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**The Contemporary Nude: A Comparison of  
Jenny Saville and Lucian Freud's Approaches  
to Gender and Materials, post-1990**

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# THE CONTEMPORARY NUDE:

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A COMPARISON OF JENNY SAVILLE AND LUCIAN  
FREUD'S APPROACHES TO GENDER AND MATERIALS,  
POST-1990.



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Dissertation submitted for the Degree of B.A. Honours in History of Art

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*“The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past”*

– T. S. Elliot.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Stanley, *Jenny Saville* exhibition catalogue, Oxford: Modern Art Oxford 2012, 2

## INTRODUCTION

The research for this dissertation started from seeing both artists' retrospectives in the summer of 2012: *Lucian Freud: Portraits* at the National Portrait Gallery, (9<sup>th</sup> February - 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012) where a whole room was dedicated to his paintings of Leigh Bowery, and then attending the opening night of *Jenny Saville* at Modern Art Oxford, (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012 - 16<sup>th</sup> September 2012), meeting the artist and being overwhelmed with the scale of her works that photographs don't convey. Both exhibitions were the summations of the artists' careers and what struck me was the success of both painters' work in challenging the viewer to confront the ambiguities of the body. The research has taken me as far as sitting as a nude model to experience those ambiguities and being 'contemporary flesh'.

\* \* \*

*'The studio has come to life again, signaling what must be called post-postmodernity (...) It brings together the spiritual and humanism of the Old Masters and the innovation and criticality of the Modern Masters. It is a New Old Master art. Craft is once again at a premium, but art remains conceptual. Kosuth once said that "art only exists conceptually" but the New Old Masters show that it is not art unless it also exists materially. "Art is not in the object" the conceptualists argued, "but in the artist's conception of art to which the objects are subordinated." But the New Old Masters art is at once aesthetically resonant and visionary. It is an attempt to revive high art in defiance of post art.'*

– Donald Kuspit, 2004.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation focuses on representations of nude figures after 1990 by the British painters Jenny Saville (1970-) and Lucian Freud (1922-2011). Comparing Saville's *Trace*

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<sup>2</sup> Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge, 2004), 181-2

(fig. 1), *Branded* (fig. 3) and *Matrix* (fig. 10) with Freud's *Naked man, back view* (fig. 2) and *Leigh Bowery (Seated)* (fig. 4), it will consider the materials of oil painting, the representation of the nude and the performance of gender in relation to the specific examples. Both Saville and Freud have refused to compromise craftsmanship within the medium of paint, despite the modern trends, and this research will follow, and offer supporting evidence for, Kuspit's proposal that they are both Old Masters *des nos jours*.<sup>3</sup> Pernilla Holmes wrote in the *Art Review* of Jenny Saville: 'She is likely in the future to be looked upon as a dinosaur stoically refusing to accept that bad painting is the equal to good.'<sup>4</sup> This will be disputed; instead, this paper will argue that craftsmanship and conceptual thought do not have to be mutually exclusive, and that the body can be a space onto which both concerns can be posited. Given the long tradition of nude paintings in the West, it will consider the differing stimuli to which the artists respond, and conclude that, from a feminist reading of the works, Saville looks forward by reclaiming the nude from the "active artist/passive model"<sup>5</sup> time-honored tradition through destabilizing patriarchal pictorial strategies such as scale, perspective and being a female artist, whilst Freud does the reverse, subjugating his model back into a gender binary and painting in a way assertive of his virile masculinity.

Chapter One introduces the artists, contextualizing their work and offering an insight into their material approaches. Then, initially from behind the nude, Chapter Two will consider Saville's painting *Trace* (1993-4) [Private Collection, 213.4 cm x 182.9 cm], drawing comparisons with *Naked Man, Back View* (1991-2) [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 182.9 x 137.2 cm] by Freud. Each model appears to fulfill a stable gender boundary, which will allow contrasts to be drawn between the male and female painters' approach to landscaping a comparable form. Although apparently similar, the chapter will demonstrate this not to be the case through visual critical analysis and comparison.

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<sup>3</sup> Kuspit, 2004, 181-2

<sup>4</sup> P. Holmes, "Report Card: Jenny Saville", *Art Review* 53 (December/January 2002), 87

<sup>5</sup> L. Noel, "Jenny Saville: Reclaiming the Body", *CUJAH* (vol. 13, 2014), 3

The nude will then be turned around to be examined from the front in Chapter Three.

*Branded* (1992) [Private Collection, 209.5 x 179 cm] by Saville will be compared to *Leigh Bowery (Seated)* (1990) [Private Collection, Seattle. 243.7 x 183 cm] by Freud. Both works demonstrate the de-idealization of nude forms, which will be the central focus. A comparison will be made between portraits of the self and others, their focus on particular body parts and the relationship between the nude's skin and the 'skin' of the paint.

Chapter Four will consider how both artists engage with gender boundaries, by initially considering Freud's depictions of Bowery in relation to photographs of him dressed in his usual attire. It will look briefly at Bowery's life to locate him within the New Romantic counter-cultural movement (1979 to mid-1980s) and argue that Freud subordinated a self-created surrealist dandy by stripping him of any adornment in order to 'neuter' his non-complicit masculinity. Focusing on Saville's painting of a transgender figure, *Matrix* (1999) [Private Collection, 213.4 x 304.8 cm], it will demonstrate that, in contrast to Freud's approach, Saville paints the reality of contemporary flesh and reaches beyond gender stereotypes.

Painting contemporary flesh in a Postmodern age presents challenges, particularly the place of performance, both in a literal sense and in a gender-specific sense. Judith Butler argued in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that gender is not a biological stable, but that all gender is artifice encoded on the form in different ways, most prominently through habitually performed acts. This will be examined in Chapter Five through the materialization of particular experiences in the five works, which will, ultimately, demonstrate that overtly theatrical and covertly theatrical are all a matter of degree.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

'As Michael Foucault has shown, in the modern period the body has become a highly political object, a crucial site for exercise and regulation of power.'<sup>6</sup> Since Greek times, people have projected their fantasies and obsessions onto the human body: it has acted as a cultural conditioner, a signifier of what is perceived beautiful.<sup>7</sup> In Postmodern times, the obsession to 'enhance this elusive ideal' of real self<sup>8</sup> by attaining the physical ideal we are persuaded we can achieve is ever present, particularly due to social media. But what is the reality for bodies that fall outside such ideals, as a result of body image and sexual identity? Both Lynda Nead's *The Female Body: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (1992) and Richard Leppert's *The Nude. A Critical Rhetoric of the Body in art of Western Modernity* (2007) discuss this. Kenneth Clark's study *The Nude: A Study of the Ideal Form* (1972) was the first book to tackle the subject of the nude in depth, but its comparison of nudity and the nude, with the former being seen as obscene and the latter argued to be aesthetic, are now agreed to be outdated. Both Nead and Leppert pull Clark's argument apart, and both reject the formalist's 'tradition of arts fabrication of the nude'<sup>9</sup> but suggests a number of alternative ideas which will be explored within this project. T.J. Clark and John Berger also address the subject. Linda Nochlin's *Floating in Gender Nirvana* (2000) and Judith Halberstam's *The Body in Question: Transgender Images in Contemporary Visual Art* (2000) formed understanding of Saville, whilst Leppert's *The Nude* and David Mellor's *Interpreting Lucian Freud* (2002) did the same for Freud. Finally, the performance of gender will be underpinned by Judith Butler's *Gender Troubles* (1990) and *Gender Troubles and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) as well as Sara Sahil's critical thinker's guide called *Judith Butler* (2002).

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<sup>6</sup> L. Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London, 1992), 10

<sup>7</sup> R. Leppert, *The Nude: Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in Art in Western Modernity* (London, 2007), 239

<sup>8</sup> Smyth, J., 'All Too Human' *Fortnight*, (no 394 (April 2001)), 24

<sup>9</sup> Markowitz, S., "Reviewed work: *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* by Lynda Nead", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Spring, 1995), 216

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE CONTEMPORARY NUDE ARTISTS: JENNY SAVILLE AND LUCIAN FREUD.

Saville curated a room, *La Peregina*, in the *Rubens and his Legacy* exhibition at the Royal Academy in early 2015, and focused on the treatment of the human form and fleshy handling of paint. She included a painting by Freud which seems pertinent because both artist's practices have been connected over the last 20 years to varying degrees. This essay will re-evaluate their proximity by drawing comparisons between comparable works made at about the same time.

### JENNY SAVILLE

Nochlin argues: 'Saville's work is post-"post-painterly", to wrench out of its original Greenbergian context: painterliness pushes so far over the top that it signifies a kind of disease of the pictorial, a symptom of some deep disturbance in the relation of pigment to canvas."<sup>10</sup> Born in 1970 in Cambridge, Saville attended Glasgow School of Art for 5 years. The first two paintings to be discussed, *Trace* and *Branded*, belong to the series painted for her degree show in 1992; these were spotted and purchased by Charles Saatchi, like many of the Young British Artists. They were both shown at the Saatchi Gallery in the 'Young British Artists III' exhibition (1994). Through confrontational poses and inscribed text, these works remain her most political. Her style is characterized by her interest in the monumental female nude and the expressive possibilities of paint. She works from photographs, often of unknown models, as the basis of her paintings, and mirrors are dotted around her studio to see her naked flesh as she works. She aims for universal rather than specific works, commenting: "To paint figurative works I needed a movement

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<sup>10</sup> L. Nochlin, 'Floating in the Gender Nivirna, *Art in America*, 88, (no.3, 2000), 96

between the particulars (that's why I say I don't paint portraits) into something general. If you can find some way of generalizing or universalizing something (...) the making becomes the subject.'<sup>11</sup> This tension between the material paint and the nude forms as 'subject' will be considered in the following two chapters. She has also said: "I try to find bodies that manifest in their flesh something of our contemporary age" and in doing so, she fragments artistic conventions to make 'visible a new version of femininity and physical identity.'<sup>12</sup> More recently her work has focused on pregnancy and the mother and child relationship, and as many of her works are made from charcoal and chalk pastels as from oil now.

### LUCIAN FREUD

Freud said: "I'm drawn to women by nature and to queers because of their courage."<sup>13</sup> Whilst numerous women have 'submitted to Freud's scrutiny', few men have posed nude. The young filmmaker Angus Cook sat nude for Freud between 1985 and 1990,<sup>14</sup> his studio assistant and fellow artist David Dawson sat from many years until Freud's very last, unfinished painting in 2011, and Leigh Bowery sat from 1990 to his death in 1994. Unlike Saville, the presence of the model was critical to Freud's practice, and his focus on the particulars of a specific sitter also hold him at odds. This essay focuses on two paintings of Bowery that will allow consideration of the male artist's depiction of the male form and his approach to an extrovert and flamboyant non-conformist.

Lucian Freud was notoriously private. His work is made from extensive sitting with models, many of whom were friends, lovers and family members. From the mid-1950s onwards Freud used a thick hogs-hair paintbrush combined with Cremnitz White pigment that he layered up, purportedly cleaning his brush after every stroke, to create the textured, impasto representations of flesh that is today synonymous with his name. He also

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley, 2012, ii

<sup>12</sup> Christies website: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/jenny-saville-branded-5408895-details.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> L. Freud, *Recent Drawings and Etchings* (Mathew Marks Gallery, 1993) included Bowery, "Art and Love", 8

<sup>14</sup> S. Figura (ed.) *Lucian Freud: The Painters Etchings*, exhibition catalogue, New York: MoMA (2007), 26

began to work standing which produced a changed viewpoint and enlarged the scale of work. Around the time of this stylistic change, he wrote *Some Thoughts on Painting* (1954), republished in Tatler Magazine in 2004 with only the addition of a few sentences from the artist. He stated: "The subject must be kept under the closest observation: if this is done day and night, the subject - he, she or it - will eventually reveal itself".<sup>15</sup> He also wrote: "The model should only serve the very private function for the painter of providing the starting point for his excitement."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lucian Freud, "Some Thoughts on Painting", *Modern Painters*, vol 6., no. 3 (Autumn 1993), 25

<sup>16</sup> Freud, 1954, 25

## CHAPTER TWO

### BEHIND THE CONTEMPORARY NUDE



fig. 1

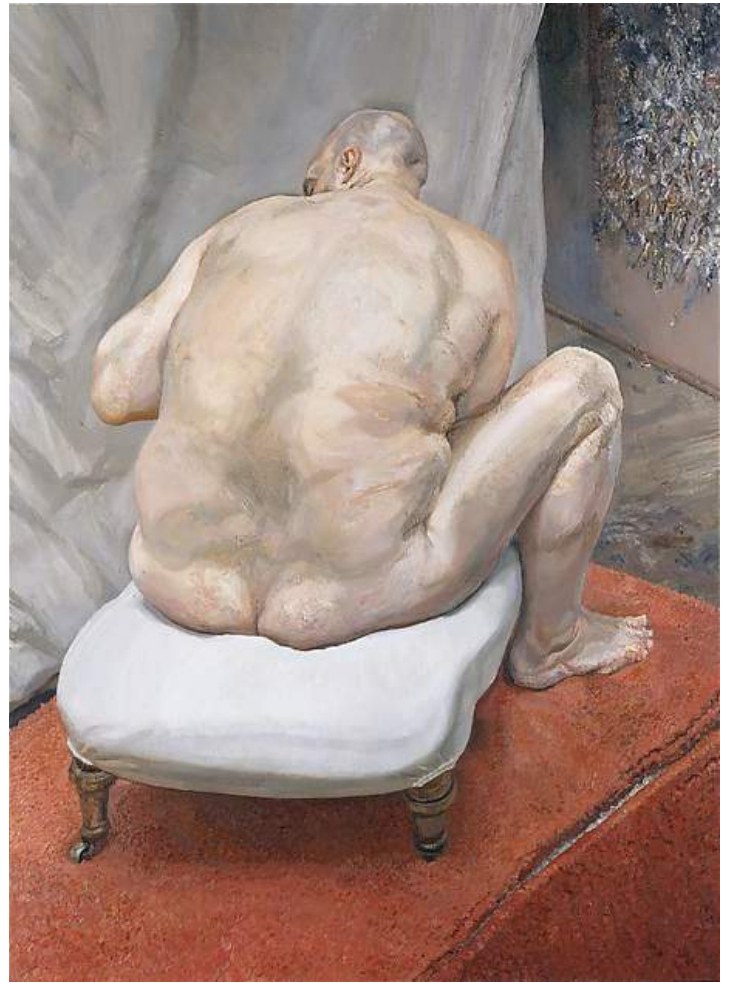


fig. 2

#### **TRACE BY SAVILLE**

*Trace* (fig 1) is a female back filling the entire canvas, inflated to a monumental size (213.4 x 182.9 cm). Saville has stated: “I want to make large paintings that are very intimate”.<sup>17</sup> In painting her subjects larger-than-life, she creates a push-pull viewing experience; the viewer moves back to take in the composition and subject, and then moves in again to experience the details and enjoy the materiality. Through removing the form’s head and legs, *Trace* is made anonymous and archetypal because it could be depicting you, your

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<sup>17</sup> Christies website: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/jenny-saville-branded-5408895-details.aspx>

mother, sister or wife.<sup>18</sup> Although unknown, the back is also extremely specific because of the scattering of blemishes, demonstrating Saville's photography-based practice. Brendan Prendeville wrote: 'Photorealism promises a view into depth which it simultaneously cancels through its preoccupation with the superficial'.<sup>19</sup> This could apply to *Trace* because, through pushing the figure into the nearest frontal picture plane, she loses any sense of depth. Yet, in doing so, it accentuates the "intimacy" she seeks. For example, take the nuances of the skin; a pinkie-purple pock mark on the left shoulder blade testifies to an acne spot. Again, up-close the viewer can enjoy the Bacon-like glob of white pigment, yet on moving backwards it perfectly reflects a sheen of light, demonstrating the waxy smooth scar tissue and testifying to exacting observation.

The varying uses of oil paint in *Trace* shows a plethora of skin appearances and textures; from the buttery thick impasto oil on the lower back describing the fatty store, to the grainy thin application of paint replicating the scaly dry elbow skin. Nochlin wrote: "although the surface and the grid both play an important role in Saville's formal language, both are melted down and sharpened up by the virtuoso yet oddly repulsive brushwork that marks her style."<sup>20</sup> As Nochlin mentions, sweeping, confident marks create overall impressions of the three dimensional surface of the skin whilst there is an underlying grid formation (diagram 1). Saville also discusses this: "I came to see the materials of paint as a kind of liquid flesh I could mold in my hands (...) I started to think about not only the anatomy of a body, but about the anatomy of a painting".<sup>21</sup> Saville's colours of flesh range from ivory skin, to ochre/sienna brown base layers, as well as mottled blue hands and deep purple lower bottom. Together they landscape the soft undulations of a female back whilst realistically recounting un-idealized elements, thus reclaiming the form from the patriarchal tradition of fantasy.

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<sup>18</sup> Stanley, MAO, i

<sup>19</sup> B. Prendeville, *Realism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Painting* (London, 2000), 179

<sup>20</sup> Nochlin, 2000, 96

<sup>21</sup> J. Saville, *Continuum*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Gagosian Gallery (2012), 16

Although painted in the nude, architectural marks on the subject's skin suggest the presence of female undergarments that appear as the reddened imprint of tightly fitting underwear. They also give insight into the 'anatomy' of the paint layers. Rendered with uncompromising truth, the sagging elasticated line of the briefs falls below the top of the buttock crack, creating a slightly unsavoury impression. Similarly, the bra is shown in an arch shape, suggesting it is poorly fitted and riding up the back, whilst the seams at the edges of the chest pull the skin in, causing lumps of flesh. Some of these marks are painted with a darker ochre tone that is likely to have also been used as the base layer, whilst others are carved into the thick surface of the pigment with a sharp marker like a stylus. Through describing their presence, Saville reasserts her position of being a female painter; she recounts the reality of female underwear from personal experience, and further removes the figure from the realm of idealization.

With regard to the contemporary form, Saville's work has been allied to the Postmodern literature of J.G. Ballard by John Gray in *The Landscape of the Body: Ballard, Bacon and Saville*. He argues that, like Ballard, Saville's 'project' is to reclaim the 'body from personality'.<sup>22</sup> Arguing, 'Ballard's work is a war against memory, but the intension is not to forget. It is to turn the debris of personal time ... into images that are impersonal and emptied of time'.<sup>23</sup> Through her removal of personal characteristics to create archetypal forms and her desire for the "universal", it seems plausible to argue Saville is doing the same. The visual image of *Trace* and the mental indexes created in Ballard's 1973 book *Crash* are striking:

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<sup>22</sup> J. Gray, 'The Landscape of the Body: Ballard, Bacon and Saville', published in *Jenny Saville* by S. Schama (New York, 2005), 9

<sup>23</sup> Schama, 2009, 9



fig. 1, detail

*“The precise make and model-year of my car could be reconstructed from the pattern of my wounds. The layout of the instrumental panel, like the profile of the steering wheel bruised into my chest, was inset on my knee and shinbones.”<sup>24</sup>*

### **NAKED MAN, BACK VIEW BY FREUD**

*Naked man, back view* (fig. 2) is painted on the same width canvas as *Trace*, but depicts a life size representation of a nude male in an interior. The sitter’s gender is emblazoned across his form; bald head, thickset back and shoulders, weighty dense foot and sculpted thigh. He sits hunched on a French stool and turned away from us, whilst the stature of his body (all 6 foot, 3 inches and 17 stone of it)<sup>25</sup> give a suggestion of his identity: Leigh Bowery (1961 - 1994). In 1993 he said, “Like me, he [Freud] is interested in the underbelly of things”,<sup>26</sup> and this is very apparent in the way Bowery has been portrayed. A playful contour outlines his indecorous form and emphasizing his nudity; it reads from the crux of his neck, over his hunched head and down the to the tip of his elbow, it then curls around the waist and buttocks, before moving along the right leg to his foot nestled in the carpet (diagram 2).

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<sup>24</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Crash*, (London, 1973), 18-19

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Ellen, *Leigh Bowery: Ideal Husband*, The Observer Review, 21<sup>st</sup> July 2002

<sup>26</sup> S. Tilley, *Leigh Bowery: The Life and Times of an Icon*, (London, 1997), 220 and Mellor, referencing Bowery’s interview with Australian Herald (1993), 35.



*Naked man, back view* is an odd union between illusionary depth and actual materiality.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, as Brendan Prendeville argues: 'By means of the skin of paint and the painted skin, the painting addresses us (invasively) through our own skin and in terms of our bodily awareness.'<sup>28</sup> The overloaded, impasto and tactile use of paint, built up on the surface from Freud's use of dense Cremnitz White,<sup>29</sup> gives the surface 'extreme corporeality',<sup>30</sup> creating a sculpted surface. Through the three dimensional layering of pigment, Freud forms a ridged landscape on the surface of the canvas that landscapes the nude form both in a literal and illusionary way. An example is how Freud emphasizes the course pubic hair around buttocks, lower back and legs through stippling brush marks and forming a mountainous-like region in the paint.

Nead suggests: 'Art criticism writes sex into descriptions of paint (...)' a certain kind of phallogentric textuality can be articulated in the discussion of painting's handling and style.'<sup>31</sup> Certainly, 'light caresses form, shapes become voluptuous, colour is sensuous, and the paint itself is luxuriously physical.'<sup>32</sup> This is true of *Naked man, back view*, where a series of volumes or circular forms make up Bowery's back (diagram 3), sensuous in the modeling of the flesh.



diagram 2.

Photographs of Freud at work emphasize the virility of his approach:

moving back, away from the canvas to observe the nude body present, and then brandishing a brush in a phallic gesture, and moving back in to 'penetrate' the canvas with brushstrokes. It is at odds with Saville's description of paint as liquid flesh and her photography-based practice, only relying on her naked self and mirrors for guidance.

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<sup>27</sup> Prendeville, 2000, 181

<sup>28</sup> Prendeville, 2000, 187

<sup>29</sup> D. Dawson, *A Painters Progress: Freud at Work* (London, 2014), 27

<sup>30</sup> D.A. Mellor, *Interpreting Lucian Freud* (London, 2002), 36

<sup>31</sup> Nead, 1992, 58

<sup>32</sup> Nead, 1992, 56

In contrast to the material illusion of the surface landscape, Bowery's surroundings have an orchestrated feel, and the location is indisputably the studio. David Dawson, Freud's studio assistant, commented: "The location is always Freud's studio."<sup>33</sup> What is most immediate in the "scene" is the blood-red shag-pile carpet. The colour is contrasted with the crisp white of the stool's surface: the overflowing bulge of the padded seat, upholstered in white muslin and finished with satin trim, mirrors the soft undulations and contours of Bowery's curves above. Also, his weight is absorbed by the carpet through the wheeled feet of the foot stool. The stark muslin is also contrasted to the greyer and more loosely painted dust sheet that conceals the interior, and forms a mottled backdrop to Bowery's flesh. In *Some Thoughts on Painting*, Freud wrote: 'the painter must be as concerned with the air surrounding his subject as the subject itself.'<sup>34</sup> This is in contrast to Saville's treatment of *Trace* where the form is so close to the canvas that it obscures any indication of location. The areas of encroaching reality in *Naked man, back view*, such as the area of the room revealed to the right (showing wood panelled floor and unpainted wall that has been used to discard unwanted oil paint, 'clotted' and built up over years of cleaning his pallet and brush<sup>35</sup>), can easily become distracting from the nude form of Bowery.



diagram 3.

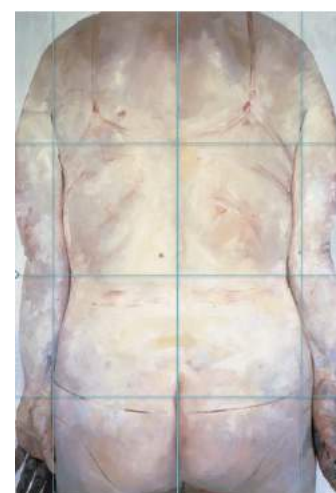


diagram 1.

In these works Saville and Freud have both shown that their subjects are not only material but also conceptual. Saville, through the juxtaposition of a three dimensional surface of a figure with un-idealized elements both reclaiming the form from patriarchal fantasy, and, through devices such as its architectural marks, highlighting the feminine experience. In

<sup>33</sup> Figura, 2007, 23

<sup>34</sup> Freud, 1993, 25

<sup>35</sup> Dawson, 2014, 18

contrast, Freud uses a gradual build up of opaque paint and heaviness of both physical paint and artistic application to impose a masculine virility.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FACING THE CONTEMPORARY NUDE

*'Women have been regulated by men who draw the lines around the category of 'women',  
lines that divide the normal from the deviant and the desirable from the loathsome.'*

- Lynda Nead, 1992.<sup>36</sup>

*Branded* (fig. 3) by Saville has been selected because it demonstrates a female artist reclaiming the female body and removing it from the realm of fantasy into today's reality: depicting a body that falls outside such lines previously drawn, whilst at the same time engaging in the 'heightened sense of vulnerability'. The chapter will then turn to *Leigh Bowery (Seated)* (fig. 4) by Freud, also embodying a de-idealized nude male form, and will conclude by drawing comparisons between the depictions of the portraits; the gazes as well as the distorted perspectives in both works.

#### **BRANDED BY SAVILLE**

Dawn French said: "Jenny seems to have touched upon something that all women feel, which is a sort of tyranny of thinness. We have all been forced to see ourselves as attractive if we can conform to a certain kind of shape, a certain kind of beauty."<sup>37</sup> This 'tyranny of thinness' is manifested in *Branded* which depicts the abdomen, chest and distorted face of a nude female with words cut into the surface of her flesh. Composed from an oblique view below, the form is looked up to, causing her flesh to be pushed into the front of the picture.

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<sup>36</sup> Nead, 1992, 60

<sup>37</sup> *Jenny Saville*, BBC, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995 (12.16 mins in)



*fig. 3*

Through painting a self-portrait Saville has imposed an element of self-reflectivity. It creates questions around what her terms of inclusion were: is she recounting a personal experience of looking in a mirror? Is she undressing herself in the hope of changing perceptions? Perhaps it is to demonstrate her position as a female painter; emphasizing the difference between her and her male predecessors? It seems plausible to suggest all of the above. Her own words, cited in the dissertation's introduction, seem particularly pertinent: "If I wanted to paint figurative works I needed a movement between the

particulars into something general (that's why I say I don't paint portraits)<sup>38</sup> *Branded* is recognizably Saville, but equally acts as a mirror or a metaphor for other women.

Given the angle of the composition and the way the woman clenches a fold of her tummy, *Branded* feasibly is about body image. Maholi argues that Saville uses obesity as a subject to 'raise the issue of the body as a site for the competition between nature and culture, or nature and artificiality', explaining that while 'nature' (i.e. childbearing and nurturing) means that female bodies tend to gain weight in certain areas, 'culture' asks them to conform to an adolescent shape.<sup>39</sup> Such an ideal of beauty is in stark contrast to the first known representation of the female form, the *Venus of Willforndorf* (c. 30,000 - 25,000 BCE) [Unknown craftsman, 11.1 cm high, Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna] (fig. 5). The impersonal representation of a goddess's overflowing fertility has more in common with Saville's representation of the female form in *Branded*.

Equally, as Lynda Nead proposed in a BBC2 documentary about Saville, made in 1995, *Branded* displays flesh in the same way that a Christian icon might, saying: 'Saints would show you their stigmata and point at their wounds. It's as if, 'this is my imperfection, here in your face, what do you think of that?' Saville dares you to disapprove of it.'<sup>40</sup> Her fist full of flesh has more common with a Saint demonstrating their flesh than with the cult of beauty promoted in contemporary culture.



fig. 5

Nead wrote: 'She is framed – experiences herself as image and representation – by the edges of the mirror and then judged the boundaries of her own form and carries out necessary self-regulation.'<sup>41</sup> Such self regulation can perhaps be seen in the inscribed

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<sup>38</sup> Stanley, 2012, 6

<sup>39</sup> F. Maioli "Nomadic Subjects on Canvas: Hybridity in Jenny Saville's Paintings" *Ecloga*, 8 (Spring, 2010), 75

<sup>40</sup> Nead, 10.46 mins in, BBC2 'Jenny Saville', 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995

<sup>41</sup> Nead, 1997, 11

words. *Branded* means ‘identification marks burned into skin’ as well as ‘a habit or quality that causes someone public shame’.<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein to *Trace*, Saville has used the butt of her paint brush to carve into the surface of the paint a series of words (all in capital letters, of varying sizes and all following the form of the body). Kent argues the inscribed words ‘emphasize the unorthodoxy of her form [and] read as an embodiment of failure’.<sup>43</sup> But if we consider the mix of words, some are descriptive (petite, delicate and decorative), some describe personality (irrational) and others are caring words (precious and supportive); they seem to demonstrate an internal dialogue for the woman viewing



fig. 3, detail

herself in a mirror. Moreover the location of the words could also shed light on their meaning. For example, ‘supportive’ is scrawled wrapping around the underside of the right breast and could refer to the role a breast plays in breast feeding and nurturing a baby, or the need for a supportive bra to hold the breast in place. Again, the word ‘delicate’ arches along the line of the ribs, near the epigastrium, and could refer to a delicate stomach, or equally, a particularly tender part of the body, sexually.

### ***LEIGH BOWERY (SEATED) BY FREUD***

*Leigh Bowery (Seated)* (fig. 4) was the first oil painting Freud made of Bowery and the title instantly identifies him. He is ‘a bit past his prime: bald, overweight, and no great beauty.’<sup>44</sup> He is presented straight on; sitting on a Georgian winged, red velvet upholstered armchair, legs akimbo, overhanging belly central, oak wooden floorboards contrasted with his flesh, and staring directly out at us with a spent expression. The location is not visibly Freud’s studio. There is a gross mismatch between the delicate antique chair and the sprawled corpulent man. This is further emphasised by his unconventional pose: half poised, half

<sup>42</sup> Oxford English Dictionary

<sup>43</sup> S. Kent, *Shark Infested Waters. The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90* (London, 1994), 84

<sup>44</sup> Leppert, 2007, 224

relaxed. While the right side of his body holds a more conventional seated pose (with leg planted on floor, arm by side and hand tucked under thigh), his left is shown at leisure (arm bent across the top of the back support and knee hooked over the chair's arm). On facing the painting, the eye jars between Bowery's face and his genitalia, directly aligned below. His pubic region is open to our gaze and framed by the heavily shadowed fold of stomach fat. The flaccid penis falls vertically, and the impression is given that he holds his leg open for our benefit. Even given their central position, Leppert argues: 'the genitals appear as not any more than any other body parts – not the body part.'<sup>45</sup> Due to the equal attention and focus on all areas, essentially, he is what he is because all pretense has been removed.



*fig. 4*

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<sup>45</sup> Leppert, 2007, 226



David Mellor has argued, through Freud's paintings of Bowery, that 'Freud extended - perhaps even more fully than Bacon did - a de-idealized tradition of the grotesque nude'.<sup>46</sup> Through stripping away a 'traditional heroic attitude'<sup>47</sup> (a muscular,



fig. 6

defined form) and by painting the figure in a nondescript domestic setting, Freud moves



fig. 7

his representation of Bowery away from the traditional male form, such as the *Belvedere Torso* (1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE) [Vatican Museum, Rome] (fig. 6).<sup>48</sup>

When Tamara Garb wrote about Gustav Caillebotte's *Man at His Bath* (1884) (fig. 7): 'in this context (a domestic setting) the body alone had to become the locus for men's manliness, the site for an elaboration of invigorated modern masculinity,'<sup>49</sup> she could easily have been referring to *Leigh Bowery (Seated)*.

Further, Bowery's understanding that he was a long

way from a traditional male nude is summed up in his statement: 'when I thought of this catalogue of ghoulish features, I began to feel self-conscious and a little embarrassed - distant from a regular nude.'<sup>50</sup> Unlike a traditional male nude like Sandro Botticelli's

(1445-1510) *Mars and Venus* (1438) [National Gallery, London] (fig. 8)

Bowery is not painted within a mythic context,



fig. 8

<sup>46</sup> Mellor, 2002, 35

<sup>47</sup> T. Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figures and Flesh in Fin-de-Siecle France* (London, 1998), 28

<sup>48</sup> Selected because it was exhibited in *Defining Beauty: The Body in Ancient Greek Art* at the British Museum (2014).

<sup>49</sup> Garb, 1998, 28

<sup>50</sup> Hilton "The Cruel Story of Youth", *Leigh Bowery*, (London, 1998), 26

therefore he does not acquire any heroic gravitas. The vulnerability of Freud's nudes, male and female alike, is not about sex but about life. He acknowledges the distinction between prettiness and truth, promoting forcefully the claim made by the latter.'<sup>51</sup> The strength of this observation is underlined by the ongoing significance of Bowery's body to Freud, who paid for it to be flown back to Australia after his death from HIV/AIDs in 1994.

Both Saville's and Freud's paintings face the viewer head on and make direct eye contact with the viewer. (fig. details 3 & 4). Diana Meyer claims: 'the mind is the locus of selfhood and the face is the public side of the interior self.'<sup>52</sup> When applied to *Leigh Bowery (Seated)* this is significant; he holds his head high and stares unashamedly, yet his eyes are glazed, consumed in his thoughts. Leppert wrote on the eye contact of a nude: 'In Bryson's account, 'the gaze' commands an objectified world external to itself; it is so searchingly engaged in perceptual scrutiny that it dissociates the visual factual from the linguistic and the social and from meaning to general. Bryson took his term partly from the writing of Jacques Lacan, whose complex ideas respecting the gaze drew on the culture of



Detail of fig. 3



Detail of fig. 4

existentialism'.<sup>53</sup> Leppert goes on to apply Bryson's proposal on 'the gaze' to Freud, reasoning that Freud initially formed his realist practice in response to 'Parisian art of the existentialist period and suggests his approach does not 'entail merely a domination by the viewer of the viewed'.<sup>54</sup> Bowery's gaze, expression and eyes show he is occupied within

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<sup>51</sup> Leppert, 2007, 157

<sup>52</sup> J. Shrange, "You've Changed" *Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, (Oxford, 2009), 156

<sup>53</sup> Prendeville, 2000, 184-5

<sup>54</sup> Prendeville, 2000, 185

himself and not with the 'external world'; they are not confrontational and it is not uncomfortable to keep looking. The sad and wistful expression makes sense when you know he is coming to terms with his diagnosis of HIV/AIDS - a death sentence in the early 1990s. In comparison, there is no such passivity in the gaze from Saville. She returns the spectator's look, looking down her nose through the landscape of her body with a challenging expression. The viewer becomes involved looking and judging and in turn experiences a heightened awareness of the thoughts and judgements made about Saville's nude form. Saville further distances *Branded* from a traditional nude by angle and gaze; the model makes no attempt to show her features off in a flattering angle or under appealing lighting. This may be 'the public side of the interior self' but it could also be a mirror for any female spectator's 'locus of selfhood'.<sup>55</sup>

Both paintings distort perspective. *Leigh Bowery (Seated)* is painted from a vantage point that initially suggests a standing perspective looking down on the seated figure, but through continued viewing, manipulated areas reveal themselves. For example, Bowery's lower left leg is painted straight on and there is an obviously misaligned meeting point between floor and wall that creates the impression of a viewing from sharp left and right. Within *Branded*, such a distorted angle could only be achieved by placing a mirror between the feet and straining to see the reflection. The result is that Saville's head appears exceedingly small, perching atop the form, and disconnected from the fleshy body. Further, the head makes a three point isosceles triangle, with the other two points formed by her hands: the right one resting on the hip and the left holding a fold of stomach flesh. Kent argues this 'discrepancy implies a discordance between mind and body; a light spirit trapped within a heavy form.'<sup>56</sup> I believe it could also be read as a woman's experience of looking in the mirror: how she perceives herself as far larger than the reality.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Shrange, 2009, 156

<sup>56</sup> Kent, 1994, 83

<sup>57</sup> M. Meagher, 'Jenny Saville and the Feminist Aesthetic of Disgust' *Hypatia*, 18 (Autumn, 2003), 34

Obesity is a common theme between both works. Kent points out in *Shark infested Waters* (1994), written at the same time as the work was made, that obesity acted as a signifier for 'poverty and malnourishment; of a diet of white bread, chips, sweets and pop'. Of course, obesity and heart disease are closely related, and Kent concludes by showing that Glasgow, where Saville painted *Branded*, had the highest rate of heart disease in the UK in 1994.<sup>58</sup> Through representing larger women, Saville is engaging with this British cultural epidemic and the phenomenon of fat-phobia.

Both Saville and Freud engage with the contemporary nude by de-idolizing the form through the materials of oil paint and in the topics they engage. While Saville portrays flesh with multiple layers and exposures of different approaches to application, Freud builds a material landscape but only leaves the top skin visible. Saville rejects the "tyranny of thinness" or what current 'culture' and social media suggests the body should conform to, instead framing the feminine experience to include forms that curve and nurture. Freud, by painting a nude man within the domestic environment and by materializing flesh decaying from the HIV/AIDs virus, removes it from any realm of virile idealization, instead presenting "everyman".<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kent, 1994, 83

<sup>59</sup> B. Bernard and D. Dawson, *Freud at Work* (London, 2006), 30

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BLURRING THE GENDER BOUNDARIES



fig. 9

*'The repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created this appearance of natural division. The "naming" of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference.'*

- Judith Butler, 1990.<sup>60</sup>

In every one of the 10 paintings made after Freud and Bowery met in 1988,<sup>61</sup> as demonstrated through selected examples, Bowery shown as 'Everyman' (or "really naked", as Freud calls it).<sup>62</sup> Yet in an interview in 2006 Freud acknowledges some of Bowery's body adornments: "He had some ornaments in here [points to cheeks]" and "a tattoo on his

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<sup>60</sup> Butler, 1990, 147

<sup>61</sup> Figura, 2007, 30

<sup>62</sup> Bernard 2006, 70

tongue. It said 'Mum' on it".<sup>63</sup> Neither does he engage with Bowery's self-created image: an androgynous surrealist dandy. The following section will consider why. It will then look at Saville's representations of a transgender person opting for medical intervention in *Matrix* (1999) (fig. 14), and consider how she presents the body as a site of gender transition or hybridity. The chapter will initially distinguish between 'sex' and 'gender' by rationalizing gender types through terms such as non-gender conforming, before going on to consider them as inseparable; Judith Butler argues that 'sex is gender'.

### FREUD & BOWERY

*"Because I'm chubby, I can pleat the flesh across my chest and hold it in place with heavy grade gaffer tape. Then, by wearing a specially constructed under padded, uplift bra, I create the impression of a heaving bosom with six inch cleavage. Rather than dance with my penis flopping around, I do a tuck and glue job to affect a hairy pussy."*

- Leigh Bowery, 1993.<sup>64</sup>

Australian Leigh Bowery (1961-1994) arrived in London in 1976, and became involved in the emerging cultural-backlash to Punk: New Romanticism. Frieze Magazine's article *Leigh Bowery's Immaculate Conception* describes this time of 'violence, artifice and transvestism', and described how it initially surfaced in the androgynous proto-punk years of Ziggy Stardust'.<sup>65</sup> New Romanticism's emphasis on self-creation, originality and 'going out' as a stage for an ever-changing and ever-challenging spectacle was contextualized by the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2013 exhibition *Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s*. It demonstrated how traditional gender types were modified through flamboyant fashion. Bowery was a performance artist, nightclub owner and a cross-dressing fashion designer who used his body as his canvas.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bernard, 2006, 73

<sup>64</sup> Quoting Leigh Bowery, *Leigh Bowery*, 1998, 122

<sup>65</sup> 'Leigh Bowery's Immaculate Conception': [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/leigh\\_bowerys\\_immaculate\\_conception/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/leigh_bowerys_immaculate_conception/)

<sup>66</sup> Hilton, 1998, 77

His gender-impossible aesthetic was extreme. By ignoring the biological construct of his own body through modifying tools (such as makeup, gauze masks, prosthetics and piercings), he made himself a ‘hermaphrodite character whose sexuality was either lobotomised or masked’ as the Frieze article goes on to argue.<sup>67</sup> Alison Bancroft suggests in *Leigh Bowery: Queer in fashion, queer in art* that ‘he never made himself ‘like a woman’’ or ‘an approximation of a woman,’<sup>68</sup> but instead: ‘he adopted seemingly feminine corporeal characteristics in conjunction with the maintenance of the masculine aspects of the body.’<sup>69</sup> This is more apparent when we compare photographs of ‘dressed-up’ Bowery to photographer Nan Golding’s (1953 -) image *Misty and Gimmy Paulette in a Taxi, NYC* (1991) [Tate Modern, London] (fig. 11) of two drag queens in costume, taken around the same time, shows that, whilst Bowery traversed between gendered characteristics, Misty and Gimmy’s costumes aspire to emulate a feminine identity.<sup>70</sup>



fig. 18



fig. 11

So was Freud unmasking the feminine and reconstructing the masculine? Or perhaps even deconstructing the man? In relation to *Nude with Leg Up* (1994) [Hirsthorn Museum, Washington DC, 72 x 90 in] (fig. 12), Leppert argues: ‘our eyes have put him in his place, a lesser man than we, a man self-feminized (the ultimate cultural sin for the male) for our

<sup>67</sup> [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/leigh\\_bowerys\\_immaculate\\_conception/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/leigh_bowerys_immaculate_conception/)

<sup>68</sup> Bancroft, A., ‘Leigh Bowery: Queer In fashion, queer in art’, *Sexualities*, 15, (2011), 68

<sup>69</sup> Bancroft, 2011, 72

<sup>70</sup> Tate Website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/goldin-misty-and-jimmy-paulette-in-a-taxi-nyc-p78046>

viewing', as we look down.<sup>71</sup> This could also apply to *Leigh Bowery (Seated)*. But this reading is working from the assumption of an outsider's understanding of Bowery's involvement in London's subcultural scene of the 1980's, which, is already unfamiliar to subsequent generations. Until 1967, only 9 years before Bowery immigrated, it was illegal to be homosexual in the UK.<sup>72</sup> As a visibly gay male who assumed feminine aspects through costume and performance, Bowery challenged and threatened the 'heterosexual matrix'.<sup>73</sup> Butler politicizes the issue of gender difference by arguing there are 'identities and bodies that currently "matter" and those that don't',<sup>74</sup> caused by the maintenance of 'oppositions such as male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight' to exclude 'other' identities.<sup>75</sup> The question of why Bowery was prepared to allow Freud to strip him bare still lingers in relation to his gender. Was it for 'high' art validation as has been proposed? The union began after his diagnosis of HIV/AIDs and it seems plausible to propose that, although he confided in only a few (preferring that a story of him becoming a pig farmer in Bolivia should be circulated after his death), he agreed to, and then dedicated himself to, modeling for Freud because of his diagnosis. His friend Alt Hilton has written it was a 'passive



fig. 13

version of the discipline he applied to his own creations'.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps this is because he knew that he was dying and desired to leave behind physical manifestations that would outlive his flesh? Or perhaps Bowery knew that having unprotected sex with over 1000 men<sup>77</sup> was the

cause of his untimely illness and likely death and he was prepared to reveal this by being

<sup>71</sup> Leppert, 2007, 226

<sup>72</sup> Sexual Offenses Act of 1967

<sup>73</sup> S. Sahil, *Judith Butler* (London, 2002), 76

<sup>74</sup> Sahil, 2002, 76

<sup>75</sup> Sahil, 2002, 45

<sup>76</sup> Hilton, 1998, 26

<sup>77</sup> Karl-Peter Gottschalk, 'Leigh Bowery: Goodbye to the boy from the Sunshine' *Easy Publication*, (1995)



'unmasked' by Freud as he would have been during the acts. Whatever the cause, the dichotomy between Bowery's cultivated appearance and how Freud paints him is most visible in the photographs of Bowery at the Lucian Freud Retrospective held at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (1993), taken by Don Pollard (*fig. 13*).

### ***MATRIX BY SAVILLE***



*fig. 14*

*'Anyone can be the mater (creator) of his/her very self (the matter), a very postmodern statement that is, however, complicated by the aforementioned issue of surgery as both a matter of self-definition and a modification of the body according to stereotypes that the subject has unconsciously internalized.'*

- Francesca Maoili, 2010.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Maoili, 2010, 89-90

*Matrix* (1999) could have acted as an alternative to *Branded* when facing the contemporary nude in Chapter Three. But it would have presented a shocking disruption of expectations to the reader because, unlike Freud, Saville addresses sex and gender as not necessarily fixed; she shows us the ambiguous body-that of a man trapped inside women's flesh. Saville said: "I wanted to paint a visual passage through gender – a sort of gender landscape."<sup>79</sup> In *Matrix* she does so by showing an individual transitioning between biological genders with the help of medical intervention.

Initially, when looking at *Matrix*, the viewer is confronted by the female genitalia, pushed into the front of the picture plane. It is posed in a similar vein to Gustav Courbet's (1819-1877) *The Origin of the World* (1866) [Musee d'Orsay, Paris] (fig. 15), yet through the



fig. 15

inclusion of the model's head and the exaggerated scale (compared to Courbet's 46 x 55cm size), Saville 'creates a junction between the objectified body and the rationalized human face',<sup>80</sup> and re-appropriates the female genitalia from art historical discourse. The eye then follows the ostensibly female body upwards, over

the swollen tummy and voluptuous breasts. It meets, set against the creamy falling left breast, a stubbly beard, ruddy face, shaved head and bicep-wrapping tattoo: distinct aspects of masculinity. In response to this juxtaposition, the eye then races back along the landscape of the body, through the contours of the breasts, to see if the head does belong to the vagina.<sup>81</sup> We realize the hybridity of the figure and begin to look for signifiers to satisfy curiosity: Male-to-Female or Female-to-Male transition?

<sup>79</sup> Reilly, M., 'Curating Transnational Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, (Vol. 36, No. 1, RETHINKING THE GLOBAL (Spring 2010)), 171

<sup>80</sup> Noel, 2014, 6

<sup>81</sup> J. Halberstam, 'The Body in Question: Transgender images in Contemporary Art' *Make*, 88 (2000) 37

On further reflection, we see that the body as a whole is posed in a 'semi-recumbent' way,<sup>82</sup> balanced half on and half off a ledge with neck cricked and a cramped sense, similar in framing terms to *Branded*. The model's physical discomfort, also suggests discomfort with the reality of undergoing a transition inscribed in the flesh, because 'day by day violations threaten the integrity of the transgender body'.<sup>83</sup> The model is Del LaGrace Volcano, then a 38 year old Californian-born and British-based photographer who describes himself on his website as: 'An intentional mutation and intersex by design (as opposed to diagnosis).'<sup>84</sup> Although *Matrix* does not purport to be about Volcano, partly because the title is anonymous, Saville identifies him in interviews,<sup>85</sup> and admits his "self-designed" body appealed as being "partly man-made".<sup>86</sup> Volcano also wrote about the experience, *On Being A Jenny Saville Painting* (1999), where he admits his fear that Saville's photographs and final painting might "dislocate and/or diminish my transgender maleness".<sup>87</sup> The title *Matrix* is also significant. Maoli points out in *Nomadic Subjects on Canvas: Hybridity in Jenny Saville's Paintings* (2010) that it 'comes from the same root as "mater" (mother), "matter," and "material"'. She goes on to argue, 'It indicates the mould which, in the Aristotelian-thomistic notion of conception, stands for the male element opposed to the female element which symbolizes the raw matter for creation.'<sup>88</sup>

Butler wrote: 'If gender differentiation follows upon the incest taboo and the prior taboo on homosexuality, then "becoming" a gender is a laborious process of becoming naturalized, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings (...) such descriptions correspond to a body which has already been

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<sup>82</sup> Reilly, 2010, 171

<sup>83</sup> Halberstam, 2000, 38

<sup>84</sup> Del LaGrace Volcano website: <http://www.dellagracevolcano.com/statement.html>

<sup>85</sup> Schama, 2005, 126

<sup>86</sup> Extract from 'Interview with Jenny Saville' by Simon Schama

Saatchi Gallery Website source: [http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/jenny\\_saville.htm](http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/jenny_saville.htm)

<sup>87</sup> Halberstam, 2000, 38

<sup>88</sup> Maoli, 2010, 89

constructed or naturalized as gender-specific'.<sup>89</sup> Whilst Freud's depictions of Bowery seem to deny that identity can be a matter of creation, the hybrid position of Saville's figure in *Matrix* clearly argues that it can be: with a male head and female breasts and genitalia the body can be 'molded and remolded' until satisfactory.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, as in J.G. Ballard's *Crash*, 'humans can be authors of their lives'; hypothetically as well as literally.<sup>91</sup> Nochlin argues Saville is 'aggressively anti-essentialism,'<sup>92</sup> and when put in these terms, Nochlin's assertion makes sense. The visual analysis in Chapters Two and Three, Freud 'neuters' Bowery of all transgenderism by forcing him back into a male gender binary because 'since sex and gender are the first inscriptions to be found on the flesh.'<sup>93</sup> In doing so, he consolidates existing heterosexual power structures through 'neutering' Bowery's perceived transsexuality and transgression, and takes him from a subject to an object. Some commentators approach the Freud/Bowery relationship as a collaboration between two artists. Although this is literally true, Chapter Five will consider this in more depth.

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<sup>89</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Troubles* (Rutledge, 1990), 89-90

<sup>90</sup> Maioli, 2010, 71

<sup>91</sup> Schama, 2012, 29

<sup>92</sup> Nochlin, 2000, 96

<sup>93</sup> Maioli, 2010, 87

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PERFORMING OR PERFORMER?

Butler argues: 'gender is not a noun [but it] proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be'.<sup>94</sup> Salih interprets Butler's writing on the performance of gender as being 'something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being'.<sup>95</sup> Butler's major claim is that gender is a 'socially and discursively produced category' held in place by perpetually reinforced performative acts, preserved by institutions, discourse and common practice, that 'naturalize gender norms'.<sup>96</sup>

This chapter will consider the social or ideological performance of gender on the one hand, in relation to Butler's writing and the physical forms in the five paintings, and the performance of the representation of gender on the other - questioning if oil painting can be materially part of the performativity of the act, as Noclin argues, and therefore be a byproduct. It will discuss Bowery as performing or performer, considering his act of unmasking as perhaps the performance itself, the physical poses adopted by him as a continuous performance, and finally the collaboration of exposing the performed flesh. It will propose in relation to both works that not only does Freud reiterate gender binaries publicly but he also contours flesh, while Saville attempts to deconstruct 'heterosexual hegemony' common dichotomies such as nature/culture, male/female, masculine/feminine and gay/straight.

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<sup>94</sup> Butler, 1990, 25

<sup>95</sup> Salih, 2003, 62

<sup>96</sup> Brown, S., Collinson, D., & Wilkinson, R., eds. *Biological dictionary of twentieth-century philosophers*, (London, 1996), 118

## SAVILLE THE PERFORMANCE ARTIST?

Let us first consider Jenny Saville as performance artist. Nochlin claims that: 'Saville is at heart a conceptual artist' who 'has more in common with feminist performance art (..) than with that of old-time painter-slinger Freud'.<sup>97</sup> Is the performance of painting part of the truth negotiation she seeks and should we classify her as a performance artist first and foremost, or a painter? In discussing Saville's painting process we should consider her statement that she considers paint as liquid flesh that she manipulates. Further, in her interview in *Continuum*, she compares her process with that of a conductor: "Tonality is as important to a painter as it is to a musician. When I mix my colours, it is foremost in my mind to construct and differentiate between, say, the flat of an ear and the side of the head. The way I shape my marks is similar to the way a musician shapes his or her notes. Are you going to play them hard or soft, blending the sound?"<sup>98</sup> This emphasis on the physical movement of the artist's body, both scripted but with areas of spontaneity, conjures mental images of the artist's dance, whilst her unflinching focus on the body aligns her to feminist performance artists. Moreover the time she devotes to each work could be seen within the brackets of duration performance.

Yet I would dispute the statement in full because, as Kuspit's statement in the introduction suggests, the material outcome is as important as the process to Saville. "Art is not in the object" the conceptualists argued, "but in the artist's conception of art to which the objects are subordinated." But the New Old Masters art is at once aesthetically resonant and visionary.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, through the act of painting she is not only performing, but also, and of equal importance, she is confronting gender binaries and socially imposed ideals that are manifested through the presence of the outcome of the dance: the physical material painting. In addition, the paintings themselves, such as *Trace* and *Branded* are performing

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<sup>97</sup> Nochlin, 2000, 96

<sup>98</sup> Saville, 2012, 16

<sup>99</sup> Kuspit, 2004, 181-2

to some degree within the public domain because they are challenging binaries of feminine beauty and adding other female forms to the canon.

### BOWERY THE PERFORMER

Performance was Bowery's *métier* so let us consider three possible ways the performance plays out within *Man naked, back view* and *Leigh Bowery (Seated)*. Bowery's performances challenged traditional gender signifiers and subverted expected private/public social spheres. For example, Bowery 'gave birth' to his wife, Nicola Bateman, on stage<sup>100</sup> (fig. 16) and he would create an enema (injecting liquid or gas into the rectum to expel its content<sup>101</sup>) prior to a performance and subsequently spray his audience with excrement. Therefore, was the act of unmasking his self-created identity a performance in itself for Bowery? Within Freud's painting he is shown simply being, "truly naked" which leaves a question over whether he felt to some degree unnatural, undressed and stripped bare? Was he comfortable in both dressed and undressed performance? And was he at ease with his self-created identity as well as his real self?



fig. 16

Freud's comments suggest that Bowery was as comfortable in dressed as undressed performance, and that the physical pose Bowery endured for months on end was a

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<sup>100</sup> Bowery married Nicola Bateman, his long term companion, 7 months before his death. Freud painted to pair in *And the Bridegroom* (1993) (fig. 11)

<sup>101</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/enema>

performance of duration. Saying: “I was aware of his awareness of being an instrument”, Freud elaborated that “I realize that the fact that he was a performer meant that whatever he did, he was still in a sense performing, because of his physical awareness, which was extraordinary. And very articulate. And – huge as it was – very delicate.” Within the interview, Freud also concedes that Bowery was responsible for suggesting ideas for poses, including *Naked man, back view* (although Freud felt it “doesn’t work, I don’t think.”) This durational idea of performance could also be linked to other works Bowery made, including his installation at the Anthony d’Offay Gallery in 1988 when the pair first met. The press release announced that “Bowery will be installing himself,” and although costume and audience were an integral part of this work, the idea of thinking up and then holding in stillness a particular pose does link to what he went on to do for Freud.



fig. 17

The idea of a collaboration, together exposing the contemporary flesh of a performance artist, has also been raised. Of course, through including Bowery, Freud makes his work modern,<sup>102</sup> and through being included, Bowery cements his place within the canon, but could it be deeper? In his article of 1956, Freud wrote: “The aura given out by a person or object is as much part of them as their flesh. The effect that they make in space is all bound up with them as might be their colour or smell. (...) It is through observation and perception of atmosphere that he can register the feeling that he wishes his painting to give out.”<sup>103</sup> From Bruce Bernard’s photographs of the pair at work, ‘performance is playfully replayed’ because Bowery mimics poses from the painting underway (*fig. 18*), his

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<sup>102</sup> Bowery, 1998, 27

<sup>103</sup> Freud, 1954, 16



character almost tangible. As David Mellor argues, 'this theatrical repetition is presented in a photograph that became a kind of performance piece in itself.'<sup>104</sup> Could this run even deeper? In Freud's painting of *Leigh Bowery (Seated)*, his vast belly appears almost pregnant, which perhaps references Bowery's performance of birth already mentioned.<sup>105</sup>



fig. 18a

### THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

Finally, let us consider the performance of gender binaries and their disruptions within both Freud and Saville's work. 'The body, then, is something that is not natural but it is part of the subject's project of identity,' a strongly Butlerian idea.<sup>106</sup> Within all the nude paintings considered, we see elements of gender performance to fulfil the 'heterosexual hegemony', as Butler puts it. For example, *Trace* and *Branded* playing into perceived feminine roles that are constructed by society, such as negative feelings around obesity. *Matrix* raises the idea of gender as a construction, a choice rather than simply biology, but also reminds us that Volcano is bound to socially constructed masculine ideals, such as a goatee beard and bicep-wrapping tattoo that impose, through body art/adornment, the fulfilment of perceived masculinity.<sup>107</sup> All of Saville's presented works show the

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<sup>104</sup> Mellor, 2002, 41

<sup>105</sup> Mellor, 2002, 40-41

<sup>106</sup> Maioli, 2010, 87

<sup>107</sup> Maoili, 2010, 89-90

contradictions, and 'point where diverging issues converge and balance, before they finally implode to create and re-create something new.'<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, as demonstrated within *Naked man, back view* and *Leigh Bowery (Seated)*, Freud has imposed such ideals onto his subject so that he removes (in terms of costume) and conceals (in terms of cheek-piercing and tattoos) all enactments of non-gender conformation, neutering him of his performance of gender 'otherness'.

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<sup>108</sup> Maioli, 2010, 88

## CONCLUSION

Leppert writes: 'Paintings of nudes, however transgressive some might be, easily remind us of the limits of the very agency that their transgressiveness.'<sup>109</sup> Judith Butler says 'sex is gender'. Since it can be accepted that biological gender is the first inscription to be found on viewing nude flesh, I believe I have shown in this dissertation that it is very difficult for a contemporary nude not to express heterosexual hegemony to some degree. Chapter 4 argued that the blurring of gender boundaries which has occurred in the UK over the last 50 years - following the legalization of same-sex intercourse and recent improvements in gender alignment surgery - biology no longer needs to dictate gender. Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted the potential alienation of bodies that deviate from that ideal.

Nead suggests that the solution that has emerged 'has meant opening up visual culture to different kinds of images of femininity and the female body, and has politicized the role of visibility itself.'<sup>110</sup> I believe my research into the works of Saville and Freud supports this. Saville achieves representation of 'transgressiveness' by painting and bringing into the public sphere, otherwise ignored forms: while Freud's paintings, particularly those of Bowery nude and stripped of his transgressive adornments represent his attempt to impose his own virility on Bowery's transgression.

"Craft is once again at a premium but art remains conceptual" wrote Kuspit.<sup>111</sup> My visual analysis in Chapter Two and Three confirms this. Both Saville and Freud challenge traditional practice by using enormous canvases for their nudes: Freud life-sized and Saville larger-than-life. They differ in their planning and their use of materials: Saville's

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<sup>109</sup> Leppert, 2007, 239-40

<sup>110</sup> Nead, 1990, 79

<sup>111</sup> Kuspit, 2004, 182

photo-based approach supports her layered detail and heterogenous use of oil paint, Freud uses layers of opaque Cremnitz White to develop his three-dimensional skin surfaces.

The research I have carried out and my analysis firmly supports Kuspit's view that the 'New Old Masters bring us a fresh sense of the purposefulness of art – faith in the possibility of making a new aesthetic harmony out of the tragedy of life, without falsifying it – and a new sense of art's inter-humanity.'<sup>112</sup> But it has also shown in relation to the works of the two artists I have studied in this paper, that while there are similarities in their aesthetic and a connection in their painterly technique, their paintings are based on entirely different approaches to gender: Saville highlights contradictions in order to create, even re-create something new. Freud, in contrast imposes his ideals onto his subjects.

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<sup>112</sup> Kuspit, 2004, 193

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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*fig. 1*

**TRACE**, 1993-94

*Jenny Saville*

Oil on Canvas

213.4 cm x 182.9 cm

Privation Collection

*Seen at Modern Art Oxford curtesy of Gagosian Gallery.*

Image Source: MAO catalogue, p. 7



*fig. 2*

**NAKED MAN, BACK VIEW**, 1991-92

*Lucian Freud*

Oil on Canvas

182.9 x 137.2 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

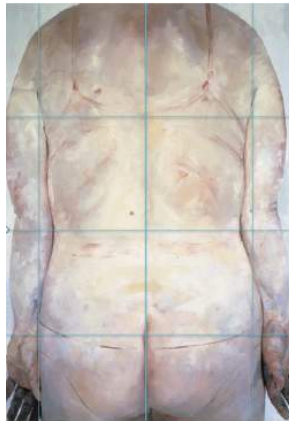
*Seen at Lucian Freud retrospective?*

Image Source: Met Museum website



*Diagram 2.*

Imposed onto fig. 2



*Diagram 1.*

Imposed onto fig. 1



*Diagram 3.*

Imposed onto fig. 2



*fig. 3*

**LEIGH BOWERY (SEATED), 1990**

*Lucian Freud*

Oil on Canvas

243.7 x 183 cm

Private Collection, Seattle

*Seen at Lucian Freud retrospective?*

Image Source: *The Painter's Etchings*, MoMA, Starr Figura, p. 31



*fig. 4*

**BRANDED, 1992**

*Jenny Saville*

Oil and Mixed Media on Canvas

209.5 x 149 cm

Private Collection

Image courtesy of the Gagosian Gallery

Image Source: Christies Website [25.04.2015]



*fig. 5*

**VENUS OF WILLENDORF**

*(circa 30,000 - 25,000 BCE)*

Made from limestone

Height: 110mm

Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

Image Source: artstor [06.04.2015]



fig. 6

**BELVERDER TORSO, 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE**

*Signed by Athenian sculptor Apollonios*

Carved Marble

Vatican Museum, Rome

Image Sources: My photo.



fig. 7

**MAN AT HIS BATH, 1884**

*Gustav Caillebotte*

Oil on Canvas

189.5 x 144.1 cm

Museum of Fine Art, Boston

Image Source:

<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/man-at-his-bath-537982>



fig. 8

**VENUS AND MARS, 1485**

*Sandro Botticelli*

Tempera and Oil on Poplar

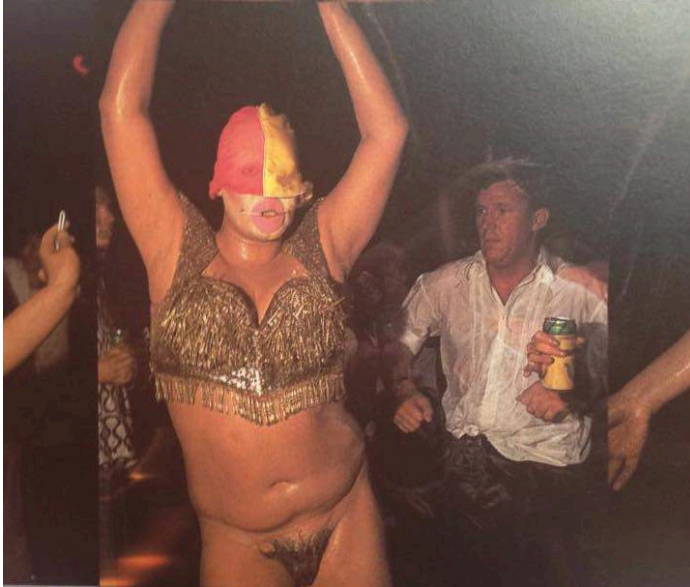
69.2 x 173.4 cm

National Gallery, London

Image Source:

[http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/sandro-botticelli-venus-and-mars/\\*/key-facts](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/sandro-botticelli-venus-and-mars/*/key-facts)





*fig. 9*

**LEIGH BOWERY AT CAMBODIA,  
LONDON**

*(1990)*

Photograph

By David Swindells

Image Source: Leigh Bowery book, Violette Edition  
London, Sacn from p. 72 [06.04.2015]



*fig. 10*

**MINTY AND GIMMY PUALETTE IN A  
TAXI, NYC**

*(1991)*

Photograph

By Nan Golding

Tate Modern Collection

Image Source: Tate Website



*fig. 12*

**NUDE WITH LEG UP, 1992**

*Lucian Freud*

Oil on Linen

72 x 90 in.

Hirsthorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Image Source:

<http://www.artcritical.com/2014/04/30/phoebe-hoban-on-lucian-freud/>



*fig. 13*

**LEIGH BOWERY AT THE OPENING OF  
LUCIAN FREUD EXHIBITION AT THE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,  
NEW YORK**

*(1993)*

Photograph

By Dan Pollard

Image Source: Leigh Bowery book, Violette Edition

London, Scanned from p. ?? [06.04.2015]



*fig. 14*

**MATRIX, 1999**

*Jenny Saville*

Oil on Canvas

Private Collection

Image courtesy of the Gagosian Gallery

Image Source: MAO catalogue, p. 25



*fig. 15*

**THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD, 1866**

*Gustav Courbet*

Oil on Canvas

46 x 55 cm

Musee d'Orsay

Image Source: artstor [15.3.15]



fig. 11

**AND THE BRIDEGROOM, 1993**

*Lucian Freud*

Oil on Canvas

231.8 x 195.9 cm

Lewis Collection

Image Source: William Fever Book, photocopied from p. 268



fig. 16

**LEIGH BOWERY LAST PERFORMANCE WITH MINTY, FREEDOM CAFÉ, LONDON**

24<sup>th</sup> November 1994

Photograph

By Alex Mark Hanson called Simon

Image Source: Leigh Bowery book, Violette Edition London, Scan from p. 302 [06.04.2015]



fig.17

**PORTRAIT OF LEIGH BOWERY**

(1988)

Photograph

By Werner Pawlok

Image Source:

<http://artblart.com/2013/01/27/exhibition-xtravaganza-staging-leigh-bowery-at-kunsthalle-wien-vienna/> [06.04.2015]





a



b



c



d

*fig.18 a* Lucian and Leigh, 1992

*fig. 18 b* Lucian and Leigh II, 1992

*fig 18 c* 1993

*fig 18 d* Leigh Bowery, 1992

Photographs

By Bruce Bernard

Image Source: Scanned from *Freud at Work* (2006)