

ANITA STECKEL'S *EAT YOUR POWER...*, THE PHALLUS MOTIF AND 'UNSTABLE' FEMINISM(S)

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Anita Steckel's oeuvre has often been marginalized, if not excluded entirely, from dominant discourses of Feminist Art despite the artist positioning herself explicitly as a feminist and being quite active and connected in the New York art scene throughout her life.¹ This lack of representation in the art world has only persisted for Steckel since 1972, the year in which her show at Rockland Community College was censored by New York state legislation and encouraged the artist to establish the Fight Censorship collective of women artists.² The subsequent neglect of Steckel's works has often been attributed to the artist's "transgressive expressions" of erotic imagery, most notably her recurring motif of erect phalluses as exemplified in her 1970's *New York Skyline* series.³ Recent reconsiderations of Steckel, by such scholars as Richard Meyer and Rachel Middleman, have aimed to contextualize the artist's practice within the mid-century feminist avant-garde by emphasizing how her use of the phallus was intended as patriarchal critique.⁴ These scholars posit that it is perhaps a result of the contentious nature of the phallus within second-wave feminism that Steckel has been sidelined from the "established feminist art history" through exhibitions and surveys into the 21st century.⁵ In a key example, Steckel's work was excluded entirely from the checklist of

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, the 2008 touring exhibition often seen as the seminal retrospective of Feminist art practice in the 1960's and 70's.⁶ The Dallas Contemporary's 2016 exhibition, *Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics*, responded to Steckel's exclusion in *WACK!* by positioning the artist within a new framework of "black-sheep" feminist practices along with other overlooked transgressive female artists who were active in the 1970's such as Betty Thompkins and Joan Semmel.⁷ The press-release for the exhibition argued that these 'black-sheep feminists' were dually contentious, within both dominant feminist courses and the art world proper, for their imagery that is "reminiscent of the [masculine ...] pornography industry."⁸ However, the Dallas Contemporary's simplified hypothesis of explicit sexuality cannot fully account for why Steckel has been so thoroughly marginalized within established feminist art history. For example, feminist work from the same period that alludes to a vulvic 'central cavity', in such works by Judy Chicago or Miriam Schapiro, continue to be celebrated for their focus on "the female experience".⁹ Thus, what distinguishes Steckel from her feminist contemporaries is not in her sexual explicitness, nor in its utilization toward patriarchal critique, but rather her assertion of her heterosexual desires through the motif of the erect phallus, often portrayed orgasming or during intercourse.¹⁰ By focusing on the fifth painting of her 1970-1980 *Skyline* series, entitled *Eat your power before it gets cold...*, this essay reconciles how Steckel's work has been misunderstood within second-wave feminist debates of pornography versus eroticism and thus largely excluded from the feminist 'canon'.¹¹ I will

argue that Steckel's underrepresentation in Feminist art history is due to the difficulties to neatly periodize her 70's work within second-wave feminism, as her sex-positive feminism fits more in line with post-modern third-wave feminisms that celebrate "unbridled" female sexuality such as *jouissance*.¹² I will first examine Steckel's work through the scholarly lens of both Craig Owens' conception of post-modernism as the "Discourse of Others" and 'expropriative' practices, and Helen Molesworth's conception of feminist practices that expose the porous and non-discreet nature of public and private spheres.¹³ Through Owens and Molesworth's approaches, I will situate Steckel within the dominant contexts of 70's American Feminism that, despite this framing, still cannot account for how Steckel has been continuously "under-known" in dominant art world circles since.¹⁴ More importantly, I will then situate Steckel's work within the concepts of Tanya Augsberg's *Feminist Ars erotica* and the Feminist reclamation of *jouissance* to show how the artist was revolutionary in her sex-positive and satirical feminism, that anticipated the approaches of "post-structural" and "theoretical" third-wave feminisms during the 70's "essentialist" period.¹⁵

At 6 by 8 1/2 feet, *Eat your power...* is exemplary of Steckel's mixed-media *Skyline* series, in which the artist paints over an enlarged silkscreened photograph of the New York skyline from the East River. Each work of this series includes this same photograph in which Steckel clutters her appropriated city-scape with representations of couples copulating and inflated disembodied phalluses parallel to, or resting on top of, the skyscrapers.¹⁶ In composition, *Eat...* slightly diverges from the other surviving paintings

of the *Skyline* series, with more colourful representations positioned against a black-and-white photo-montage as in *Black Cock Canon*.¹⁷ *Eat...*, in contrast, has a particularly monochromatic colour scheme of pre-dominantly browns and greys in which Steckel's figures are merely outlined in black and blend into the city-scape around them. The viewer can see the work's subtitle inscribed on the upper left side of the painting, beside the Empire State Building, in which Steckel has created a visual parallel to a similarly 'erect' phallus that 'emanates' from the famous skyscraper. To the left of the Empire State building is a representation of a "Mother" figure, in which the quote "Eat your power honey before it grows¹⁸ cold" emits from her mouth in a speech-bubble-like fashion, who spoon-feeds the 'sky-scraper's' semen to a gigantic muscular man.¹⁹ As the muscular man's body wraps around the large skyscraper, like a spectre, the phallus emerging from the Empire State Building is positioned between his legs implying that the sperm that he feeds is his own.²⁰ It is clear from Steckel's representation how the giant's semen ingestion further empowers his virility, as the veins and muscles of his biceps and fore-arms exaggeratedly bulge and rest on top of the United Nations Headquarters.

Steckel's representations of circumcised erect penises inflated to parallel the size of skyscrapers can be most easily interpreted as giving aesthetic form to Jacques Derrida's conception of "phallogentrism".²¹ As conceived by Derrida, "phallogentrism" posits that the West's construction of "rational, linear" meaning is organized around the phallus, and thus inherently privileges masculinity within dominant structures such as language, society etc.²² Phallogentrism in Western societies ultimately justifies its own

supremacy with reference to “an external power” within phallogentric²³ structures, such as language binaries and hierarchies, with the phallus “being the signifier or norm, [the] central point of reference.”²⁴ An example of this “phallogentricism” can be seen in the dominant city architecture of the sky-scraper towers, themselves representative of corporate capitalistic culture, that have been noted by many architectural theorists as having a vertical or phallic ‘thrust’ that, metaphorically, re-enforces masculine supremacy, “force [... , ...]fertility, [and ...] violence.”²⁵ In creating the association between the Empire State Building and the male orgasm, which then is ‘fed’ back to a dominant male figure, Steckel alludes to a similar critique of the self-perpetuating phallogentric structures within American capitalism.²⁶

Derrida’s “Phallogentricism” is indeed one of the concepts that Craig Owens posits as a deconstructionist theory in his influential text “The Discourse of Others” that is “congenial to a feminist perspective”.²⁷ In that same essay, Owens argues that post-modernism, and its deconstructionist tendencies against dominant ideologies, allows for previously marginalized voices such as feminists to challenge their oppressors.²⁸ Even though Owens never mentions Steckel by name, the author references artists such as Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine as female artists who “expropriate” by appropriating from their oppressors, or masculinist myths of originality and artistic ‘genius’, all of which ultimately rejects patriarchal notions of the creator as ‘paternal authority.’²⁹ Thus, in her work as a self-positioned feminist artist, we can see Steckel as “expropriating” the phallic order of the city as a site that legitimizes female oppression.³⁰ In this light, Steckel’s

graphic imagery, often deemed as obscene and pornographic, functions as a deconstructionist technique to expose the male supremacy of dominant Western capitalism.³¹ In an interview, in which she states the *Skyline* series was a response to her feeling that “[m]en seemed to own the city”, Steckel herself echoes such deconstructionist sentiments against phallocentrism.³² Indeed, in architectural language, corporate buildings such as the Empire State and Chrysler buildings can be said to have been *erected*. Thus, in her *Skyline* series, Steckel uses an implicit play on words that conflates penises with corporate towers to emphasize male privilege as inherent to the construction of dominant society.³³

Steckel’s critique of the oppressive phallocentric order is not simply limited to American capitalism as the artist pointedly includes numerous allusions to her particularly New York Jewish heritage and the generational traumas suffered by her cultural diaspora.³⁴ Such distinct Jewish motifs include the numerous Stars of David that litter the cityscape, text allusions to “Coney Island” and “Miami”, locations known for their Jewish communities and where Steckel had spent time as a child, and ten ovaloid forms of “*gefilte fish*”, a traditional Jewish dish which swim in the East River.³⁵ Most disturbingly, the upper right-centre of *Eat...* has a profiled depiction of Adolf Hitler, which can be identified through his association to both a swastika and the number six million, undoubtedly a reference to the number of Jewish lives taken in the Holocaust.³⁶ Steckel depicts Hitler with his throat being slashed by a nude female performing a back-flip who wields a sharp protruding object from between her legs. Despite Hitler’s defeat

in the context of the painting, Steckel implies that the oppression of women and the Holocaust were symptoms of the same patriarchal phallogentric order.

If Steckel's work then exposes the invisible "patriarchal structures of phallogentricism, by super-imposing "private" imagery of the bedroom onto the public sphere, Helen Molesworth's work on how 70's feminist art exposed societal "givens" becomes relevant.³⁷ As Molesworth argues in her essay "House Work and Art Work", there is a false dichotomy between the 'essentialist' second-wave feminisms of the 1970's, including Judy Chicago, with the more 'theoretical' third-wave feminisms of the 80's and 90's.³⁸ Chicago notably used vulvic imagery, like in 1979's infamous *The Dinner Party*, that many critiqued as "essentializing" the female and thus Feminist experience based on anatomy.³⁹ Molesworth compares the "problematic" Chicago with her more "theoretical" contemporaries in Mary Kelly, Mierle Ladermann Ukeles, and Martha Rosler. Molesworth argues that all four of these artists, despite being positioned against each other, subvert mythical distinctions between public and private spheres by exposing private experiences, such as maintenance and domestic labour, to their inherently public art practices.⁴⁰ Steckel too subverts these distinctions of the spheres in *Eat...* by including motifs associated with both the private and public sphere. The detailed erect phalluses and figures of female masturbation allude to interior erotic pleasure, while the "demands of work" are connoted with the skyscraper motifs or the "beacons" of Western capitalism. These motifs in Steckel's painting are indeed held in a "constant tensile relation," that can illustrate how the public and private spheres are not mutually

exclusive.⁴¹ For example, the representation of the mother figure spoon-feeding the semen alludes to the domestic labour expected of a housewife. The “Mother” figure is represented in a liminal position that is both dominant and submissive. The spoon-feeding “Mother” can be seen as a critique of masculine dominance, in society and in heterosexual intercourse, as the figure is seen serving her male counterpart. However Steckel’s representation also queers these expectations of the domestic housewife by placing the female figure as the “active” agent in the act of feeding the reclining, dimwitted and submissive male giant.⁴² This blurring between the private and public spheres in *Eat...* is part and parcel with Steckel’s generally sex-positive feminism that could perhaps posit how sexual labour, like domestic labour, is a legitimate form of work. Thus, we can see how Steckel exposes the invisible “givens” in patriarchal society, such as the distinctions between “public” and “private,” that marginalize women’s voices by denigrating their work within the private sphere whether sexual or domestic.

Molesworth continues this conversation of blurred private and public spaces by advocating for finding similarities as opposed to differences between second-wave feminist approaches in the 1970’s and third-wave feminisms of the succeeding decades. As Steckel’s most notable exhibitions took place in the 70’s, such as the 1972 Rockland College show, we can suggest that the artist both anticipated many of the ‘theoretical’ feminist practices of her third-wave ‘successors’ and, perhaps, proves that such a ‘rupture’ between second and third-wave feminisms is a false dichotomy to begin with.⁴³ If Steckel can be said to use ‘essentialist’ motifs of male and female-coded sex organs, as

Chicago does in her *Dinner Party*, she uses these representations for satirical ends, or the absurdist “distanciation”, as in the ‘theoretical’ institutional critiques of Rosler or Ukeles.⁴⁴ In her *Skyline* series, Steckel can be most clearly seen as an Institutional Critique artist in which recognizable signs and spaces of the patriarchal public sphere, such as the New York skyline, are intervened with feminine ‘private’ images of copulation and eroticism. Through her use of the phallus as parallel to skyscrapers, Steckel’s work clearly exposes the invisible patriarchal structures of phallocentrism in the organization of the Western world.⁴⁵ But, as Molesworth writes, Rosler, in particular, works in institutional critique to deeply critical ends while also envisioning a ‘utopic’ revision patriarchal society that “rearticulates the terms of public and private [...that] fashion new possibilities for both spheres”.⁴⁶ For Molesworth, who ignores Steckel entirely in her essay, each of the four artists she mentions submit various patriarchal “givens” to what Frederic Jameson called a “laboratory situation” and propose how “the world might be *differently* organized.”⁴⁷ If Rosler envisions a “polyvalent and dialectical world where demands of work and pleasure [...] are held in [a] constant tensile relation”, Steckel’s ‘utopic’ feminist revision of phallic order, posited in such works as *Eat...*, occurs through the embrace of *jouissance* or an unbridled and free female sexuality.⁴⁸ According to Middleman, Steckel’s revisionism of what *could* be, in addition to her larger more explicit critiques, is only possible through her frequent practice of photo-montage.⁴⁹ Photo-montage, which re-appropriates pre-existing images into new contexts as Steckel does with the New York cityscape in the *Skyline* series, “willfully takes apart what is or is

supposed to be and arranges it in ways that suggest what it could be”.⁵⁰ Thus, through her mobilization of photo-montage, Steckel can be said to “expropriate” like Sherman and Levine but also engage in Jameson’s “laboratory situation” along with her contemporaries Ukeles, Kelly, and Rosler.⁵¹

Indeed, the term *Jouissance*, or the “unbounded, fluid, unlimited” nature of female sexuality, has been described as the feminist anecdote to phallogentrism.⁵² Pleasurable feminine bodily experiences, in the context of *jouissance*, “oppose the phallic/symbolic order” by breaking down the oppositional linguistic structures in which the male partner repeatedly assumes dominance over the female figure.⁵³ Notably, the works of feminist theory that reclaimed the term *jouissance* toward feminist ends, such as Julia Kristeva’s *Desire in Language* (1980) and Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985), were not published until the 1980’s.⁵⁴ Thus, Steckel’s sex-positive feminism in the 1970’s did not benefit from this discursive shift in feminism that re-claimed *jouissance* and ‘expropriated’ formerly-misogynist sexual images.

Likely a key reason why Steckel’s work has been underrepresented in Feminist art retrospectives with her contemporaries was because her 1970’s work was caught in the cross-fires of the heated and divisive feminist “sex wars” of the decade, in which the American movement was debating over the merits and detriments of pornography and erotica.⁵⁵ Meyer contextualizes Steckel’s censorship, and subsequent neglect, through these feminist debates over pornography and the phallus within the second-wave feminist movement.⁵⁶ In mainstream American feminist discourses of the 1970’s,

pornography was generally seen as inherently violent toward and damaging for women. In 1974, Robin Morgan, a founding member of New York's Women Against Pornography group, wrote her influential essay "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape" that linked pornography as "the theory" to the "practice" of sexual assault.⁵⁷ In addition, a strain of feminist thought during this period by such authors as Sue Katz, Barbara Mehrhof, and Pamela Kearon had positioned heterosexual penetration, without exception, as inherently oppressive to women.⁵⁸ In her 1971 manifesto "Smash Phallic Imperialism" Katz wrote that the penis is "the material basis for power in Amerika" and if "you don't have one you get fucked over by those who do."⁵⁹ Katz elaborated that Feminists cannot "pretend that those few flaps of skin that make up the masculine apparatus are just a few objective ectodermal gathering" but rather that the penis is "proof of a right to have access to privilege."⁶⁰ As Meyer writes, it is not difficult to see how the patriarchal critique of Steckel's *Skyline* series is in line with, or even the aesthetic embodiment of, Katz's "denunciation of phallic imperialism" within the United States.⁶¹ This is especially clear in *Eat...*, in which Steckel underscores the male power and privilege of dominant American capitalism by associating the semen emitting from the Empire State Building with masculine "power".⁶² However, Katz' insistence that the penis is "not just the primary symbol of male domination but that it is the very embodiment in brute material form" renders any representation of the male sex organ as inherently anti-feminist, even within a tongue-in-cheek or satirical tone as in Steckel's work.⁶³ If representations of the female body, or in particular genitalia, were celebrated

as a means for “feminist self-affirmation,” alternatively the representation of the phallus by Steckel and her compatriots in the Fight Censorship movement were accused of “reifying ‘phallic imperialism’ for their ‘prick art’.”⁶⁴

Steckel’s use of phallic motifs, however, still doesn’t fully account for how the artist has been “under-known” for years within established feminist art history. The phallic form, utilized to feminist ends, is represented in *WACK!*’s checklist through works by Yayoi Kusama, Lynda Benglis, Bourgeois, and others.⁶⁵ While these aforementioned artists, respectively, faced controversy and censorship in their time for work that mobilized male genitalia from a female perspective, their works arguably cloak phallic motifs within de-sexualized contexts.⁶⁶ These ‘established’ feminist artists sterilize any charge, including sexual or virile, from the phallus motif and thus are arguably more ‘acceptable’ to be positioned within mainstream feminist frameworks such as *WACK!*. In Benglis’ 1974 *Artforum* ad, perhaps the most explicit of these ‘canonized’ feminist works, sexual desire is arguably not an element. While both Benglis and Steckel satirically mobilize the phallus as a symbol of masculine power and privilege, Benglis’ *Artforum* ad, in contrast, queers any notion of heterosexual desire through the artist’s visual cues to deliberate artificiality. These visual cues in the *Artforum* ad include the use of a “double-headed” exaggerated dildo placed between Benglis’ legs and clear tan-lines on her nude body, both of which that evoke the uncanny.⁶⁷ In contrast, the “money-shot” nature of the represented orgasms and copulative pleasure in Steckel’s *Eat...* more closely resemble the inherently ‘masculinist pornography’ that second-wave feminists strongly

opposed.⁶⁸ Mainstream American feminism in the mid-20th century, that posited that women were inherently disempowered in heterosexual contexts without exception, then had little room for an artist like Steckel, whose phallogentric critique was paired with an 'irreconcilable' assertion of her own sexual desires for the male body.⁶⁹

Steckel's sexually explicit work was further caught in the cross-fires of other debates between American feminists in the mid-century, such as Gloria Steinem and Linda Williams, who participated to distinguish between 'pornography' and 'erotica.'⁷⁰ For many of these Feminists, "pornography" was the crude patriarchal tool while "erotica" was the "artistic" category that could lead to 'sexual freedom' for women.⁷¹ However, Tanya Augsberg argues that sexually explicit feminist art neither clearly resembles erotica nor pornography. Augsberg instead argues that feminist erotic art can be more usefully seen through the lens of Michel Foucault's conception of *Ars erotica* that posits that all explicit imagery, including both pornography and erotica, are mediums of transmission for sexual knowledge and practice in modern society.⁷² In applying Foucault's theory specifically to feminist art, Augsberg illustrates how sexually explicit imagery by female artists served as "an important means to advance knowledge about women's sexual desires, pleasures, bodies, attitudes, practices and identities".⁷³ In light of the feminist "sex" wars over pornography of the 1970's, Augsberg highlights the work of women artists in the 1980s and 1990s who flourished outside of mainstream feminism and instead within sex and porn industries.⁷⁴ Sex positive women artists in this era "applauded sexual experimentation and diversity, decried the policing of desire, and

saw the necessity, to safeguard the circulation of fantasy and creative expression of the erotic imagination.”⁷⁵ For example, Augsburg mentions the 1984 collaboration between Candida Royalle and Lauren Niemi who created a feminist porn production company called Femme Productions with a mission of creating erotic films that “female viewers could relate to and identify with.”⁷⁶ Femme Productions’ frequent eschewing of the masculinist ‘money-shot’, the typical close-up of the male orgasm onto a female body, is echoed in Steckel’s earlier *Eat...* which queers these notions by depicting the masculine giant as receiving his own semen.⁷⁷ Steckel’s subversion of the ‘money-shot’ through this ‘queer’ sexual act does indeed emphasize how the patriarchal power is self-perpetuating as the semen itself is deemed as a privilege or ‘power.’ However, Steckel’s emphasis on semen as a substance to be orally ingested in *Eat...*, in addition to large representations of women masturbating on the right side of the canvas, particularly asserts heterosexual female desires. In other works of the *Skyline* series, such as *Black Cock Canon*, Steckel uses chiaroscuro shading to add details such as bulging veins to her large phalluses in which equally large female figures kiss and caress with visible pleasure. Further, in keeping with Augsburg’s *Feminist Ars erotica*, Steckel, too, often creates the association in her work between sexually explicit imagery and interpersonally transmissible cultural knowledge.⁷⁸ As aforementioned, in *Eat...*, Steckel includes many allusions to her New York Jewish heritage including a representation of Hitler with his throat slashed by a naked woman. If Hitler looms over the city as a “patriarchal menace”, it is only through *jouissance*, as represented by the nude woman who kills him with a knife between her

legs, that can defeat the damaging and violent effects of the phallogentric order of which Nazism, misogyny and other forms of bigotry are symptoms.⁷⁹ The unbridled female *jouissance*, as embodied by this nude woman wielding a knife from her vaginal area, can thus be seen as an antidote to Western society that is poisoned by the patriarchy. It is through these fetishistic representations of orgasming phalluses and vaginas that we can see how Steckel asserts an inherently feminine and dominant subject position through her heterosexual desires.⁸⁰

In conclusion, Steckel's self-assertion of her subjectivity in *Eat...*, as a heterosexual Jewish woman in a patriarchal society, is dependent on the erotic imagery of her sexual desires.⁸¹ While Steckel does indeed critique the phallogentric order through her parallels between erect penises and New York skyscrapers, her work is more complex than simply a patriarchal critique as it is an ambitious and unabashed assertion of the artist's identity.⁸² Thus, Steckel can be seen as more in line with the "expropriative" or *Ars erotica* practices of feminisms of the 1980's and 1990's rather than her 1970's second-wave contemporaries. Alternatively, perhaps Steckel is proof that, as Molesworth posits, the 'rupture' between second-wave feminism in the 1970's and third-wave feminisms in succeeding decades is a false notion and does not account for dissident feminisms within the earlier period, even between heterosexual white women.⁸³ While her more renowned Feminist peers were sterilizing the charge from the phallus, and instead focusing their attention on a 'central cavity', Steckel utilized the motif two-fold to criticize the dominance of the phallogentric order but also to assert her

own subjectivity through the emphasis of the phallus as an object of her desire.⁸⁴ Then, through *Eat your power...*, Steckel illustrates that her identity as a feminist is myriad, messy, and arguably proto-intersectional, before that term was even coined, and thus thoroughly unstable when placed into dominant and generalized discourses.

NOTES

¹ Richard Meyer, "Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art, and The Force of Censorship in the 1970s," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Corneila Butler, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 365.

² Meyer, "Hard Targets," 366. Such high-profile Feminist artists as Louise Bourgeois, Hannah Wilke, Judith Bernstein et al attended meetings of the Fight Censorship group.

³ Dallas Contemporary, "Press Release: Black Sheep Feminism," [artsy.net](https://www.artsy.net), 2016, Accessed April 10th, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/show/dallas-contemporary-black-sheep-feminism-the-art-of-sexual-politics/info>. There is discrepancies between the dates of each of the work in the *Skyline* series. While we know that a few of the *Skyline* works were exhibited in the 1972 Rockland College show, due to contemporary press reports, a number of the works exhibited that year are no longer extant and there are no surviving records on which specific works were exhibited (See: Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art and Sex in the 1960s* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2018], 147, 167). Thus the surviving *Skyline* works are approximately dated between c. 1970-1980, with the exception of *Black Cock Canon* which was vaguely described in a *Village Voice* review of a 1971 show at the Westbeth's Artists Community.

⁴ Meyer, "Hard," 363; Rachel Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage: Merging Politics, Art, and Life," *Women's Art Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2013), 29.

⁵ Dallas Contemporary, "Press Release: Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics." [Artsty.net](https://www.artsy.net), 2016, Accessed April 18th, 2021.

<https://www.artsy.net/show/dallas-contemporary-black-sheep-feminism-the-art-of-sexual-politics/info>.

⁶ Meyer, "Hard," 363-382.

⁷ Dallas Contemporary, "Press Release."

⁸ Dallas Contemporary, "Press Release." Indeed, the curator of *Black Sheep Feminism*, Alison Gingeras, stated many times that Richard Meyer's essay "Hard Targets" was the catalyst for planning and executing the exhibition. See: Alison Gingeras, "Venus Envy",

interview by Rachel Middleman, *Frieze*, October 2nd, 2017.

<https://www.frieze.com/article/venus-envy>.

⁹ Meyer, "Hard," 363.

¹⁰ Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 25.

¹¹ Tanya Augsborg, "Ars Eroticas of their Own Making: Explicit Sexual Imagery in American Feminist Art," in *Companion to Feminist Art*, 1st edition, ed. Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2019): 493.

¹² Augsborg, "Ars Eroticas," 495-497; Alexandra Bennett, "Jouissance," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, (New York: Routledge, 1997): 310-311

¹³ Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October*, Vol. 92 (Spring 2000): 93

¹⁴ The word "under-known" is used here because the artist herself stated that she liked that term rather than *marginal* or *overlooked*. As Meyer writes in his *Artforum* eulogy of Steckel, the term "under-known" "laces the burden on viewers rather than the artist by suggesting that their knowledge is inadequate to her achievement.". See: Meyer, "Passages: Anita Steckel," *Artforum International*, Summer 2012, accessed April 20th, 2021, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201206/anita-steckel-31080>.

¹⁵ Augsborg, "Ars Eroticas," 495-497; Bennett, "Jouissance," 310-311.

¹⁶ Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 146-147.

¹⁷ See Footnote 3 for more about the issue of the surviving *Skyline* paintings. Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 168.

¹⁸ Steckel also makes an implicit play on words in this sentence and subtitle, switching such a word as "gets" to "grows", to further allude to the male erection.

¹⁹ Gail Levin, "Censorship, Politics and Sexual Imagery in the Work of Jewish-American Feminist Artists," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, No. 14: Women in the Visual Arts (Fall 2007): 75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/nas.2007.-.14.63>.

²⁰ Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 75.

²¹ Contemporary reception of the 1972 show had posited the connection between Steckel's *Skyline* series including a Channel 13 new story that claimed "Artist Anita Steckel's theme is that the male power structure dominates us all, and her symbol for that is an erect penis". See: Betsy Marston, reporter, Channel 13 public television newscast, February 1972, videotape qtd. in Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 146; Owens, 12; Emma L.E. Rees, "Phallogocentrism," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 434, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.4324/9780203874448>

²² Rees, "Phallogocentrism," 433.

²³ Phallogocentrism is a portmanteau coined by Derrida of phallogocentrism and logocentrism, the latter of which means "word-centered". This portmanteau term is used to indicate how Western language is binary and unitary that inherently privileges the

masculine, as 'givens', and thus perpetrates the patriarchy through an external authority. See: Rees, "Phallogocentrism," 433.

²⁴ Rees, "Phallogocentrism," 433.

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, "From The Production of Space (English translation 1991)," in *Architecture theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 187.

²⁶ Meyer, "Hard," 370.

²⁷ Owens, "Discourse," 347.

²⁸ Owens, "Discourse," 347.

²⁹ Owens, "Discourse," 347.

³⁰ Owens, "Discourse," 347.

³¹ Meyer, "Hard," 365.

³² Meyer, "Hard," 365.

³³ Meyer, "Hard," 363.

³⁴ Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 75.

³⁵ In addition, the giant's right arm tattoo refers to controversial Jewish comedian Lenny Bruce, and the subsequent outlawing of tattooed persons in Jewish cemeteries. See: Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 75.

³⁶ Steckel has alluded to, in interviews, her frequent associations between her Jewish heritage and her subject position as a sexually open woman in a patriarchal society. In an interview with Gail Levin in 2007, Steckel said that "[w]hen you come from a culture that has been the underdog in a very brutal way, you tend to speak out against injustice."

See: Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 74.

³⁷ Molesworth, "House Work," 71-72.

³⁸ Molesworth, "House Work," 71-72.

³⁹ Molesworth, "House Work," 93.

⁴⁰ Molesworth, "House Work," 93.

⁴¹ Molesworth, "House Work," 93.

⁴² In addition, Steckel also alludes to a perhaps incestuous relationship between the "Mother" and the giant, who could perhaps be her son as she addresses him as "honey," that further transgresses heteronormative expectations. See: Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 74.

⁴³ Molesworth, "House Work," 80.

⁴⁴ Molesworth, "House Work," 88-91.

⁴⁵ Meyer, "Hard Targets," 364-367; Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 146-147.

⁴⁶ Molesworth, "House Work," 94-95

⁴⁷ Molesworth, "House Work," 95

⁴⁸ Molesworth, "House Work," 95; Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 28.

⁴⁹ Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 26.

⁵⁰ Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995): 25, qtd. in Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 28.

- ⁵¹ Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 28; Molesworth, "House Work," 95; Owens, "Discourse," 347.
- ⁵² Bennett, "Jouissance," 311.
- ⁵³ Rees, "Phallogocentrism," 434.
- ⁵⁴ Bennett, "Jouissance," 311.
- ⁵⁵ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 499-500.
- ⁵⁶ Meyer, "Hard Targets," 365.
- ⁵⁷ Robin Morgan, "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape (1974)," in *Going Too Far: Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*, ed. Morgan (New York: Random House, 1977): 169 qtd in Meyer, "Hard Targets," 375.
- ⁵⁸ Meyer, "Hard", 369
- ⁵⁹ Sue Katz, "Smash Phallic Imperialism (December 1970-January 1971)," in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Queer Liberation, 20th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 261, qtd. Meyer, "Hard", 369-370.
- ⁶⁰ Katz, "Smash," 261, qtd. Meyer, "Hard", 369-370.
- ⁶¹ Meyer, "Hard," 370.
- ⁶² Levin, 75.
- ⁶³ Katz, "Smash," 261, qtd. in Meyer, "Hard," 369.
- ⁶⁴ Meyer, "Hard," 371; Augsburg, 499.
- ⁶⁵ "Checklist of the Exhibition," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008): 500-50.
- ⁶⁶ Corinna Peipon, "Yayoi Kusama," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 256; Linda Theung, "Louise Bourgeois," *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 220.
- ⁶⁷ Meyer, "Bone of Contention," 73-74
- ⁶⁸ Middleman, "Anita Steckel's Feminist Montage," 28; Dallas Contemporary, "Press Release."
- ⁶⁹ Meyer, "Hard," 382.
- ⁷⁰ Meyer, "Hard," 382.
- ⁷¹ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 494.
- ⁷² Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 495-496.
- ⁷³ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 496.
- ⁷⁴ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 500.
- ⁷⁵ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 501.
- ⁷⁶ Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 501
- ⁷⁷ We can be sure Steckel gives visual emphasis to her image of the giant eating his own semen in the myriad of representations in *Eat...*, through both the painting's subtitle and by the artist's use of white pigment to fill in the orgasm's representation, in contrast to the pre-dominant browns of the rest of the composition. See: Augsburg, "Ars Eroticas," 501; Levin, "Censorship, Politics," 75.

⁷⁸ Steckel litters the canvas with ghostly and unverifiable female names such as “Sarah Uman”, “Annie Bradley”, “Rosalie Netter” that are said to, in present tense, “Lives”.

⁷⁹ Also of note is Steckel’s 1963 *Mom Art* series, another series in which the artist uses photo-montage to intervene in other socio-political themes, that was not touched on in the later *Skyline* series. This includes racial inequality, including her support for Civil Rights for African-Americans in *Return of the Wet Nurse* and *College Boy*, her opposition to the Vietnam War and the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church in *The Imposter* et al. See: Levin, “Censorship, Politics,” 74; Middleman, “Anita Steckel’s Feminist Montage,” 21-24.

⁸⁰ Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 167.

⁸¹ Middleman, “Anita Steckel’s Feminist Montage,” 26.

⁸² Importantly, Steckel signs her full name the bottom right-hand corner: “Anita Slavin Arkin Steckel”. Steckel’s autograph in *Eat* is too large in the composition to be a traditionally unobtrusive artist’s signature and, curiously, doesn’t appear in any of the other surviving works from the *Skyline* series. This is in contrast to her other works from the period that are signed either with the artist’s first and last name (as in *Legal Gender*) or simply her last name (as in *Lying in the City of the Giant Woman* series). See: Levin, “Censorship, Politics,” 75.

⁸³ Molesworth, “House Work,” 80-81.

⁸⁴ Molesworth, “House Work,” 80-81; Meyer, “Hard,” 363.

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