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The Metaphors of Spatial Merging: The Female Body as House in the Work of Mary Caponegro, Louise Bourgeois, and Francesca Woodman[1]

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Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar once asked, if a pen is a metaphorical penis entitling men to have authority over the creative process, whence should women derive their creative powers; or in other words, with what *organ* can women generate texts? By saying "women have sexual organs more or less everywhere" (252) Luce Irigaray gave the answer by suggesting that woman's creative organ is their body. *Ecriture Feminine* which translates roughly as feminine writing or writing in the feminine mode, implies writing from or by the female body. According to Helene Cixous, feminine writing would constitute a counter language which has a subversive potential to explode the oppressive structures of conventional thought and language; giving woman the ownership and the authorship of their own bodies that have been denied to them. She says, "By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions" (Cixous 116).

As Cixous's words suggest, women's relationship to their bodies has been problematic since the ancient times. Cast in the role of the body by the "rational, disembodied" men, women have been seen as a lack or an anomaly because of the morphology of their sexual organs. They have been reduced to sexual objects to be looked at or to be owned because of the materiality of their bodies, and because of their reproductive faculties, they have been expelled from the public space and relegated to the private space of the house.

In spite of differences in detail, every human society uses the difference between male and female genital morphology to classify individuals and to assign them social, economic, political and sexual positions in society.

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The conceptualization of female biology as an aberration of the male norm in Western thought, has engendered an insidious form of essentialism—biologism—in which women's essence is defined on the virtue of their biological characteristics. As Elizabeth Grosz maintains, biologism is often based on some form of reductionism in that social and cultural factors are seen to be the effects of biological causes (48). Since women are tied to the functions of reproduction and nurturance, a biologist/essentialist ordering of society limits women's social and psychological capacities denying them an equal position and place in society. Consequently, women and men have different status in terms of control of property, control of labor, and political participation (Spain 3). As Daphne Spain explains, throughout history and across cultures, geographic and architectural spatial arrangements have fortified differences between men and women: "Women and men are spatially segregated in ways that reduce women's access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women's lower status relative to men's. "Gendered spaces" separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege" (3).

The gendered construction of space has been elaborated by many feminist scholars. Elizabeth Grosz in *Time, Space and Perversity* shows how the notion of the *chora* (space), that Plato describes in *Timaeus* as an indescribable, labile and unstable concept, has a direct albeit often unacknowledged link with femininity as it is associated with the sexually coded terms of "mother," "nurse," "receptacle," and "imprint bearer." In *Timaeus* where Plato attempts to explain the genesis of the universe, he sets up a series of binary oppositions that have become the hallmarks of Western philosophical thought: the distinctions between being/becoming, the intelligible/sensible,the ideal/material, the divine/mortal, all of which can be said to represent the distinction between the perfect world of reason and the imperfect material world (Grosz 113). According to Plato the passage through the perfect to the imperfect; (from the form to the reality) is made possible by *chora*; the space necessary for the existence of material objects (Grosz 114). According to Grosz, this intermediary space of the *chora* that Plato describes as a "receptacle" is highly feminine; even maternal: "*Chora* can only be designated by . . . [her] function: to hold, nurture, bring into the world. . . . *[C]hora* has neither existence nor becoming. *Not* to create or produce—this is the function of the father, the creator, god, the Forms—but to nurse, to support, surround, protect, incubate, to sort, to engender . . ." (115).

According to Grosz, the idea that in reproduction it is the father who gives all the specific characteristics to incubation provided by the mother has its roots in Plato's explanation in *Timaeus*. The erasure of woman's defining

role in procreation, and her consequent erasure from the society as an active agent on the virtue of her biological capacities, result in a gender-stratification that accords men a higher status than women as a group, assigning the latter a subservient position that man exploits and abuses to their own ends. Moira Gatens's statement: "the female body in our culture, is seen and no doubt often 'lived' as an *envelope, vessel, or receptacle*" (41), seems to support Grosz's reading of the Platonian chora. In a similar manner Kathleen M. Kirby accentuates the link between the female body and space:

> Gender ideology . . . not only determines our interactions in space, but defines us as space. "Woman" connotes a space that is penetrable, susceptible, passive, submissive, imploding, collapsing upon itself; "man" derives from a space assumed to be expansive, rigid and intrusive. (137)

This paper deals with the work of three women artists; the Italian American short story writer Mary Caponegro, the French American painter and sculptor, Louise Bourgeois, and the American photographer with an Italian name, Francesca Woodman. Producing their work in the male oriented spaces of literature and arts, Bourgeois, Caponegro and Woodman, through their different mediums of expression comment on the relationship between domestic space and the female body, and reveal the anonymity and self-effacement that comes with the territory. Through their work they show how, in Elizabeth Grosz's words:

> The containment of women within a dwelling that they did not build nor was even built for them—can only amount to a homelessness, within the very home itself; it becomes the space of duty of endless chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of the affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense and erasure of the self, the space of domestic violence and abuse, the space that harms as much as it isolates women. (122)

All three artists, in their respective works take the female body as their point of artistic departure, as Cixous has suggested, and challenge and subvert traditional roles attributed to women by expressing their anger, alienation, isolation and entrapment within a body that has not been defined by them, and their confinement in a domestic space/role that is not of their choosing. By focusing on the female body in their works, these three women artists produce "a new space of comprehension in which the body becomes nothing less than a new source of understanding equal to mind" (Komar 94).

Apart from their shared theme of psychological and physical entrapment, the techniques they employ are also similar. All three artists make use of boxes not only as objects but also as forms permeating the structure of their artistic medium. The tightly contained narrative space of Caponegro's story doubles the structure of the house her character inhabits; the box-like structure of the houses that incorporate Bourgeois's women in her *Femme-Maison* paintings point to the psychological dimension of women's entrapment in the domestic role. Furthermore, both Bourgeois and Woodman have been associated with the feminist art movement of the 1970s and both make use of the figure of the female nude; challenging and appropriating its male monopoly in their own representations of the figure from a female perspective. In *The Nude Male: A New Perspective,* Margaret Walters explored the gendered conceptualization of the nude figure:

> Over the centuries of western civilization, the male nude has carried a much wider range of meanings, political, religious and moral, than the female. The male nude is typically public: he strides through the city squares, guards public buildings, is worshipped in the church. The female nude on the other hand, comes into her own only when art is geared to the tastes and erotic fantasies of private consumers. (8)

Through her nude women in *Femme-Maison* paintings Bourgeois, on the one hand, perpetuates the anonymity of the female nude; while, on the other hand, she disrupts the scopophilic tendencies of the viewers by denying them a complete vision of the figure in her hybridization of the female body with the house. Furthermore, Bourgeois also challenges the tradition of the passive "reclining nude" by making her women stand on their two feet and in a constant effort at communicating with the world. Francesca Woodman on the other hand, in her nude self-portraits, disrupts the easy consumption of her corporeal form by constantly fragmenting her body, putting it into highly unnatural shapes and often refusing to become the central point of attention either by appearing at the corner of the photograph or by becoming incorporated by the objects or the structure that surrounds her. Woodman's choice of the square format, over the horizontal, as Eva Rus argues, is deliberate, as it creates a constricted space (box-like) in which a viewer is made aware of how the body is framed and constrained within the physical limitations of the interior spaces she chooses to use as her setting (14). Bourgeois, Caponegro and Woodman, in their respective metaphorical conflations of the female body with the architecture of the house,

provide a criticism of the limited roles, functions and space women are allowed to occupy in society, based mainly on their biology.

"The Daughter's Lamentation," the opening story in Mary Caponegro's *The Complexities of Intimacy* (2001), is the complex account of the "intimate" relationship between a daughter and an architect father, rendered through the daughter's interior monologue making the interior space of her mind identical with the space of her text. Basically a story of patriarchal violence and rape, the narrative represents multiple forms of violation of female spaces, ranging from the internal female spaces of the daughter's womb and mind to the transgression of her private space within the house she co-habits with her father. The daughter remains nameless throughout the story, so does the father, however throughout the narrative the father is referred to with a capital F, pointing to patriarchal domination.

After her sisters have gone and her mother died the daughter has remained behind "out of filial piety, nobility or stupidity" (11), to take care of her aging father. The house they inhabit had been built (or at least designed) by the father, and the daughter seems constantly at a loss trying to find her way in the labyrinthine construction of the house, never being able to reach the middle: "I am up, I am down, I've never quite arrived . . . never stationary, my feet perpetually between steps" (16). Situated next to a lake, the house is highly gothic, gloomy and dark, eliciting uncanny sensations for the daughter: "the house has taken on a quality of inaccessibility, awkwardness, as strong a word as threat may be truest" (24). As she explains,

> The house . . . conforming to no law with which I am acquainted is a kind of wood box slightly skew not salt box, neither hat nor shoe, a leaning tower without a Pisa's dignity, haphazard, squat and deep within, a strange conglomerate of spaces extending from cellar to attic, each appearing infinite, made separate instead of connected by a series of steps, altogether unfinished yet cramped. (13)

In his book *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely,* Anthony Vidler identifies the uncanny with all the phobias associated with space including, "'la peur des espaces' or agoraphobia . . . [and] its obverse, claustrophobia," arising mainly from the interior space of an individual's mind (6). As Sigmund Freud explained in his essay on the uncanny in 1919, uncanny arose when something that once seemed homely—*heimlich*—was transformed into *unheimlich*, unhomely (Vilder 6). The daughter's spatial estrangement and

obvious disorientation in the house are provoked by the unexpected violation of her body by her father in the family home, turning the once secure and familiar space of the house into a strange and threatening territory; from the homely to the unhomely.

The way the daughter describes the house also makes use of the symbolism of boxes (suggestive of the irrational and the unconscious) revealing the daughter's psychological and physical entrapment—something we also see in Bourgeois's and Woodman's work. Furthermore, the structure of the house doubles the daughter's narration as her narrative is equally labyrinthine, with no particular telos. Just as the house that she inhabits is unfinished, in fragments—so is the daughter and her narrative, she hardly ever completes a sentence and seems not to know anything for certain, the majority of her statements are in the either/or format. This technique of "mise en abyme" that Caponegro employs points to the parallelism between the daughter's (woman's) enclosure in the patriarch's physical space and her containment in the conceptual universe of patriarchy. This idea is also invoked later when she confides in her mother the father's rape: "'Oh no, don't give me one more thing to bear,' my mother said when I attempted to confide, as if all the weight of civilization had finally stooped her, reduced her, the collective grandeur of those monuments, remnants, fragments: Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the Berlin Wall; the Temple at Delphi, the Taj Mahal; the Fountain of Trevi, the Colosseum, and Bernini's angels, I fear, instead of bearing her aloft in ethereal grandeur, were like weights around her wrists and ankles, dragging her silently into the Tevere, so much stone" (19).

All the structures that Caponegro refers to in this section are masterpieces created by men either for religious, political or personal reasons. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, the production of a (male) world; the construction of an "artificial" environment, religion, philosophy, all point to the attempts of men to build a universe,

> upon the erasure of the bodies and contributions of women/mothers and the refusal to acknowledge the debt to the maternal body that they owe. They hollow out their own interiors and project them outward, and then require women as supports for this hollowed space. Women become the guardians of the private and the interpersonal, while men build conceptual and material worlds. (121)

The following quotation from the story, charged with double meaning supports Grosz's argument and unveils the similarities between the violation of nature and of the female body:

> bridges, roads and by extension buildings, are the marks man thrusts into the unsuspecting wilderness. This is craft: intrusion masked as intuition, this is clever alteration such that man can make himself creator in the guise of God to lay these marks upon the earth, thus persuading a perceiver they belong there. (23)

The expression, "unsuspecting wilderness" reinvokes the imagery of the daughter's violation by her father, his intrusion of her bodily space doubling that of nature's in the hands of male "world builders."

An architect by profession, the father has spent the large portion of his life travelling around the world to observe the architectural masterpieces and to find the secret behind an architecture that rhymes with nature (19). The outcome of all those years of observation and travel that is put into practice in the house that he has built however is far from reflecting the vision he must have acquired, pointing perhaps to its impossibility. The house, he has built is in decay, and its foundation is less than solid, so the daughter, who now feels like a protective parent to her father offers to support this structure "like Atlas supporting the world" (12): "Might I then catch the door before it makes the sound he cares so little for, offer an appendage as a hinge of sorts? I'd stay the door with hand or foot before it had a chance to slam . . ." (12). Her offering of her body as a support to the foundation of the house accentuates the erasure of the daughter's identity as a separate entity from the house that was built by her father. Her positioning of herself as a support for her father's house attests to her status of chora in the Platonic tradition.

As a matter of fact, the daughter is a cliche of the selfless woman, or the house-wife; whose only duty seems to be the guardianship of the male—in this case the patriarch's—order. Lacking an identity or a life of her own, she indulges in self-objectification, fetishization even; seeing herself through the other's eyes, what Sandra Bartky has called "a panoptical male connoisseur" seems to dominate her sense of self-awareness: "for instance, note my posture, bearing the drama of my silhouette, as I lean against a pillar just outside the station" or "my clavicle, that part of my anatomy which never failed to elicit admiraton on stage" (18).

As it has been suggested by John Berger and Laura Mulvey among others the daughter's sense of self is supplanted by a sense of being under the surveilling gaze of another, in particular that of her father. Lacking an identity the daughter fantasizes that she is a character of fiction: "ever my father's princess, my King,

my Lear, whose suffering I see and feel, and make, against my will, my own, my maker, my betrayer, why can't I abandon you abuser" (15). It is here that the daughter makes the reader realize for the first time, albeit implicitly, that the father has been abusing her sexually. This transgression is implied strongly in the leitmotif of "trapped sexuality." While speaking of her days as a ballerina the daughter says: "one is always leaping up or from or into the arms of a man whose sex is trapped in a stocking, like the squeezed face of a thief" (15), an image she invokes repetitively as she wonders, lost in the spaces of the house. The male sexuality described as entrapped in a stocking as the squeezed face of a thief suggests the unnatural hence the hidden nature of her sexual abuse by her father. As a thief enters a house, secretly, and has no right to be there, so does her father enter her body. Moreover, the imagery of leaping to and fro, suggests that the daughter is unable to find stability or a stable point with which to define herself. However, stasis is also dangerous, threatening, she has to keep moving, as anytime she seems to reach stasis the abuse is repeated:

> I still nearly gasp each time I *finally* find the ground floor only to find *him* in the place I dont expect, a place which strikes me as *unnatural*, at very least inconsistent with convention . . . just as certain people stand too close to those with whom they speak, transgressing tacit boundaries of private space, this intimacy transgresses some more subtle spatial code. (23, italics mine)

In this section the structure of the house and the body of the daughter are rendered in equal terms, making it difficult for the reader to pinpoint which of the two constructs the daughter is referring to. This doubling of the house with the body of the daughter points to the impossibility of imagining the daughter's identity outside the boundaries of the home; her lack of an identity and agency is underscored in the overlapping descriptions of her bodily space with the space of the house.

Ignored by the mother and covered up by the family doctor, this rape, the transgression of the daughter's bodily space and integrity seems to have dislocated her psychologically and rendered her physically unable to navigate the labyrinthine structure of the house. Furthermore the fact that the daughter is unable to openly articulate the abuse of her father is implied through the reinvocation of the imagery of trapped sexuality: "'Oh no,' like a muffled scream of horror, as from a mouth inside the squeezing skin of a stocking" (20). Like a ghost, the daughter is doomed to haunt the house her father built never to wander out of it nor ever to reach equilibrium; a sense of separate, stable identity (McLaughlin 146). The story ends on the lamentation of the daughter:

> How shall I bear to maintain this curious house, which of course will be my legacy to inherit? I will dance as if in ritual atonement or bereavement- I who must atone for other's sins, I whose grief precedes this one—I'll dance before the setting sun to keep the illusion of equilibrium as I nightly drown. (27)

The daughter's words are echoed by Luce Irigaray, who in her *Elemental Passions* summarizes the predicament of women:

> I was your house. And when you leave, abandoning this dwelling place, I do not know what to do with these walls of mine. Have I ever had a body other than the one you constructed according to your own idea of it? Have I ever experienced a skin other than the one you wanted me to dwell within? (qtd. in Grosz 122)

The traumatic history of the daughter's abuse by her father has curtailed her development as an autonomous being, and she lacks the means to fully articulate and negotiate her problematic past; and art seems to offer her no solace, as her experience as a ballerina results only in a "stilted corporeal narrative" (15), doubling/exacerbating the bodily oppression she has been subjected to in real life.

The issues of abuse, anonymity, self effacement, objectification of the female self, and entrapment that were dealt with in Caponegro's story, are elaborated by Bourgeois in her *Femme-Maison*[2] series: initially a series of drawings and paintings Bourgeois made in the 1940s and then returned to in the 1980s in the sculptural form, the *Femme-Maisons* depict the embodiment of the house by the female body. In the early drawings and paintings the *Femme-Maisons* are female nudes who have domestic architecture placed on the upper part of their bodies. In all of them we can see an arm or two—and sometimes three—as if waving or signalling for help, as if trying to say "Hey! See me I am here." The positioning of the house on the upper body replacing or embodying the female figure's head—which is the site of rational thinking—is significant suggesting that woman's thinking capacities are walled in by her domestic role—and her nakedness, while on the one hand is suggestive of her bodily existence, her identification with materiality, is also a comment Bourgeois makes on the objectification of

[2] The *Femme-Maison* series of Louise Bourgeois that have been translated as Women-Houses or House-women, could also be translated as house-wives since "femme" in French also means wife.

the female body as sexual object. By merging the domestic house with a naked female form Bourgeois seems to embody the two constricted roles women are assigned in society: house wife and sexual object. Bourgeois's criticism of the gendered stereotypes and limited range of roles attributed to women in society resonated with the concerns of the 1970's American feminism; her women-houses were seen emblematic of "'the feminine mystique' of their desires for something more than [a] husband and . . . children and [a] home" (Friedan 29).

In one of the earliest examples of the *Femme Maison*[3] series made in 1947, Bourgeois depicts a female figure that has bars where the sexual organs need to be, suggestive of woman's imprisonment in her body, and through her sexuality and reproductive faculties, her entrapment behind the walls of the house. Just as the daughter in Caponegro's story supported her father's house as "Atlas supporting the world," in the *Femme Maison* drawings, Bourgeois's women seem to be carrying the burden of their domesticity on their shoulders. Furthermore, like the daughter's anonymity in the story, the recognizable features of these women—their faces—are hidden behind the structure of the house and its dark windows offer no glimpse of their distinguishing features implying that these women have no individual identity. The erasure of the distinguishing features of the female body is a theme shared also by Francesca Woodman. As Deborah Wye has commented:

> [In the *Femme-Maison* series] woman's most obvious sign of her identity, her face has been replaced by a house. The implication is devastating. Domesticity becomes the very definition of these women since they have no other means by which to speak. They are prisoners of the house and also hide behind its facade thereby both denying their identity through this challenge to, as well as determination of, their wholeness. (17)

Furthermore, the round, curved form of the bodies of Bourgeois's women are rendered in direct opposition with the rigid, rectilinear shape of the houses that engulf them. In her article, "The Squaring of the Circle: The Male

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[3] Due to copyright reasons I cannot include the *Femme Maison* pictures in this article. For those who are interested, please see the following links respectively:

< http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/oct/07/louisebourgeois>,

<www.artnet.com/.../artmarketwatch9-11-07-4jpg>,

< http:www.recirca.com/rviews/louisebourgeois/index-shtml>.

Takeover of Power in Architectural Shapes," Cillie Rentmester concentrates on the "curved/angular polarity in architecture. Rentmester observes that the architecture of the matriarchal societies of the Mediterrenean and Near East that had been predominantly oval and round shaped, was supplanted by the angular architecture of Greece, suggesting the "male takeover of power in architectual shapes" (qtd. in Komar 90). The juxtaposition of the angular shapes of the houses with the curved bodies of the women who support them point to the unnatural and intrusive qualities of these structures, an idea also invoked in Caponegro's story.

The *Femme-Maison* sculptures, on the other hand, dating approximately forty years from their painted precursors, continue the critical and anxious streak of the earlier figures. In a sculpture made in 2001, the female body is now shown as positioned horizontally, as a landscape upon which the house is situated like a tombstone in a graveyard. The figure of the woman is naked and mutilated (like the classical statues), she lies on her back, her head, her arms and legs have been cut off, she has been rendered static, in other words killed. She no longer has the eyes that were previously hidden behind the dark windows, nor the arms with which to ask for help, no matter how ineffective the gesture would have been in the previous artwork. It goes without saying that of course, through her anonymous female figures imprisoned within the structure of the house Bourgeois is far from conveying a message of passive acceptance. On the contrary, in her body-based paintings and sculpture, Bourgeois's work epitomizes the subversive feminist art movement of the 1970s, characterized by its exploration of gendered identity and a critique of gendered stereotypes.

Like Caponegro and Bourgeois, Woodman also seems to have been particularly interested in the construction of the female self, the female body and its embodiment by the domestic space of the house. Benjamin Buchloch maintains that Woodman's photography is,

> An attempt to articulate female desire outside of the system of patriarchal representation, and to articulate it with photography, the medium that is both the most permeated and the most promising project to dismantle the symbolic. (49)

In her photographs, which she had referred to as "ghost photos," Woodman often poses naked in decaying domestic interiors and her face is seldom discernible. She looks more transparent than tangible, and seems to be enveloped by the space or the structure of the domestic interiors she chooses for her mise-en-scene.

In one of her *Space*^{2} photos,[4] Woodman appears to be immersed in the wall, and a wall paper passes through her; whether or not she is being entombed, or coming out from the wall -- one can hardly tell. Her body can be seen only in fragments, the fact that the central point of attention is on the belly button -- the locus that binds the mother to her baby through the umbilical cord, suggesting to the viewer that it is primarily the woman's reproductive role and function that casts her in the role of the body and domestic servant, entrapping her behind the walls of both.

In another *Space*^{2} photograph, Woodman again appears one with the wall, the lower part of her body is painted the same color with the wall, while her face is blurred. Her posture and positioning of her left hand on the wall invokes the feeling that she has been cornered and has no place to go, with her back against the wall. Her naked body adds to her unease; it is as if she is trying to evade the gaze of the viewer by merging herself with the wall. In House # 4, Woodman is in a reclining position, one that reminds the viewer of a woman in labor, her face is again hidden behind the column of the fireplace, the fireplace itself invoking the image of a woman's sexual organ. The upper portion of her body seems to be in motion, as if in a struggle to get away, but the fireplace looks as if it is crashing her. She seems unable to move under its weight, and cannot escape her destiny as a woman.

Woodman's immersion in her surroundings, and mimicry of the objects around her can also be explained in the light of Roger Callois's article "Mimicry and Legendary Psychastenia" as explored by Grosz in her book *Volatile Bodies*. Callois's paper is an ethnological and sociological analysis of the behavior of insects that mimic other insects or "feign" their surroundings or other creatures. Callois parallels the insect's ability for bodily imitation to psychosis, described by Pierre Janet as "legendary psychastenia" in which the psychotic is unable to locate himself or herself in a position in space (Grosz 46). Grosz explains this phenomenon of "depersonalization by assimilation to space" experienced both by insects and by the psychotic as:

> Both the psychotic and the insect renounce their rights to occupy a perspectival point, abandoning themselves to being spatially located by/as others. The primacy of one's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another, for

[4] Please see the following links:

<http://www.berk-edu.com/RESEARCH/francescawoodman/pages/woodman010html>.

<http://www.heenan.net/woodman/providence/rhode-islan-13.shtml>.

> whom the subject is merely a point in space and not the focal point organizing space. (47)

If identity is the distinction of a being from its environment, the psychastenic has no identity, as it can be no longer distinguished from its surroundings. Legendary psychastenia and the psychastenic body can be applied as a metaphor to explain the work of Caponegro, Bourgeois and Woodman, respectively; underlining the criticism inherent in their work of the traditional roles women are assigned in society that deny them a fully developed—if any—subjectivity.

Despite the temporal gap and their different modes of expression, through their body- based narratives, Caponegro, Bourgeois and Woodman reveal the unequal positioning of women in patriarchal societies and explore what it means to be an artist in such a milieu. Their work articulates the contradiction inherent in the experience of a woman artist: of taking on the position of a subject in a society that traditionally has treated her as an object, making their work an arena to establish a sense of personal and sexual identity (Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro 40). By using the traditionally male art forms of literature, painting and photography, these women artists appropriate the infected modes of expression, and turn them into transgressive and liberating instruments that allow them to explore what it means to be a woman, from a female point of view.

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