefore the site through which sexual objectification is diffused.

The Personal is Still Political

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix is on a continuum with the legacy of artists and activists such as Judy Chicago, Jess MG, Pipilotti Rist and DissoNoiSex. This project develops my passion for, and expands my contributions to, the disciplines of sex-positive feminism and media art. *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* explores women's sexual agency through theoretical, aesthetic, spiritual, political and social perspectives. Its interdisciplinary and collaborative nature offers a potential site for hybrid engagements with women, scientists, artists, practitioners, scholars and educators in various disciplines such as human-computer interaction, media art, feminism, sex-positive feminism, sexology, sacred sexuality, sex therapy, and

art therapy. It promises to engage new forms of artistic collaboration and audience participation in the aggregate.

Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix was held at Fleishman Gallery in Toronto, inside Wonderworks, a cross-disciplinary venue catering to the creative arts, healing arts, mindful living, and diverse spiritual practices. The venue was appropriate to the work because it is also a community centre for women who are interested and engaged in diverse spiritual practices and issues of empowerment. The centre is located in the milieu of feminist, body and soul oriented centres such as the Toronto Women's Bookstore, Sivananda Yoga Centre, and Good for Her, which sells sex-related toys, DVD's and hosts sex educational workshops catered to women. *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* has also been accepted into the 2011 CHI (Computer Human Interaction) *Feminist Interaction Design Workshop* in Vancouver and the ISTA (International School of Temple Arts) *Conference of Sexuality and Consciousness* in Toronto.

Through the process of completing this MFA research and paper, I am beginning to experience the power of research and writing to inspire feminist activism. I have developed a desire to think through the power of language as a means of bolstering my impact as a feminist. My battle for women's sexual agency has expanded beyond what is embodied in my artistic creations.

Central to *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* is the idea of creating an artwork birthed from the masturbatory act. Masturbation is not only an exploration of one's sexual desires and pleasures, it is also a powerful assertion of one's sexual

agency, which can only take shape within the context of the social sphere. It is a most direct act of "the personal is political." Today's capitalist and media-driven world induces a passive consumption of a sensationalistic and superficial sense of happiness; it is evermore urgent to gain control of our lives through a more conscious means of fulfillment. I suggest a return to the older active role in achieving euphoria. Masturbation is not only a source for the self-discovery of desire and pleasure, but also part of a political consciousness-raising. As Naomi Wolf boldly stated, "Orgasm is the body's natural call to feminist politics."⁸³

⁸³ Wolf, Naomi. "Feminist Fatale; a Reply to Camille Paglia." *The New Republic*, 1992, 23-25.

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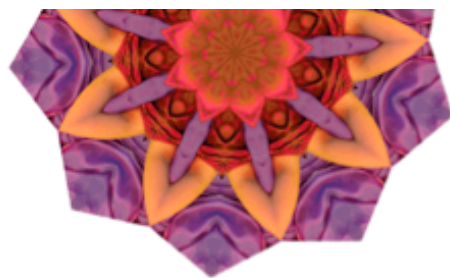
Appendix A. Consent and Age of Majority

To ensure age of majority, I requested that collaborators give me a copy of a government issued photo ID, which I verified against a live image of her (either in person or through video conferencing) if I did not already know her in person.

Once I confirmed the collaborator's age of majority, I emailed her the password to access the consent form and collaboration pages. For collaborators who lived outside Toronto and could not physically give me a digital copy of their recording, I provided them with a secure FTP link for transferring their file. I then downloaded their file to my password-protected hard disk and deleted it from the FTP server. The following is the consent form.

Euphoric Femme

progressive construction of woman's sexual image



Protected: consent

Artistic Collaboration Agreement:

I'm excited you will be an artistic collaborator! This agreement is to make sure we both feel comfortable with your participation and that we both understand how your creative contribution (sound and/or image recordings, or any other creative contributions) will be used. Please let me know if there's anything I missed and should address below.

As an Artistic Collaborator, you give me (the Artistic Director) **access to your creative contribution** for the sole purpose of creating Euphoric Femme artworks (final artworks for exhibition).

Your creative contribution, will remain confidential, except to me, as I will need access while editing it into the final artworks. I will safeguard it in a password protected digital folder at all times. Once your creative contribution becomes part of a final artwork, I will continue to safeguard it for future artworks and exhibitions.

Your creative contribution will be automatically anonymous. If you want public acknowledgment for your artistic contribution, please let me know.

Final artworks (which may or may not depict your creative contribution) will be documented for my website, as well as for media coverage and publicity. Please feel free to do the same with any **documentation of final artworks**.

As I want you to feel comfortable, please know you can end your artistic collaboration at any time. Just let me know and I will delete your recordings from the password protected folder, and from all final artworks and future exhibitions.

Finally, this note is to say I have confirmation that you are of age of majority, either because we already know each other and I know this is true, or because I took a copy of your government issued photo ID and verified it against a live image of yourself (either in person or over video conferencing).

Thank you for your interest in what I feel are very exciting self-empowering and political artworks! I look forward to your shaping of Euphoric Femme! <3

Teresa Ascencio, Artistic Director

PAGES

- * ... create your ornamentalized image!
- * ... create your sound!
- * ... create your video!
- * about
- * collaborators
- * consent
- * expansion
- * your stories & more!

ARTWORKS

- * online artwork
- * spring 2011 exhibition



Appendix B. Exhibition Documentation

The appendix is a DVD containing a video of the *Her Pleasure, Her Desire; Remix* installation as exhibited at the Fleishman Gallery, Toronto, in April 2011. This accompanying material is available upon request from the Ontario College of Art and Design Library. Anyone requesting the material may view it in the library or pay to have it copied under the aforementioned Creative Commons license agreement.