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Mark, Lisa Gabrielle., and Cornelia H. Butler. *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.

Chapter: *The Returns of Touch: Feminist Performances, 1960-80*

*The Returns of Touch: Feminist Performance 1960-1980*, penned by Peggy Phelan, examines the international foundations of art made under the influence of feminism; specifically the exploration of touch through feminist performance. This historical survey focuses on the crucial period of the feminist movement when the majority of feminist activism, theory and art making took place. Inspired by the Civil Rights and antiwar movements, the feminist movement took place in various locations geographically and culturally, creating a nuanced political and aesthetic evolution, that included a multitude of media, such as painting, photography, cinema, sculpture, video, and performance.

The artists explored in this chapter, perceived their art as a contribution to the advancement of the feminist counter-archive and developing feminist theory. After WWII with the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb, the art world began to have a renewed interest in the human body. One study involved the examination of touch, or the epistemological contours of touch. This approach investigated the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge; essentially putting the human body at the center of knowing, or at the center of art and art making. This line of art making became known as body art, live action or better known today as performance art.

Performance art is directly linked to feminist art, but its roots began much earlier with the Japanese art group known as Gutai, who staged events and performances that utilized the body as the main medium. This group included artists like Kazuo Shiraga, and Atsuko Tanaka, who responded to the United States' use of the atom bomb. Both artists focused on their bodies and highlighted themes of touch, hidden gender politics, and external environments versus inner landscapes. Atsuko Tanaka's piece *Electric Dress* was sculptural and performance in nature and paved the way for wearable art within feminist art.

Tanaka used her body as a tool to discuss embodiment politics. By covering herself in phallic shaped lights and electric cords, she created a barrier that made it impossible to touch her, and yet created a spectacle impossible to ignore. By becoming an object, specifically a heterosexual turn-on, she demonstrated the power held by the masculine and phallic social, political and economic domains. In addition, the radiating light from the dress, reflected and

mimicked the immense light created by the atomic bomb, and used it as a reminder of the inherent power of technology that overcame the body.

Tanaka's sculptural and performance work is just the beginning of a long and rich history of artists tackling themes of touch, violence and technology. Artists like Yayoi Kusama and Yoko Ono, created significant performances and installations that pushed the bounds of feminist art. Yoko Ono's work, *Cut Piece*, explores just how active passivity can be, the intimacy of touch, and voyeurism. By asking the audience to participate in the scene and actively enter the performance space, she was asking them to give up voyeurism and to become an object of the audience's gaze. Although this motif of *spectator becoming performer* persisted through each remake, the context of the performance changed with each new venue and audience; reflecting the ideologies of touch, power and women's bodies as objects within the different social, political and cultural spheres.

Ono's exploration of passivity as strength, fear, aggression, tenderness and vulnerability were again investigated by Marina Abramovic in *Rhythm 0*. This durational performance, six hours in length, provides a table of five objects ranging from a feather, to a gun, and invites the spectators to become performers and use the objects on or against Abramovic. Throughout the performance Abramovic passively allowed others to write on her, drape items over her head, cut her skin, and eventually one even pressed a loaded gun to her temple. This performance was a turning point for Abramovic. Afterward this performance she begins to analyze how the spectatorial energy can be leveraged to create bodily change.

Although some of the feminist art performances were dismissed as narcissistic, violent or even masochistic, many feminist artists responded to the history of violence central to women's lives by engaging in some form of violence to attempt to master or control that very same violence. These performances called attention to the shared mortality of the human body, its ability to survive pain, and revealed the power dynamics deep-seated within sexism, gender hierarchies, and agency over women's bodies; centralizing the body as powerful mediums for art making.