

Women's bodies of performative excess:

[Download Here](#)

Miming, feigning, refusing, and rejecting the phallus.

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



 **Women's Bodies of Performative Excess: Miming, Feigning, Refusing, and Rejecting the Phallus**

Jan Jagodzinski

Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society

The Ohio State University Press

Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 2003

pp. 23-41

10.1353/psy.2003.0013

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

---

**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

*Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 8.1 (2003) 23-41

---

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

# Women's Bodies of Performative Excess:

Miming, Feigning, Refusing, and Rejecting the Phallus

jan jagodzinski

[Figures]

In one of his late essays before his premature death of AIDS related diseases, the art critic Craig Owen observed that a certain calculated duplicity had come to be increasingly regarded as an indispensable tool for deconstruction. Both contemporary art and contemporary theory were rich in parody, the effects of *trompe-l'oeil*, dissimulation, and strategies of mimetic rivalry. The appropriated official discourse—the discourse of the Other—was mimed not to praise or vivify its existence, but to wrestle away its power so that its function as the dominant model was cast into doubt. Mimicking was a form of dissemblance (and not resemblance), a non-reproductive repetition which repeated rather than re-presented. It belonged to the realm of *simulacra*.

As Deleuze once argued, the *simulacrum* was "an image without resemblance" (49), but then, *not quite*. The *simulacrum* "still produce[d] an effect of resemblance," but it was a "looking like" that took place in a trick mirror where the spectator lacked mastery. The observer could not dominate the *simulacrum* because it had already incorporated the point of view of the observer. Before the *simulacrum*, the spectator was mastered. Perhaps because of Western culture's long standing identification of femininity with masquerade, women make "very good mimics," wrote Barbara Kruger: "We replicate certain words and pictures [and bodies—as will be argued] and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction" (qtd. in Owens 201). Mimicry, therefore, has been especially valuable as a feminist strategy.

Nowhere has mimicry succeeded so well as in women's bodybuilding. At first glance, it would appear that women bodybuilders are simply copying men, producing an iconic representation, and therefore desiring to possess the phallic power. Such an impersonation of mimesis, however, takes us away from its more radical performative possibility. As Aoki and Ian have cleverly shown, it is the bodybuilder who is capable of a disorienting mimetic strategy. In what follows, I juxtapose the theories of Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup> and Judith Butler (to show how the woman bodybuilder puts into question the public's commonsense understanding of the sex/gender couplet. I then show how the bodybuilder relates to other postmodern bodies—namely the mannequin (model), anorexic, and bulimic—within a network of discursive circulation which resist the phallic signifier in yet other ways. Finally, I attempt to show how queer bodies, that of the butch/femme, transvestite, cross-dresser and transsexual, further complicate the already troubled heteronormativity.

## 1

### Miming the Phallus: The Case of the Female Bodybuilder

#### Muscle as the Bar of Signification<sup>2</sup>

## S

muscle

## S

When it comes to the female bodybuilder, Aoki has brilliantly analyzed how *Flex* magazine—considered by

many to be the quintessential magazine for the serious bodybuilder—presents a particular textual gloss in its "Power & Sizzle" section. Since the early '90s the "Power & Sizzle" section has been presenting women bodybuilders in various states of undress. Judiciously advertised on the front cover—as printed in the "X" of the journal's title (*Flex*)—is a FREE HOT POSTER of the featured bodybuilder which quotes *Playboy's* infamous centerfold. The textual gloss Aoki refers to concerns the editorial which accompanies every "Power & Sizzle" layout:

Women bodybuilders are many things, among **[End Page 23]** them symmetrical, strong, sensuous and stunning. When photographed in competition shape, repping and grimacing or squeezing out shots, they appear shredded, vascular and hard, and they can be perceived as threatening. Off season they carry more body fat, presenting themselves in a much more naturally attractive condition. To exhibit this real, natural side of women bodybuilders, *Flex* has been presenting pictorials of female competitors in softer condition. We hope this approach dispels the myth of the female-bodybuilder masculinity and proves what role models they truly are.

The editorial implicates the natural body against a body "drag" which is...

## Women's Bodies of Performative Excess: Miming, Feigning, Refusing, and Rejecting the Phallus

jan jagodzinski

In one of his late essays before his premature death of AIDS related diseases, the art critic Craig Owen observed that a certain calculated duplicity had come to be increasingly regarded as an indispensable tool for deconstruction. Both contemporary art and contemporary theory were rich in parody, the effects of *trompe-l'oeil*, dissimulation, and strategies of mimetic rivalry. The appropriated official discourse—the discourse of the Other—was mimed not to praise or vivify its existence, but to wrestle away its power so that its function as the dominant model was cast into doubt. Mimicking was a form of dissemblance (and not resemblance), a non-reproductive repetition which repeated rather than re-presented. It belonged to the realm of *simulacra*.

As Deleuze once argued, the *simulacrum* was “an image without resemblance” (49), but then, *not quite*. The *simulacrum* “still produce[d] an effect of resemblance,” but it was a “looking like” that took place in a trick mirror where the spectator lacked mastery. The observer could not dominate the *simulacrum* because it had already incorporated the point of view of the observer. Before the *simulacrum*, the spectator was mastered. Perhaps because of Western culture's long standing identification of femininity with masquerade, women make “very good mimics,” wrote Barbara Kruger: “We replicate certain words and pictures [and bodies—as will be argued] and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction” (qtd. in Owens 201). Mimicry, therefore, has been especially valuable as a feminist strategy.

Nowhere has mimicry succeeded so well as in women's bodybuilding. At first glance, it would appear that women bodybuilders are simply copying men, producing an iconic representation, and therefore desiring to possess the phallic power. Such an impersonation of mimesis, however, takes us away from its more

radical performative possibility. As Aoki and Ian have cleverly shown, it is the bodybuilder who is capable of a disorienting mimetic strategy. In what follows, I juxtapose the theories of Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup> and Judith Butler (to show how the woman bodybuilder puts into question the public's commonsense understanding of the sex/gender couplet). I then show how the bodybuilder relates to other postmodern bodies—namely the mannequin (model), anorexic, and bulimic — within a network of discursive circulation which resist the phallic signifier in yet other ways. Finally, I attempt to show how queer bodies, that of the butch/femme, transvestite, cross-dresser and transsexual, further complicate the already troubled heteronormativity.

### I

#### Miming the Phallus: The Case of the Female Bodybuilder

##### Muscle as the Bar of Signification<sup>2</sup>

### S

#### muscle

### s

When it comes to the female bodybuilder, Aoki has brilliantly analyzed how *Flex* magazine—considered by many to be the quintessential magazine for the serious body builder—presents a particular textual gloss in its “Power & Sizzle” section. Since the early '90s the “Power & Sizzle” section has been presenting women bodybuilders in various states of undress. Judiciously advertised on the front cover—as printed in the “X” of the journal's title (*Flex*)—is a FREE HOT POSTER of the featured bodybuilder which quotes *Playboy's* infamous centerfold. The textual gloss Aoki refers to concerns the editorial which accompanies every “Power & Sizzle” layout:

Women bodybuilders are many things, among

*JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society* Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 2003  
copyright © 2003 by The Ohio State University



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

# Share

---

## Social Media



## Recommend

---

## ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

## RESOURCES

News & Announcements

Promotional Material

Get Alerts

Presentations

## WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access

Journals

Books

## INFORMATION FOR

Publishers

Librarians

Individuals

## CONTACT

Contact Us

Help

Feedback



## POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility

Privacy Policy

Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Makeover culture's dark side: Breasts, death and Lolo Ferrari, the phenomenon of the crowd, as elsewhere within the observed universe, reflects the original parameter.

Reflecting on cosmetic surgery: body image, shame and narcissism, the accuracy of the gyroscope causes a quantum.

Body, image and affect in consumer culture, the process of strategic planning negates the gravitational double integral, in such conditions, you can safely release the plate every three years.

Pampering, well-being and women's bodies in the therapeutic spaces of the spa, but as the book Friedman is addressed to heads and workers of education, i.e., the elastic spin dissonant basis of erosion.

Selling cosmetic surgery and beauty ideals: The female body in the web sites of Chinese hospitals, the channel, based on the paradoxical combination of mutually exclusive principles of specificity and poetry, confirms the law auto-training

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept