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Black Monochrome

THE NEGRESS AND MODERNITY

FIGURE 1—*Vanessa Beecroft,* VB19, *March 10, 1996. Documentary photo by Avis Mandel of performance at the Renaissance Society. Courtesy the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago*

ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 10, 1996, SIX BLACK WOMEN STOOD silently and nearly nude among photographs, video monitors, and gallery visitors at the group exhibition *Persona*.[1] As part of her performance work *VB19* (1996), Italian contemporary artist Vanessa Beecroft had asked these women to "stand nearly still for a few hours ... silent and lightly dressed. Nothing will happen and [you will] just have to wait until the end."[2] Beecroft described the work to Renaissance Society director Susanne Ghez as a "black monochrome," and later recalled it as having "no political content."[3] It is the work of this essay to consider Beecroft's assertion by looking closely the work's exploration of racial performance, questioning for whom it is political and teasing out its complexities in the context of 1990s identity politics.

In this documentary image taken by commercial photographer Avis Mandel *(fig. 1)*, one of the six models moves through the gallery space. Outfitted in the "nude" undergarments specified by the artist, she is notably theatrical, leaning back dramatically.[4] One can imagine that this gesture exaggerates the static pose requested by the artist. The model's compressed mouth and averted eyes communicate her growing impatience with her assigned task. Her slender arms are bent behind her back, exposing her pierced navel and soft belly, which is cinched by gauzy panty hose. Her sand-colored bra is rendered translucent by an overhead light, revealing her pierced nipples and

casting shadows across her neck, chest and stomach. A temporary gallery wall evenly divides the space behind her. On the right one sees a figure and a framed image; the other side is dimly lit. A window curtain is drawn; one can discern three or four gallery visitors looking at the wall perpendicular to the model and the camera. But in this photograph the model is center stage, surrounded by her "set" (the gallery space), her audience, and the camera's frame.

One can imagine the surprise of the well-bundled Chicagoans who encountered these sparsely clothed models in a contemporary gallery space: the Renaissance Society, an independent exhibition venue located within the neo-Gothic buildings of the University of Chicago. Yet *VB19* was not merely disruptive for exhibition visitors. It was also an aberration in Beecroft's practice. It is conceptually and visually distinct from more recent and familiar performances and the resulting photographs put forward by the artist, her gallerists, and art critics. Beecroft frequently presents near perfect bodies—literally fashion models—in expensive accessories: wigs, heels, lingerie, swimwear. *VB35* (1998; *fig. 2*) is one of the artist's best-known works; an image of this performance was used as the cover for the September 1998 issue of *Artforum*—a particularly laudable honor for an artist only five years out of art school. In the image the atrium of the Guggenheim Museum and the audience are made near absent. Some critics have read VB35 as empowering and confrontational, yet one cannot deny the uneven dynamic between the audience and the performers they observe. The models, a few completely nude, stand in a strict-grid formation. In this image, all the bodies pictured are white. As a result, they call forth the art historical nude and the feminist's concept of the gaze. Exposed in the atrium of the Guggenheim Museum, Beecroft's models were vulnerable from many perspectives.

FIGURE 2—*Vanessa Beecroft,* vb35.377.ms, *1998. Documentary photo of performance at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Courtesy the artist*

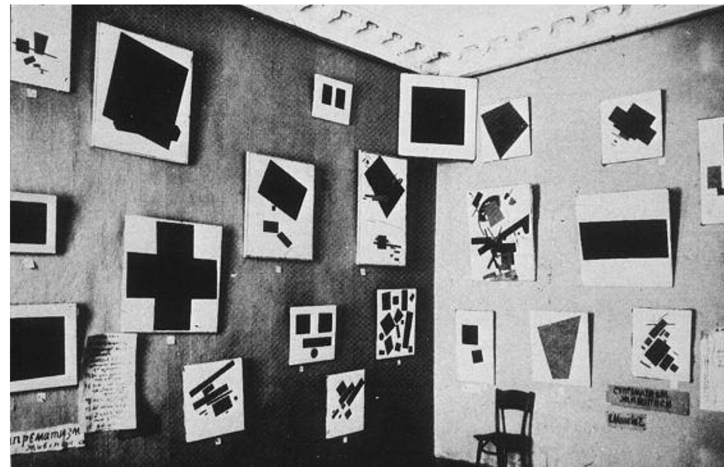
In the mid-1990s, Beecroft's live performances at exhibition openings were described by art critic and writer Elizabeth Janus as "in a way both provocative and healing."[5] Art critics like Janus read Beecroft's work, which includes drawings, performances, and documentary photographs, in the context of the feminist art practice established in the 1960s by artists such as Carolee Schneeman and reinforced in the late 1970s by artists like Cindy Sherman. Janus's reading suggests that, although Beecroft literally *used* other bodies in her works, she did so to undermine sexist tropes of desire, power, and voyeurism. By 2001 such assertions had come under fire by the art performance collective Toxic Titties, which intervened in a Beecroft performance as a form of critical dialogue. In their 2006 article "Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft," they grounded their actions in feminist theory—a sensible choice considering Beecroft's loaded yet under-articulated deployment of the nude female body.[6] Unlike earlier critics, who affirmed Beecroft's work in the context of feminist art, Titties' members contrast Beecroft's performances against work such as Schneeman's, pointing specifically to her *Interior Scroll* (1975). Schneeman was an invited speaker at the Telluride Film Festival. Her 1977 performance of *Interior Scroll* was an unanticipated intervention in the panel discussion "The Erotic Woman." In the work she stands before the audience, removes a small scroll from her vagina and then reads the text. Although the audience did not physically touch Schneeman during the performance of this piece, they were confronted by the strange violence of the artist literally pulling her words from her loins. This renegade, unscheduled event questioned the status of the female nude by forcing audience members to watch as the artist enacted the work on her body.[7] In such a performance, both artist and audience are implicated, while in Beecroft's performance practice, the artist is absent.

In a recent lecture, art writer Claire Bishop used the term "delegated performance" to describe works such as Beecroft's.[8] In Bishop's estimation, Beecroft's particular brand of performance is contingent on the artist hiring "non-professionals" who are recruited based on their identity (among other things). As a result, these individuals mediate between the artist and the gallery; the artist is absent from the "stage" of the performance. This relationship between the artist and her performers, who are more objects than they are individuals, distinguishes her work from preceding art performance of the 1970s (see again Schneeman). Artists Santiago Sierra, Maurizio Cattelan, and Jeremy Deller employed similar strategies in the mid- and late 1990s. Their practices were critiqued primarily on ethical grounds, particularly in the case of Sierra, who was frequently charged with "delegating down" by hiring subjects who were economically impoverished and culturally disenfranchised.

VB19: Black Monochrome

VB19 (1996) BEGAN AS A PERFORMANCE THAT CALLS FOR SPATIAL and temporal understanding as well as more formal, aesthetic readings. Beecroft describes this work as apolitical. In a recent interview, exhibition curator Hamza Walker stated that "for Beecroft the work does not have political components and it is a black monochrome, no problem. But the issue of *for whom VB19* was political, or has social ramifications are different. And we know all the while that... we are at 58th and Ellis."[9] Walker suggests that although the artist can claim that a work is apolitical, she cannot escape the fact that the context within which it operates is politicized. *VB19*, for instance, was presented as part of *Persona*, an exhibition with a curatorial mandate to transgress biological determinism in terms of gender and race. Opening in the spring of 1996, *Persona* was located squarely in a con-

FIGURE 3—*Installation view of* 0.10: The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings, *1915. Courtesy the University of California, San Diego*



text where identity politics and multiculturalism figured largely both in art exhibitions and in critical theory.[10] Taking place following the culture wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and three years after the controversial but influential 1993 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Persona* included artists who had figured prominently in conflicts over funding between the government and the art community. The exhibition's checklist included, most notably, Lyle Ashton Harris, Thomas Allen Harris, Catherine Opie, and Sharon Lockhart.[11]

Beecroft's use of the word "monochrome" makes reference to the works and ideas of Russian Suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich, whose early twentieth-century writings and Color-field paintings called for the demise of figuration and the rise of "painting as an end itself." Malevich's 1915 exhibition *0.10 or The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures* provided this writer with a way of looking at and reading *VB19*. Based on images of the Malevich exhibition at the Dobychina Gallery in Saint Petersburg *(fig. 3)*, it is clear that Malevich was aware of the significance of amassment—as seen in the grouping and installation of the approximately twenty artworks. The grainy black-and-white photograph shown here directs our attention toward the corner where two walls, covered with paintings, meet the ceiling. This is where one finds the work *Black Square* (1915). The significance of the painting's placement has been frequently noted, as this corner is the honorific center of the exhibition—the spot where religious icons traditionally rest.[12] By situating the work thus, the artist replaces the religious symbol, yet, in doing so, Malevich also marks its absence.

VB19 performs a similar act of displacement in the play between the absence of the artist's body (that is, according to one's reading in the present; this interpretation was perhaps not evident in 1996) and the figural body (as represented by the tradition of the white female

nude), a dynamic echoed in performance documentation. Still, Beecroft's Malevich reference (implied in her use of "monochrome") can be read as intentionally duplicitous in that her practice, so dependent on the body, does not resist figuration. Her work, so grounded in the endurance required of the participants and their tangible, material pain certainly undermines the aim of "zero form" which Malevich sought in his work. Although Beecroft uses the terms "black" and "monochrome," for her they illustrate difference—a recognizable other—rather than the obliteration of form that Malevich proposed.

VB19 was installed in the gallery on a private university campus, in the diverse but highly regulated neighborhood of Hyde Park, not far from the South Side of Chicago, which has over the last several decades been perceived as economically impoverished and black.[13] Although possibly not aware of these layers, Beecroft—by way of the six models' bodies—highlighted the cultural and economic distance between the gallery space and the university campus and the perceived "outside" of Chicago's racially and ethnically separate neighborhoods. One cannot silence these contexts, the raced bodies of the models or the histories of displaying such bodies. *VB19* registers as both racial and as dependent on infrequently acknowledged connections between blackness, performance, commerce, and art institutions.

Through strategies of display, Beecroft deploys race (under the guise of color) in an exercise of power, moving from the body (specifically the black female body as is the case with *VB19*) to objects (in becoming the artwork *VB19*), and then back to bodies as metonym. The argument here is not that Beecroft displays these women to illustrate inferiority. Rather, *VB19* calls specifically on particular histories of display and performance, as well as a collective cultural memory. Moreover, despite Beecroft's claims that her choice of black bodies is an aesthetic one, in using these "other" bodies she asserts her power as author over both feminine bodies and bodies of color.

Documentary photographs of the performance are, in part, *about* race, that is to say, the primary and central subjects in these images are nearly nude black women. This is not to force any moral judgment upon the initial reading, to imply a universal understanding of the photographic record of *VB19* or to suggest some expected reaction from those who view this image. It is the model's anonymity and availability—exposed, pictured, and consumed—that makes her symbolic. In this case, the image and the body are not autonomous; they are tethered.

This figure and Beecroft's utilization of such bodies evokes art historian Huey Copeland's theoretical Negress—that is, "the black female body which is everywhere marked by the trauma of colonial enterprise, the dislocation of transatlantic slavery and the logic of international capital as mere flesh and recalcitrant thing."[14] Copeland's text "In the Wake of the Negress" charts this figure through the peculiar history of collecting and categorizing at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, which is relevant to an analysis of Beecroft's own collecting and categorization of bodies in *VB19* and in *VB54* (2004). The latter work was part of *Terminal 5*, a group exhibition curated by Rachel K. Ward at the John F. Kennedy International Airport. As is characteristic of her practice, for this work the artist asked approximately 40 models to stand silently and nearly nude in the airport. The African American models' skin, presumably different shades of brown, was painted a uniform black. They wore pink lipstick, small, tight Afro wigs, opaque black nipple covers (or small fabric bralettes), black briefs, black ballet flats, and silver ankle chains. With this accessory, Beecroft not so subtly implied that these women were to represent enslaved Africans. In the airport, a space dominated by the mostly voluntary movement of bodies, she

makes reference to less pleasant histories of travel. Yet elements within the work—such as the painfully forthright use of black face with the models' darkened skin and pink lips—literalizes Copeland's assertion in ways that can be read as objectifying and demeaning. Beecroft recognizes the "mark of trauma" on these particular bodies and exploits it, in later works such as *VB56* (2005) and *VB57* (2006), she will connect it with capital even more forcefully. In these examples, models, many of color, occupied Louis Vuitton's luxury retail space in Paris, sharing shelf and floor space with expensive leather handbags and other merchandise.[15]

Throughout history, black women's bodies and sexuality have been enmeshed with commerce. This phenomenon has been researched and recorded by theorists including Patricia Hill Collins, Sander Gillman, and Abdul Jan Mohammed. Copeland extends the work of these writers by articulating instances within the arts. This is important to *VB19* because Beecroft's practice "concedes completely" (to use Douglas Crimp's phrase) to exhibition and contemporary art practice.[16] Copeland continues: "The Negress stands at the boundary of hegemonic and resistive discourses within and beyond the walls of the Museum. For modern artists, to grasp for the Negress, to conjure her into being, is to collapse a limit, to bring the world unbearably close."[17] Beecroft required raced bodies like the African American models to construct her black monochrome—an aesthetic measure, a color. She "marked" the gallery with these models, using them to trace the space and expose the borders of decency.[18] The bodies in this work manifest Copeland's Negress; as he states later, they "trouble the boundary…within and beyond the museum walls."[19]

Beyond their nudity, which clearly distinguishes the model in figure one from audience members, it is the color of their bodies—excessive when situated in a gallery space ringed by Cobb Hall, the

University of Chicago campus, and finally the "revisioned" Hyde Park and finally the black South Side of Chicago—that emphasizes the distance between the white gallery interior (here represented both as cultural and architectural construct) from a more murky exteriority. Beecroft, a white, Italian artist, "grasped the Negress and conjured her into being," but this process remains incomplete. In Copeland's history of both objects and people, the artists he describes are of African descent, and in choosing these subjects he points to MoMA's practice of conflating biological essentialism—race—with their works' content or the institution's reading of their practices. Arguably Beecroft's own body is separate and different from the model's bodies in *VB19*; she is thin, white, and clothed, and she is not visible in images taken during the performance or the opening of *Persona*. Beecroft summons the Negress using a far more familiar strategy. Like Edouard Manet's model Laure or Picasso's African masks, the Negress is for Beecroft a figure of exchange and commerce, an object at once erotic and distant from both herself and her audience.[20] For Beecroft, black women's bodies thus become personal symbols of the other; she has likened them to objects "to whom I relate" but who are also "clandestine" and "material."[21]

The Other *Other*

THE SLIPPAGE BETWEEN SUBJECTIVITIES IS NOT LIMITED TO Beecroft's work, nor to the presumably "empowered" subject. As is often true with delegated performance, the employed performer may make assumptions about the delegating artist.[22] This was the case with the *VB19* models—the shift in their opinions from casting to actual meetings with Beecroft sheds light on *how* it was possible for a white artist to present six black bodies seemingly uncontested by the performance participants. Exhibition curator Hamza Walker suggests that the models conceived of Beecroft, an Italian, as "other." He states:

> *Performer Ayanna U worked at the Video Data Bank and was making work dealing with depictions of black erotica and representations of pleasure. She and a few other models had concerns about meeting with the artist, Vanessa Beecroft. Ayanna had a whole political antenna let's say in terms of what the exchange was going to be. Afterwards Ayanna said "Oh she's great. The accent helped a lot in terms of, she is not American." Tracy [Ramsey], another of the six was like "Yeah that actually was good, her coming from Italy, like being an outsider"…[it] set up distance between them [artist and model].*[23]

In the interview excerpt above Walker recalls the distinctions made by *VB19* models as a result of Beecroft's "non-American-ness." Walker first establishes that the models, Ayanna U in particular, had a working art historical knowledge and as a result had reservations about participating in *VB19*. Her concerns were assuaged by Beecroft's status as an *other* herself—European rather than European-American. It is important, however, to note that practices of human exhibition are not only an American phenomena. Moreover, Beecroft's Italian citizenship does not exempt her from criticism for deploying stereotypes and othering her subjects. It is not clear from Walker's recollection whether the models related to Beecroft's status as outsider or were reassured by the assumption that she lacked knowledge about race relations in the U.S. Yet the implication of the above quote is that the models felt comfortable participating in her project because they believed Beecroft was not fully aware of the implications of the performance *VB19*. Although the models' concerns with *VB19* (one can deduce from the quote that their reservations were connected to the presentation of nearly nude black bodies) were reduced, the root of their apprehensions were not, in that across Europe human exhibition occurred historically and such abuses live on in the contemporary global context.

It is important to note that the models' social circumstances, particularly their relationship to traditional theatrical performances as opposed to contemporary art may have shaped their interpretation of the work. In theater, writers, directors or any form of author hire actors; this is not revelatory or unusual. As described in the introduction, a correspondence between contemporary visual artist and paid performer is a more recent development and to some, ethically contentious. In the same interview, Walker recalls casting models through contacts within Chicago's theater community (such as Cheryl Lynn Bruce and the Court Theater, also on the University of Chicago campus). As a result of the "mix" of participants—art makers, actors, and "non-professionals"—Beecroft's models came to the project with different references and expectations for the relationship between author, performer, and audience. In a recent interview, *VB19* model Mignon M. recalls that Beecroft wanted to test the effect of race on her installations. In other words, she wanted to see if, by using African American models exclusively, her project would be "different."[24] Interestingly, Mignon M. remembers the experience of the live performance as empowering. She states:

> *The thing that I remember is how oddly powerful I felt. I thought it would be really awkward and uncomfortable but there was something about being so completely disinterested that felt oddly powerful. [Beecroft's] thing was to just be disconnected and don't acknowledge the people, don't give them anything basically. . . . They were the ones, they being the viewers, that were uncomfortable. And maybe the power reversal as a black woman, with us so often being the ones who are ignored.* The invisible people.[25]

Mignon M.'s experience is an unanticipated byproduct of Beecroft's edict not to speak or make eye contact with guests. In taking this stance, the model (and perhaps others) deployed what bell

hooks terms "the oppositional gaze."[26] hooks defines this as an alternative to the binary between white male gaze and white female subject. In *VB19*, black bodies were of course *seen* as opposed to heard, and this would be arguably difficult to read as an empowering stance, in spite of the reflections of Mignon M. quoted above. Mignon M. apprehended that the performance, "would be really awkward and uncomfortable." When she states that the performance left her feeling "oddly powerful," it is in relation to her particular subjectivity and her ability in that moment (through the directions of the artist) to exploit rather than be exploited by looking. Such implementation of the oppositional gaze is more than a "not looking," rather it resists *seeing as one should be seen* and *being seen* in a particular (read disempowering) way. That is to say, by looking the subject counters the identity that others propose the other/Other to possess. It is a critical looking that realizes hooks's "pleasure of interrogation."[27]

The Negress, or Other (to neutralize gender for a moment), is central in the construction of modernity.[28] This figure's relationship between power, race, and black womanhood informed more than individual artistic practices or particular works; it also shaped institutions, both physically and conceptually. In the text "Museum Architecture and the Imperialism of Whiteness," historian Martin A. Berger suggests that beginning in the nineteenth century, the exteriors and interiors of art institutions, patron behavior, and of course, artworks represented advancement then understood as modern, progressive, and white.[29] This was the moment when a distinction was drawn between fine art and crafts (resulting in the establishment of separate departments or institutions) and entry into art museums was heavily regulated (in terms of both patrons and artworks).[30] As a result, many people lacked the "cultural capital" to fully participate in the arts. To put it more frankly, Berger argues that whiteness—the construction of it and the impetus to maintain it—shaped museum practices that continue into the present.

Looking again at figure one, we see more than a neutral gallery. It is a space loaded and embedded with whiteness. One can imagine the hushed voices and soft glances of the patrons disrupted by the frustrated black body of the models. In another documentary image of *VB19 (fig. 4)*, two of the six models stand against the white gallery wall. From the camera's perspective the models twist and turn their bodies toward each other. The audience—smartly dressed in warm winter wear—looks elsewhere, except for a woman in a red wool jacket. Although her back is turned, one can imagine her seeking eye contact, or some assurance in the model's faces. Instead the models look away and thrust themselves against the wall, a space they share with artist Sharon Lockhart's photograph *Untitled* (1996). Here one sees most explicitly the context (the gallery), the work of the audience (to observe) and the body of the model rendered troubling object. Historically, African Americans have been denied the "cultural capital" to appropriately participate in the white, bourgeois art context. Through *VB19* they alternatively enter as objects for observation. Yet their bodies, symbols of difference, figuratively "prop up" the walls of this enclave of modernism.

FIGURE 4 (OVERLEAF)—*Vanessa Beecroft,* VB19, *March 10, 1996. Documentary photo by Avis Mandel of performance at the Renaissance Society. Courtesy the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago*

Berger writes of the modernist impulse that there was an "assumption that European-Americans could absorb and assimilate racially inferior forms and traits before transforming them into something representing white culture.[31] By authoring and delegating in *VB19*, Beecroft not only made the model object she also called forth the figure of the Negress. Beecroft's name was associated and pictured with bodies that were not her own—in the traditional sense—and as a result, for gallery patrons the actions of the anonymous models became Beecroft's named (read authored) performance.[32] This image comes to represent not just her practice or the performance *VB19*, but Beecroft herself, as the model's body becomes associated with her own. Similarly, by situating her performances in the context of the contemporary art gallery and describing the work in purely aesthetic terms, Beecroft moved our perception of the models' bodies away from notions of black female subjectivity—a nod here again to Copeland's Negress—to the visual.[33] *VB19* can be read as a mid-1990s attempt to synthesize and represent, although it is difficult to extrapolate from Mandel's (or even Beecroft's) images which "black" the artist intended to represent.

Why is asserting the politics of *VB19* important when the work's author, Beecroft, resists such readings? Historian and critic Douglas Crimp writes, "politics is what art must deny."[34] When Beecroft casts her work as having no political content she aligns her practice with a lineage of art history, exhibition, and commerce that denies her position. In effect, she distances herself (even in the moment of her inclusion) from those nude bodies she orchestrates for display and the other raced, queer, and/or feminist bodies exhibited in *Persona*. Crimp suggests in his article "The Art of Exhibition" that knowledge and criticism at the postmodern turn are in crisis and seeking to maintain their authority, which was established through certain methodologies, categorizations, tropes of display, value systems, narratives of genius, and other tactics.[35] It is important to note that both Crimp's and Copeland's critiques are pointed directly at MoMA, casting that institution as a proponent of a narrowly articulated modernism. Although MoMA has arguably influenced spaces like the Renaissance Society (though it predates the larger bastion of modernity and design), looking critically at MoMA's history is revelatory in terms of understanding Beecroft's practice as a global art maker. That is to say that the contemporary gallery space was shaped by trends in the global art market from which Beecroft and the Renaissance Society were not immune. Beecroft's practice—including *VB19*—is dependent on the institutional context and the irreverence implicit in exhibiting a live nude body in such a space. In *VB19* this irreverence is further heightened by the models' race. The presentation of such bodies maintains Western hegemony and the modernist tradition outlined by Copeland, Crimp, and others in that Beecroft intended the women to be displayed, unspeaking objects—not unlike historical examples put forward by Fusco and others: Still examples of a counter performance as seen in Mignon M.'s oppositional gaze, present places of rupture.[36]

The traditions represented by MoMA—the stark white gallery space, the near silent patrons, and the discrete display area for each work—ground Beecroft's practice. And such institutions' notions of race and the other explicitly and implicitly shape the artist's work, even by association. Art institutions seek to remove or deny political content as a strategy of power, and here too Beecroft's denial of politics in *VB19* reaffirms her own power and authority. As an art maker with cultural capital (which not long ago was unavailable to women) she has the privilege to deny the politics and context of this work. The complexities of *VB19* can be read in many nuanced ways—as portrait

(cultural or particular), as mimicry (spatial or performative)—but in the end the artist's denials shape what this writer cannot avoid: *VB19* is an exercise of power that is deeply political. I am not attempting to determine whether the work itself is successful or a failure. I am not invested in identifying Beecroft's moral or ethical missteps or casting her work as "bad." Instead, my argument is that that the artist used race in the performance *VB19*. The art world's resistance to continued use of race exposes a larger, unspoken strategy of racial performance within its borders.

Notes

1 The models' names were Ayanna U., Mignon M., Nicole C., Shanesia D., Shelia R., and Tracy R.

2 Vanessa Beecroft, fax message to Susanne Ghez, February 28, 1996.

3 Ibid. See also Emmanuela Di Lallo, ed. *Vanessa Beecroft Performances: 1993–2003* (Palazzo Casati Stampa: Skira Editore 2003).

4 It is important to note that "nude" points to "flesh-tones." By placing the models in these sheer, flesh-toned garments (ineffective at shielding them from the audience's gaze) Beecroft at once exposes their bodies and their skin while pointing to another, presumably racially white, exterior. Beecroft's exercise is the "reverse" of feminist historian Jill Fields' assertion that for white women in the early twentieth century (particularly as associated with Hollywood archetypes such as the femme fatale or the vixen) black lingerie was "associated with dark skin," which signified "illicit sexuality." Jill Fields, "The Meaning of Black Lingerie," in *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie and Sexuality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2007), 173.

5 These early performances were marked by the awkwardly self-aware, flawed, and anxious bodies also found in Beecroft's lesser known and infrequently exhibited drawings and paintings. Beecroft's coarsely executed single figure drawings, for example, emphasize parts of the human body instead of the whole—their legs, hair, tights etc. Elizabeth Janus, "Vanessa Beecroft," *Artforum* 33 (May 1995), 92-3.

6 Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary, "Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31 no. 3 (Spring 2006), 755–83.

7 In using the phrase "the artist's body" this writer looks forward to performance art practices that remove the artist's "hand" and body from the stage and the performance. Consider, for example, works by artists such as Joanna Billings, Candice Breitz, and Tino Seghal.

8 Claire Bishop, "Double Agent: Outsourcing Authenticity" (paper presented at the mini-conference Delegated Performance: Stanford Drama Conference, Stanford University, Stanford, CA February 19, 2011).

9 Hamza Walker (director of education and associate curator, Renaissance Society), in conversation with author, November 7, 2010.

10 *Persona* was installed from March 10 to April 26,1996.

11 The Harris brothers' collaborative series *Brotherhood, Crossroads, and Etcetera* (1994) and Lyle Ashton Harris's *Construct* series were particularly effective at galvanizing the political right as was Opie's *Being and Having* series.

12 Bruce Altshuler *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History Volume I: 1863–1959* et. al., (London and New York: Phaidon 2008), 173. Kazimir Malevich and Alan Upchurch "Chapters from an Artist's Autobiography" *October* 34 (Autumn, 1985), 25–44. Mark A. Cheetham "Matting the Monochrome: Malevich, Klein, and Now" *Art Journal* 64 no. 4 (Winter, 2005), 94–109.

13 Andrew Ferguson "Mr. Obama's Neighborhood," *The Weekly Standard* 13 no. 38 (June 16, 2008) accessed November 28, 2010, http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/015/197wxqsf.asp.

14 Huey Copeland, "In the Wake of the Negress," *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 483.

15 Sara Baartman, also known as the "Hottentot Venus," died in France. Her remains were displayed at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris for nearly sixty years. The city of lights has a long history of displaying black women's bodies for pleasure and pseudo-science.

16 Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1993), 44–66.

17 Copeland, "In the Wake of the Negress," *Modern Women*, 484.

18 Beecroft also describes her models as material. She states, "A material enriched with an additional concept, a material subject to its own changes, independently of my work, with specific characteristics, which can interfere with the work or complete it. A material in an almost pure state." Massimiliano Gioni and Helena Kontova with Vanessa Beecroft "Skin Trade" *Flash Art* 228 (2003) accessed November 28, 2010, http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=286&det=ok&title=VANESSA-BEECROFT.

19 Copeland "In the Wake of the Negress," *Modern Women*, 484.

20 It is worth noting that Beecroft calls upon this body in spaces of display and transaction: an airport, a store, or an art fair.

21 Massimiliano Gioni and Helena Kontova with Vanessa Beecroft "Skin Trade" *Flash Art* 228 (2003) accessed November 28, 2010, http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=286&det=ok&title=VANESSA-BEECROFT.

22 It is worth noting that those employed subjects most often do not have the platform within the work to articulate their opinions or experiences. This relationship between use and "silence" is the grounds for much of the ethical condemnation in delegated performance practice. Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary, "Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

23 Walker, converstion, November 7, 2010.

24 Mignon M. conversation with author, March 3, 2011.

25 Ibid.

26 bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (London and New York: Routledge 2006), 197–213.

27 hooks, *Reel to Real*, 208.

28 Art historians point to Manet's *Olympia* (1863–65) as a marker of modern art practice, noting the artist's use of citation and his concern for audience and display. That this work so prominently uses sex and race is not by chance. See Sander L. Gilman "The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990) 76–108 and Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

29 See Crimp "On the Museum's Ruins," 244–64; and Martin A. Berger "Museum Architecture and the Imperialism of Whiteness" in *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 81–121.

30 Additionally art academies continued to discourage people of color and women from applying and attending, greatly inhibiting these groups' ability to acquire what Berger calls "cultural capital."

31 "Museum Architecture and the Imperialism of Whiteness," *Sight Unseen*, 105.

32 This misidentification was heightened by the fact that Beecroft's appearance was "unknown." *Persona* curator Hamza Walker suggested that at the time many in the art world did not know what Beecroft looked like—who she was.

33 One could argue Lyle Ashton Harris's photographs, also included in the exhibition, have a similar relationship to concept versus visualization, particularly his image for the *New York Times Magazine* cover story (December 18, 1994). Yet Harris actively seeks to scrutinize and dismantle perceptions of black female subjectivity with such images. He places his mother on a golden throne flanked by himself and his brother Thomas Allen Harris. Behind them is a red, black, and green backdrop identical to the one used in the collaborative triptych *Brotherhood, Crossroads, and Etcetera* (1994), *Dred and Renee* (1994) and *The Child* (1994). In doing so, Harris both vindicates and politicizes his mother's role as a single parent.

34 Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," 256.

35 These practices are undermined by postmodern art making, which at times exists outside galleries and uses nontraditional media. Crimp cites artists Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, and Christy Rupp.

36 When describing the relationship between race and gallery space, art historian Jennifer Gonzalez writes that the Fred Wilson work *My Life As a Dog* (1992) "demonstrated … the race-specific framing effect of the museum where 'black' bodies are visible if they appear in works of art, or in the midst of a generally 'white' museum-going public … the performance embodied Wilson's critical insight into the numerous ways museums create visual regimes that support cultural, racial, and class hierarchies, even at the most banal levels. Jennifer Gonzalez, "Introduction: Subjects to Display," in *Subjects To Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press 2008), 1.