



Contemporary Feminism: Art Practice, Theory, and Activism--An Intergenerational Perspective

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Although in our time a generation seems to be the measure of the life span of a mosquito, it was—a generation ago—agreed upon as the thirty-year span of time during which a person could grow from birth to parenthood. So perhaps it is fitting that, thirty years after the inception of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Feminist Art Movement, a number of panels, forums, and symposia have focused on the history, relevance, and fate of feminism. At events such as the panel "Between the Acts," moderated by Faith Wilding for Art in General in New York in October 1997; the series of four panel discussions held at A.I.R. Gallery in New York in 1997–98 to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary as one of the first women artists' cooperative galleries (including "Realities of Feminism and/or Activist Practice," which I moderated and which inspired this forum in *Art Journal*); the symposium "The F-Word: Contemporary Feminisms and the Legacy of the Los Angeles Feminist Art Movement" at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia in September–October 1998; and the panel discussion "The Body Politic: Whatever Happened to the Women Artist's Movement?" at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in December 1998, vanguard feminist artists and younger women artists have considered many of the questions I asked the following women artists and art historians from three generations of feminism to address:

Mira Schor

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in the last [five, ten, fifteen, twenty] years? What is your experience of an intergenerational dialogue around feminist ideas and histories? What do you find is the relationship between the theoretical assertions, aims, and positions articulated within feminism and the realities of your lived experience and actual practice? How would you characterize the exchange between men and women around feminist issues? Can feminist ideals be perpetuated without writing about or representing women, gendered practice, or gendered identity? How have the critical reformulations by which feminism challenged art historical and critical discussions twenty or so years ago been integrated into current curricula, institutional politics, and individual working methods?

How would you place your own work within a historical continuum from 1970s feminism to the present? Has the influence of feminist theory affected your practice as an artist, teacher, critic, or historian, and has that changed

Emma Amos

An artist friend of mine remarked to me that she hated the question, Which is worse, being black or being female? Aside from the question's ubiquitous dumbness, she had never not been both, so how could she tell? Besides, the answer is in the question itself: they are both limiting. Though I am told that many black women eschew feminism, I do not think I know any who will admit that they do. (By the way, I have no use for the term *African-American*, even if it does slip out of my mouth on occasion. Being parts African, Cherokee, Irish, Norwegian, and God knows what else, I refuse to cede the high status of being unhyphenated American to people who hide their hyphens behind whiteness or those who came to these shores way after my ancestors did.)

In 1961, when I moved to New York City from Atlanta by way of college in Ohio and art school in London, I was sure that I was prepared for anything. But I was surprised by the hidden racism, sexism, and ageism that greeted me as I showed my work to galleries and tried to find a studio teaching job. It was suggested that only mature artists could teach, and that I was too young to show. (Now, younger artists have more of an edge, if not the edge.) I eventually took a job at the Dalton School, where I made friends with artists who introduced me to my future husband and to the New York and Easthampton art scene. I shortly began to understand it was a man's scene, black or white. After a year, I began a career as a textile designer, working for the great weaver and colorist, Dorothy Liebes, who showed me how much energy it takes to be a success in a world of male power.

After returning to school to get yet another degree, I discovered Hale Woodruff, the New York University professor who had been a friend of my family while he was teaching and making murals at Atlanta University. He borrowed some of my work to show to a group of his friends, and I was invited to join them. The fifteen members of *Spiral*, all black men (except for me), included Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston, Merton Simpson, and Richard Mayhew. I imagined that I might be expected to take notes and make coffee, but I never did. For the next two years—from 1964 when I joined, to 1966 when we stopped meeting regularly—we talked of Leopold Senghor's conference in Paris on *Négritude*, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and the exploding Civil Rights struggle. Pipsqueak though I was, I argued in every discussion, except those that were about their tiresome old rivalries.

I was pleased and honored to be the token woman at *Spiral*, though I thought it was fishy that the group had not asked Vivian Browne, Betty Blayton Taylor, Faith Ringgold, Norma Morgan, or the other women artists of their acquaintance to join. I figured that I probably seemed less threatening to their egos, as I was not yet of much consequence.

In the early 1970s when my children were toddlers, I was asked to come to meetings of a group of other Village artist/NYU park-sitting mothers. But I did not, because I could not imagine discussing male/female power issues with women whose mothers, I assumed, had been Donna Reed homemakers. I was very proud that my grandmother, Emma, had a college degree and was teaching in Atlanta by the early 1890s. My mother, India, graduated from college in 1931 as an anthropology major and managed the family drugstore.

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From what I heard of feminist discussions in the park, the experiences of black women of any class were left out. I came from a line of working women who were not only mothers, but breadwinners, cultured, educated, and who had been treated as equals by their black husbands. I felt I could not afford to spend precious time away from studio and family to listen to stories so far removed from my own.



Emma Amos. *Tightrope*, 1994. 82 x 58 (208.3 x 147.3). Acrylic on linen canvas, African fabric borders. Courtesy the artist. In this work, Amos carries a T-shirt with a transferred fragment from Paul Gauguin's painting *Two Tahitian Women with Mangoes*, also printed in the four corners of the fabric borders.

When my children were older and I had become a professor at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, I became a contributor and then a member of the editorial collective of *Heresies*. This was the group I had always hoped existed: serious, knowledgeable, take-care-of-business feminists giving time to publish the art and writings of women. Besides my sponsor, Lucy Lippard, the collective included Elizabeth Hess, Avis Lang, Ellen Lanyon, Josely Carvalho, and Sabra Moore, among others.

The question of the white liberal northern understanding of class, race, and the privileges of whiteness intrigued a group of women brought together by the art historian Eunice Lipton. I began to meet with this group, Fantastic Women in the Arts, in the late 1980s. For several years we came together to read, to see art, and to discuss why the education, learning, and civil rights actions of the sixties and seventies that *should* have caused racism and sexism to abate had not done so. But the group kept attracting new people who had not done the reading and could never seem to catch up with what members had learned from past discussions of shows, readings, and each other.

At about the same time, WAC (Women's Action Coalition), the vigorous and excitable feminist action group, had started to meet. For the nonwhite women asked to join WAC (in what seemed to be an afterthought), the

group never met its promise. It made a few good "actions" but caused some hard feelings before it wore itself out. The most successful feminist group, the Guerrilla Girls, has done more since it began in the eighties than the large and unwieldy WAC ever managed to accomplish. Perhaps anonymity allowed the Girls to get their work done. Entitled: Black Women Artists, a large new group of fine artists in the Northeast, started meeting a few years ago. Goals, strategy, leadership struggles, money, time to participate, and places to meet are the tough internal issues for all groups.

Now, young artists, both women and men, seem willing to embrace the

ideas that helped put more women on art faculties and in galleries, and provoked the publication of books and writings on and by women and nonwhite artists. But every first-year class still has to be brought up to speed about how recent has been the push to move the margins to the center, to use bell hooks's concept. There has been no trickle-down of feminist thought to elementary and secondary school education. At this point, the numbers of women artists who get press, are given museum shows, and have avid dealers and collectors hardly reflect the numbers of fine women artists turned out by advanced art programs. Those artists who are not white, young, and straight, and who are openly political, and feminist, seem to still be on the margins. I hope we all will see more change soon.

Emma Amos lives in New York City. Professor of Art at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, she is also a Governor of The Skowhegan School, Maine. She has degrees from Antioch College in Ohio, the Central School of Art in London, and New York University. Her awards include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Rockefeller Bellagio Fellowship, and an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from The College of Wooster.

Susan Bee

I was called a “feminist assemblage” artist in a review by Jonathan Goodman in the October 1998 issue of *Art in America*. And in 1997, Robert C. Morgan wrote that my painting “represents a kind of Beat Feminism.” So I guess my identification as a feminist is official. My artwork—both painting and artist's books—examines gender roles and female images in the larger context of American history and iconography. I believe strongly in the role of the imagination and the importance of poetry, humor, irony, memory, and fantasy in art. Being against dogmatic approaches, I am appreciative of idiosyncratic, individualistic, and eccentric art making in whatever gender I encounter them.

I first came into close contact with the feminist movement around 1969–70 in the midst of the political turmoil of the Vietnam war protests. At Barnard College, an all-women's school, I met Kate Millett, Catherine Stimpson, and many others who were just starting to explore women's histories, issues, voices, and theories. This period of ferment had a lasting impact on my sense of identity and remains a crucial reference point for me.

In retrospect, it seems clear to me that women artists were not taken seriously until they took the initiative and brought themselves forward into the public sphere in the 1970s. For example, look at the endlessly reproduced 1950 photograph of “The Irascibles”—a large group of prominent American male artists including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and so on, and one lone standing woman artist, Hedda Sterne. Has anyone actually seen her work? As I knew from my mother Miriam Laufer's experiences as an artist, women did not fare well in the art world of New York of the 1950s and 1960s. My mother showed in the 10th Street galleries and was an early supporter of the feminist art movement.

Feminism was an eye-opener and still is. Feminist theory and practice carried me through my less than glowing experiences with the all-male art faculty of Hunter College graduate school. After Hunter I spent a year working as an editor for *Women Artists News*. Presently, I am involved with A.I.R. Gallery,

the first women artists' gallery in the United States, of which I have been a member for four years. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, I attended many notable exhibitions and panel discussions and performances there, which featured gallery members such as Ana Mendieta and Nancy Spero.

Some people question the continuing need for exclusively women's institutions like A.I.R. (or Barnard College). And, of course, there is the danger of ghettoizing female art and artists or of feeling that women-only galleries are

second-rate. In addition to these problems, some of these institutions are also facing the aging of their core membership and the difficulty of attracting qualified and interesting younger women. Younger women artists want to make it in the mainstream, if possible, and not languish on the fringes or in the past, where many perceive the feminist movement to reside. All these issues swirl around A.I.R., creating unresolved awkwardness and difficulties for the members. But then, the decision to follow a feminist path in art has never been easy. Being political and announcing your difference is not the most unproblematic way to proceed in the art world. That's what makes maintaining an openly feminist space with self-declared feminist artists in charge such a challenge.

Cooperatives are based on the principles of participatory democracy, which makes them dynamic sites for the often fiercely individualistic and demanding egos of the member artists. To come to a group decision is often an arduous process, because the lack of hierarchy provides both a frustrating and a stimulating layer of intrigue. Luckily, since A.I.R. has been in exist-

tence for over twenty-five years, rules have been formulated to deal with most problems that arise.

I think it's important that A.I.R. exist, even as women artists have begun to make significant inroads into the mainstream. We still need a place of our own. Through its exhibition program and panel discussions, A.I.R. brings younger women into contact with the history of feminism, and the gallery continues to serve as a thorn in the side of the old-boy network. We need our own networks to give us alternatives and strength.

From 1986 to 1996, I co-published, designed, and co-edited *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*



Susan Bee. *The Bell Cracked*, 1997. Oil and collage on linen. 58 x 48 (147.3 x 121.9). Courtesy the artist.

with Mira Schor. We created a space where feminist issues were explored, but also in which male artists were given an opportunity to address the issues that interested them. This created a dialogue between the genders, as well as establishing a zone for exploring further aesthetic, political, and practical issues of interest to practicing artists. Even though we ended the publication in order to focus on other projects, the need for an art magazine that includes feminist dialogues still exists.

Feminist issues remain inescapable for me in all aspects of my life—in my commercial work as an editor, in my personal life as a wife and as the mother of a boy and a girl, in my artwork, and in my involvement with *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* and *A.I.R.*, I hope the future of women's art and art making will be strong, participatory, empowering, and inclusive.

Susan Bee is a painter, editor, and book artist living in New York. She had a solo exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery in 1998 and will have another one there in April 2000. Granary Books has published her artist's books *Talespin* and, in collaboration with Charles Bernstein, *Little Orphan Anagram* and *Log Rhythms*. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, co-edited with Mira Schor, is forthcoming from Duke University Press.

Johanna Drucker

In the early 1970s, I was terrified by the idea of becoming a feminist, certain that it meant becoming aggressively plain, alienating men, and giving up on romance and humor. In addition, my critical faculties were offended by images of solidarity and sisterhood with a community of only women who appeared to suspend judgment to support each other's work. Misconceptions all, but nonetheless these ideas held potent sway in my mind in my early adulthood. And I think many of those same negative stereotypes persist today.

In the mid-1970s, when I heard about *Womanhouse* and the *Women's Building* through a gay woman friend, I figured they were for someone else. My fear of feminist environments was bound up with a thinly masked anxiety about lesbianism—not so much homophobia as ignorance. At an age when I had very little sexual experience, the idea of having or working through a sexual identity (not merely a gendered one) was mind-boggling. Enough to send me straight back into cocooned introversion. And the work I associated with early 1970s feminism made me queasy: the vaginas and labia and flowers, quilts, weavings, and body art seemed so obvious. I longed for transcendence out of gendered identity through my work, not identification with it.

It took a decade of professional life and attendant subtle and not-so-subtle abuses for me to understand the need for feminist consciousness. It also took that long for me to sort out the difference between the concept of being a woman artist (in which gender had a determining role) and feminist art practice (in which gendered identity becomes a political position within patriarchal structures of power). I now have great respect for the generation(s) of women who set their own aesthetic parameters and demonstrated the possibility and necessity for self-determination in professional and personal terms as artists—whether they used their work to display that agenda overtly or not. But it has always seemed to me that the real triumph of feminism is the moment when women can work without a sense of obligation to overt

feminist concerns. To achieve a position maximizing freedom of aesthetic expression has always seemed far preferable to having to put one's aesthetics at the service of an agenda. I'm not suggesting ignoring the lived realities of feminist politics, but I support the possibility of separating them from artistic expression if one so desires.

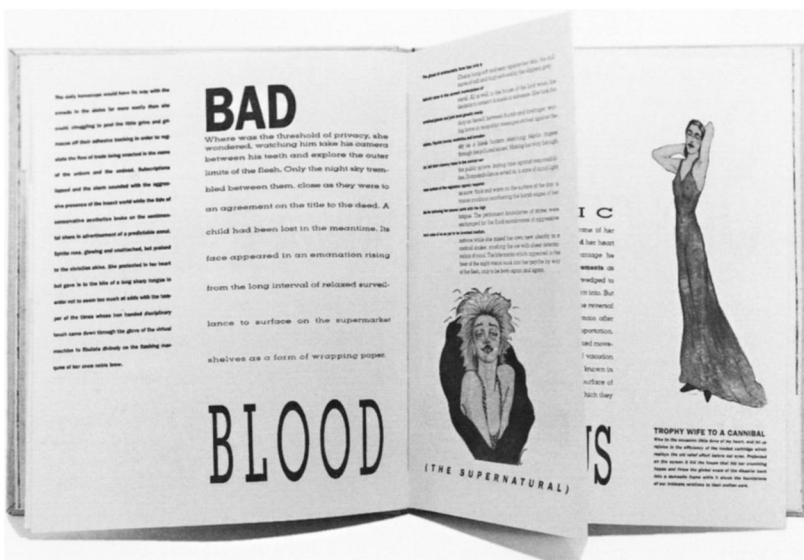
This separation of aesthetics and politics has tremendous relevance to academic and critical work and pedagogy, as well as to creative practice. When I was let go from a previous academic position, I reflected on the gender implications. Three other junior faculty were let go at the same time: all women. One was African American, three were Jewish, all were more politically radical than our colleagues, and among us were the only self-identified feminists in the department. Systematic discrimination? Or coincidence? After all, the

academic work I do is not overtly feminist. But quite possibly it

is precisely my engagement with visual culture, with graphic design, typographic poetry, the history of writing and the alphabet, and the intersection of creative and critical work that does demonstrate a radical feminism, or, at least, an embrace of "difference" and "otherness" within the field of art history. Perversely, it is now the case that recognizably "radical feminist" work in queer theory, lesbian studies, or straight feminist art history has a defined (not safe, but at least established) academic identity. Therefore, for me the goals of feminism have to include work that does not have overt feminist agendas but by its capacity to challenge received ideas is implicitly feminist.

Within the academy, the politics of gender are played out through social dynamics as well as through academic achievements. Here the pedagogical tenets of feminism also take their toll within the elite academy. For instance, among the sins I committed as an academic were to be generous with my time, provide professional development for graduate students, do assigned tasks without complaint, and never throw a diva fit. I watched numerous male colleagues be rewarded for being too busy to go to meetings, never showing up to office hours, and treating students with arrogant dismissiveness. The terms of gender were absolutely at work. And the tools of feminism? Useful as insight, utterly ineffectual in turning the situation around.

And now? Though I am troubled by the historical amnesia of my students with regard to the political background from which they can assert their gendered, gay, ethnic, or otherwise once-marginalized identities, I have to be glad that they have a self-confidence I could never have imagined at that age. If I want them to be aware of the systemic and systematic nature of power and exclusionary politics, it's not because I want them to pay a tithe of obligation to early feminist (and civil and gay rights) movements. It's because



Johanna Drucker.
Narratology, 1994. Artist's
book: letterpress and
handcolor. 12½ x 10¼
(31.8 x 26.4). © 1994
Druckwerk. Photo Brad
Freeman.

when (as will inevitably occur) they hit the limits of tolerance in the structures of patriarchal capitalist culture, they will need to be able to think beyond their individual identities and into a collective insight into the way they are positioned by those very forces to which they think themselves immune by virtue of their talents, energies, and abilities.

I want my students to absorb the lessons of feminist pedagogy from my classroom, to incorporate the flexibility of a sense of humor and play, the capacity to shift between irreverence and serious criticality, and to live with contradictions without having to close all artwork, ideas, or imagination into formulaic resolutions. The issues that gave rise to feminism are still with us, and so is the need to reconceptualize feminism so that it becomes viable again—not through some dreary sense of generational debt, but through a living demonstration of its benefit for our lives and our work.

Johanna Drucker is a writer and scholar who has published many volumes of creative and critical work on visual poetry, writing, and contemporary art. She is Professor of English, Robertson Chair of Media Studies, and Director of Media Studies at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

María Fernández

Recently, feminist critics and artists have challenged utopian rhetorics of electronic media theory that stress the liberational aspects of the technology. History demonstrates that often such rhetorics differ drastically from the actual deployment of the technology. Feminist critiques underscore the realities of women's exploitation and oppression in the global capitalist system of production.¹ It is now clear that not only poor, young, and uneducated women in areas of the "Third World" are exploited, but also white-collar workers and highly educated women in the "First World" working part-time or at home in exchange for underpayment, longer hours, and no benefits.² Women do approximately two-thirds of the world's work and earn about one-tenth of its income, and the electronic revolution has done nothing to change this.³

Recent critiques of digital utopianism are an improvement over the situation in late 1980s and early 1990s, when most theoreticians and practitioners of electronic media were far too involved in their affair with the computer to engage with these subjects. But recognition of the problems is insufficient to bring about change. It is now necessary to devise strategies of organization and intervention.

Most theorists agree on the potential of electronic communication to bring together women from diverse geographical and ethnic backgrounds. Some already see the emergence of a global "virtual sisterhood" but recognize that access to electronic technologies is often class-based.⁴

In order to reconcile the local and the global, the virtual and the lived worlds, communication and collaboration among women must occur in parallel with local organization and activism.⁵ But this is no easy task. Even at the local level we fail to communicate effectively because of long-standing barriers. In order to surmount them, it will be necessary to become acquainted with feminist history and reexamine obstacles that curtailed dreams of a "universal sisterhood" during the 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, the utopia of an

1. María Fernández, "Postcolonial Media Theory," *Art Journal* 58, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 58–73; Coco Fusco, "At Your Service: Latinas in the Global Information Network," plenary address, ISEA98, Liverpool, September 4, and Manchester, September 6, 1998; Faith Wilding, "Home at Work/Work at Home," in *Read Me! Filtered by Nettime: ASCII Culture and the Revenge of Knowledge* (New York: Autonomedia, 1998), 191–97; Zillah Eisenstein, *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
2. See especially Wilding, and the video documentary directed by Barbara Wolf, *Degrees of Shame: Part-Time Faculty. Migrant Workers of the Information Economy* (Cincinnati: Barbara Wolf Video Work, 1998).
3. Eisenstein, 134.
4. *Ibid.*, 164–69, 172–76.
5. Critical Art Ensemble, "Electronic Civil Disobedience," in *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas* (New York: Autonomedia, 1996), 9.

alliance among the world's women was challenged by women of color, who questioned the validity of the notion of a universal woman.⁶ At present, few feminists would argue for the homogeneity of women's experience, yet this assumption is implicit in much of cybertheory. Issues of race are underdeveloped, and class is addressed with much unease. As Cameron Bailey has noted, the anonymity of electronic communications facilitates what in the past used to be called "passing."⁷ In public forums, people of color often prefer not to reveal their race and ethnicity. As demonstrated in various studies of the construction of race, "no color" is associated with whiteness. A person of no color is thus imagined as a white person. While adopting an identity of no color allows for easier communication in cyberspace, it does little to disturb boundaries constructed to alienate groups from each other in the lived world. Much has been written, for example, about the prominent role that attitudes toward racial difference have played in the splintering of workers movements in the United States.⁸

If successful organization among women is to occur at both the local and the global level, we must examine and confront our discomfort with issues of race and class. The Third World *maquiladora* worker much discussed and even fetishized in recent cultural criticism for many of us remains an abstract entity. First World cultural critics are at a loss about what to say and how to act with these women in the flesh.⁹ It would seem that empathy for their plight is intellectual but not embodied.

Recent writings by feminists of color reiterate problems seldom discussed in electronic media theory: universalism, marginalization, stereotyping, strategies of silencing, and rendering invisible. These practices, controversial in the 1970s and 1980s, are still with us; but we wish them away in front of the computer. Contrary to the emphasis on disembodiment persistent in much of cybertheory, these issues are intimately related to the body, to the flesh, to the way we relate to others in an embodied way. The racialized body as sign is always already overdetermined.¹⁰ How can we produce change if we continue to be trapped within boundaries that promote alienation? Most of us abhor prejudice and domination but have not yet learned to recognize the ways in which we support the very structures we wish to eradicate.¹¹

In order to promote change, I would like to propose a very modest starting point: the reevaluation of the old dictum, "the personal is the political." The personal has usually been understood as our most intimate relations. Feminists have spent great amounts of energy observing and reevaluating inherited attitudes and roles in this sphere, and those efforts have eventually resulted in change. It is now necessary to apply comparable energy to becoming aware of how we deal with differences perceived or imagined. Many of our attitudes to difference are also inherited.

This does not mean being less present in the digital world. On the contrary, we need to strengthen our presence in that greatly contested realm, but with a consciousness of our bodies and embodiment. In the celebration of our union with machines, it is critical to keep in mind that technology has been an integral part of the construction and sociohistorical positioning of identities. Centers result from the creation of margins. If we believe that we are at the center, we owe our position to the marginalization of other spaces. In the

6. These included the following texts: bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?* (Boston: South End Press, 1981) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12(3)/13(1) (Spring-Fall 1994).

7. Cameron Bailey, "Virtual Skin: Articulating Race in Cyberspace," in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, ed. Mary Anne Moser with Douglas MacLeod (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 44.

8. See David Roedinger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994) and Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso, 1994).

9. See Andrew Ross, ed., *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers* (New York: Verso, 1997).

10. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

11. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 113.

current state of technologically facilitated global capitalism, it becomes imperative for our survival to form practical and politically effective alliances among various groups of women. We may need to let go of our central roles and welcome other ways of interacting in and out of cyberspace.

María Fernández is an art historian who received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1993. Her interests center on postcolonial studies, electronic media theory, Latin American art, and the intersections of these fields.

Amelia Jones

Feminist theory has deeply informed all of my work, although it has become more subterranean a presence in my writing over the last three years. My various professional and personal experiences in organizing the exhibition *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* for the UCLA/Armand Hammer Museum of Art and in editing its accompanying catalogue changed my relationship to feminism substantially. Initially, and somewhat naively, I had viewed my position in a positive light as a respectful, but critical, follower of the great 1970s and 1980s writers and artists in the feminist art movement—including (among many others) Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, Lucy Lippard, Ana Mendieta, Lorraine O'Grady, Adrian Piper, Griselda Pollock, Moira Roth, Carolee Schneemann, Mira Schor, Lisa Tickner, Faith Wilding, and Janet Wolff.

The hostility I experienced as I attempted to mount this critical and historical account of the place of the *Dinner Party* and its related arguments in feminist art history was intense. It wiped out my idealistic view of feminism as a collective, supportive environment in which women could negotiate and exchange ideas. It was made clear to me that certain kinds of revisionist thinking were not welcome and that, as someone who did not actively participate in earlier periods of the feminist art movement, my attempts at intervening in what I perceived to be rather reified narratives of feminist art history were viewed antagonistically by at least some of the women who had been active in the 1970s. While I still strongly identify as a feminist, because of this disillusionment I have distanced myself somewhat from the more institutionalized aspects of feminist art history and theory, discourses that I perceive as being somewhat hypocritical in their simultaneous desire to regulate discourse while self-proclaiming their own marginality and alignment with the oppressed and excluded. This probably says a lot more about my own development from an idealistic to a more realistic position relative to feminism (which, after all, can't save academia or the art world from themselves) than it does about feminism per se.

It is my view at this point that the most interesting thinking in feminism and art is being done through art practice, which, ideally, theorizes as it enacts in the visual register various crucial feminist questions and ideas (I am thinking here of the identity-expanding feminist work of Amy Adler, Renée Cox, Mona Hatoum, and Mira Schor, and as well as of the less literal explorations of lived effects of sexual difference in the recent work of Laura Aguilar, Maureen Connor, Lauren Lesko, Yong Soon Min, Margaret Morgan, Susan Silton, Diana Thater, Sue Williams, and others). This view is an extension of

my belief that the art world in general—and perhaps art criticism in particular—suffers at this moment from an extreme dearth of intellectual substance (art history is another question). Artists are doing amazing work, and the critical apparatus is not keeping up with their ever-shifting critical, theoretical, and aesthetic premises. One can only hope the art histories of this period will be adequate to it. I would have to admit that these artists are able to work more subtly with the difficult question of how to theorize gendered identity in the twenty-first century than I have been able to do in my recent art theoretical/historical writing.

The question of whether feminist ideals can be perpetuated without explicitly discussing them in art theory, criticism, and history is a difficult but important one. I do think that feminism, like most of the impassioned rights discourses from the 1950s into the 1980s, has gone somewhat underground. It's as if we have theorized ourselves out on a limb and don't know where to go next: now that we've identified and excoriated the male gaze, proposed various female gazes (not by any means necessarily heterosexually-, middle-class-, or Anglo-identified), and argued for the specificity of women's experience in relation to visual culture, we seem to have all the answers but none of the intellectual humility that is required to move us to a new place. The world—including the antics and activism of Monica Lewinsky, Ellen DeGeneres, et al.—has in a certain sense moved beyond what we are conceiving as cutting-edge feminist theory in visual culture. What do we do with Monica, after all?

It does, indeed, behoove us to acknowledge the ways in which feminism—especially white, middle-class versions of feminism—has become incorporated into the institution, but also to continue to point to the ways in which it is still, in some cases, marginalized (by funding organizations, departments in “elite” universities who may hire women at the junior level but continue to promote more men than women, and so on). Any of us who has taught feminism to undergraduates are familiar with the problem: the obviousness of feminist arguments to younger generations of women and men coexists with their complete ignorance about the history and subtleties of feminist arguments about visual culture. Feminism is at the same time both naturalized into popular culture and invisible.

Finally, a call for an expanded humility in the face of world events and the lived experience of our students, children, and other younger friends and colleagues. All of us—even those, like myself, who like to consider ourselves still to be young turks (weaned on 1980s feminist theory and coming of age in the 1990s)—have much to learn from the pressures of global capitalism on human subjectivity as it plays out in terms of a gender that is intersectionally raced, classed, and otherwise experienced in the contemporary world.

Amelia Jones is Professor of Art History at the University of California, Riverside. She has written many articles and two books—*Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (1994) and *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (1998)—that address feminist issues in art history. In 1996 she organized the exhibition *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* at the UCLA/Armand Hammer Museum of Art.

Shirley Kaneda

If the advent of feminist theory and its critical practices in the 1970s in part dismantled the restrictions of high modernism and Greenbergian formalism, I would place my work within that continuum. The acceptance of a gender-based critique of the criteria by which abstract painting could be judged has made it possible for me to use motifs that once would have been scornfully dismissed as merely decorative. The continued application of various aspects of feminist theory, as well as its ability to readjust itself, has also supplied me with a conceptual as well as a practical understanding of such critical terms as difference and identity. Unlike for my counterparts of the 1950s through the 1970s, it is encouraging to know that I don't have to struggle against a totalizing conception of history or the singularity of identity and experience. It is



Shirley Kaneda. *Artificial Sensations*, 1998. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 80 x 105 (203.2 x 266.7). Courtesy the artist and Feigen Contemporary, New York.

precisely around such an awareness that I have organized my practice as an abstract painter. However, although we have made significant advances in many areas, I find that other practitioners, as well as critics of abstract painting, do not readily accept those views. I have found that some feminists and postmodernists seemingly cannot get beyond abstract painting's association with modernism and formalism and tend to privilege more conceptual or mimetic forms of representation.

In spite of such encounters, the conceptual liberation that feminism

has fostered culturally allows me to address the notion of fragmentation, long associated as a negative aspect of female identity, as a positive quality that is not specifically feminine, but an aspect of our contemporary cultural condition. By exploiting such discriminatory and totalizing concepts, I think of myself as continuing the process of demystifying the idealization of values, such as the heroic, the aggressive, the optical, and the rational, that used to be associated with the masculine. From this perspective, I use my work to metaphorically promote such nonheroic themes as the decorative, beauty, fluidity, diversity, and so on. I am all too aware that in abstract painting, since the codes of representation are not fixed, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is less obvious. Therefore, it is difficult to realize feminist and poststructuralist themes within this framework. Nevertheless, I feel it is possible to address and represent the principal aspects of these concepts by means of metaphor, simile, and analogy.

I must admit that although my concern for “otherness”—similarity and dissimilarity—was and still is a starting point for me to think about the content of my paintings, ultimately I am not interested in my work being reduced to this polemical position. My concerns also extend to the nature of sensuous experience that an abstract painting can supply. I do not mean to imply transcendence or a universal humanism by this, but merely to acknowledge that the relationship of poststructuralist and feminist theory allows us to understand that all such positions are actualized by individuals, and are not inherent or determined by nature.

Shirley Kaneda is a painter living in New York. Her most recent exhibition was at Feigen Contemporary in New York in September–October 1998. A traveling exhibition of her work will open in France at the Centre d'Art d'Ivry in Paris, in January 2000. She occasionally writes on art and is a contributing editor for *BOMB* magazine.

Helen Molesworth

Feminism in the art world is currently marked by a jagged split between the various practices that comprised 1970s and 1980s feminism. Each accuses the other of unspeakable things: essentialism versus elitism; a naive view of the body versus no ability to image the body; a recourse to experience versus a recourse to language. The list goes on. It is, for a feminist of my generation, an untenable situation. (I couch my own position in generational terms because the debate is often staged this way. “My” generation means something like this: born in the mid-1960s; watched mother live through the 1970s; remember ERA; saw the *Dinner Party* as a young girl; and came of age intellectually in the mid-to-late 1980s in a poststructuralist field of heady and competing theoretical models of subjectivity.) And, true to my historical formation, any dichotomous split (rhetorical, theoretical, or otherwise) that disallows the ability to think the “both” as opposed to the “instead of,” that disallows room for ambivalence, is perceived as a shutting down of debate. So the continual staging of the essentialism/theory, 1970s/1980s divide seems perpetually to reconfirm these positions as opposed to articulating different ones. In fact, this debate seems to have rendered itself historical, in that it lacks a sustained and nuanced version of the terms and particularities that shape the present.

In the face of that old heavy “the present,” I will resort to anecdote. I recently was asked to give a talk at a well respected university, in part because I am an active art critic in New York. The title of my talk was to be “Housework and Artwork: A Reconsideration of 1970s Feminist Art Practice.” Upon hearing this, the man who invited me to speak said, “Oh. Well, feminism is certainly important, but” (but? I thought), “the students will be expecting something more.” When I queried what that something more might be, he replied that the students would want to know “where we are now, in the nineties.” “Why, for instance,” he went on, “is there no phrase to describe nineties art practice? Might I have something to say about that?”

I confess my naiveté; I was stunned into silence. “Gosh,” I muttered, “I’ll see what I can do.” When I got off the phone (my responses are often delayed; “I should have said . . .” is my most trusted companion), I realized I thought people weren’t allowed to say things like, “Feminism is certainly

important, but” Certainly, I knew people thought such things, but I didn’t know it was still permissible, particularly in privileged academic circles, to speak them out loud. The exchange irritated me, and I found myself walking around ranting (out loud) about the importance of rethinking what the ramifications were for visual art practice of a theoretical and political movement that asked for nothing less than the reorganization of society. This struck me as especially important to do given the current vogue for 1970s artwork, generally, “in the ’90s.”

Yet, in spite of my irritation, the exchange served to crystallize something about the contemporary moment of feminism for me. I am the privileged beneficiary of political and theoretical struggles that have preceded me. I entered adulthood with an understanding that my sexuality was mine to explore, that my desire was a lush and intricate thing. So, too, I was driven intellectually by theories that posited identity (gender, race, class, sexuality) as a complicated construction—theories that allowed me productive and liberatory moments of disengagement from, and manipulation of, my biologically and culturally marked body.

As you might imagine, a lot of this happened in graduate school. The workplace is a different matter altogether. There, sexism remains. However, currently, in the 1990s, it is notoriously difficult to point to, much less ferret out. Sexism is woven into the institutional fabric, the language, the everyday logic of places like law firms, the academy, and the corner grocery store. Telecommuting, working mothers (as if mothering wasn’t work), home officing, the rise of the adjunct, the decline of union membership—there is still the division of labor to be discussed. It occurred to me that while there is a lot of talk about feminism, there is remarkably little about sexism. Perhaps this is because of how difficult it is to discuss, tucked away as it is in the crevices and habitual patterns of the everyday. So while its terms may have shifted (in white collar and professional work)—sexism may be less blatant, less hostile—but it’s still there. The theoretical advancements of both 1970s and 1980s feminism happened largely in the realms of identity and sexuality. With those zones opened (for the privileged) for continual intellectual and physical experimentation and play it may now be time to turn our energies to those dust bunnies in the corner of the workplace, the ones we’ve been assuming someone else might clean up.

Helen Molesworth is Assistant Professor of Art History and Director of the Amelie Wallace Gallery at State University of New York at Old Westbury. She is also an editor of *Documents*, a magazine of contemporary art and visual culture.

Howardena Pindell

My work changed drastically in 1968, a year after I arrived in New York City to live and work after graduating from Yale University’s M.F.A. program. It was subtly tugged into further changes, as I became influenced by other experiences, including dialogues and personal awakenings as a result of the Black Power and feminist movements. I stopped using the stretcher, nailing free-flowing canvas to the wall as a result of visiting Africa and seeing African textiles, as well as work by women artists who did not use the stretcher—namely,

to address a wider range of experience was the Women's Caucus for Art.)

In the 1980s, my work explored autobiographical themes, women's issues, racism, child abuse, slavery, and AIDS. In the 1990s, I created a series of memorials. Oddly, when a white male critic reviewed my work in *New Art Examiner* in the 1970s, he referred to it as a light show and stated that he wanted to have sex under my paintings. In the 1990s, I received a scathing review of my work that dealt with racism, etc., from another white male critic in the *New York Times*. This review was titled "From Subtlety to Stridency." During this decade, there was a nostalgia for my non-issue related work of the 1970s, yet during the 1970s, those same voices were silent.

I believe that consciousness raising was an experience that helped me to confront difficult issues. As a result of my experiences in the 1970s, in the late 1990s I started, with another artist, Carolyn Martin, a cross-generational black women artists' group called Entitled: Black Women Artists. Entitled has a monthly newsletter that lists job, grant, and exhibition opportunities, as well as the accomplishments of its members. We have been exhibited as a group and meet once a month to discuss topics such as income tax and the artist and residency programs. We also organize slide presentations of our work, as well as the work of others. Our membership is international, and our Website address is <www.entitled-bwartists.com>.

Some books I have found helpful are bell hooks's *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Chilla Bulbeck's *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*, and Leela Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory*.

Howardena Pindell lives in New York City. She received honorary Ph.D.'s in Fine Arts from the Massachusetts College of Art in 1997 and from the New School University, Parsons School of Design, in 1999 and is currently Professor of Art at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and Visiting Professor at Yale University. Her book *Heart of the Question* was published by Midmarch Press in 1997.

Mira Schor

In "From Liberation to Lack," an essay I wrote for *Heresies* in 1987, I noted that "Feminism has little institutional memory, there has been no collective absorption of early achievements and ideas, and therefore feminism cannot yet afford the luxury of storage." I also noted that "Women of my generation form a living bridge across ebb tides of feminist thought."

Quoting myself now is only to sadly make the point that as things change, so too they stay the same. For feminism, the problems of institutional memory and of storage of cultural work remain. At the symposium "The F-Word: Contemporary Feminisms and the Legacy of the Los Angeles Feminist Art Movement," held at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in September–October 1998, two examples made this horrifically evident. The symposium was organized by FAWS (Feminist Art Workshops), a group of students and faculty, who were amazed to discover that there had once been a Feminist Art Program at CalArts, when a librarian found evidence of what one might argue was one of the school's most important contributions to late twentieth-century art history being consigned to the dumpster. Also, a trove of archival video material, both documentary and fictional, from the 1970s had just recently been put out on the street for garbage collection by

the woman who had stored it in her home for twenty years. Providentially, at the last minute, an archive took in this material. Thus, in less than thirty years, large chunks of the accomplishments of the feminist art movement in the United States had fallen out of history and very nearly out of existence. It is not surprising that during the 1980s the term *postfeminism* was popular, encouraged by a culture-wide backlash against feminism.

A variant of that phenomenon is at issue today. The responsibility I feel to provide a bridge of knowledge across generations of feminists is greater now, because so much more knowledge exists—and, often, has been forgotten or naturalized. This responsibility, which I so take to heart, puts a brake on the movement of thought in my work. This was not the case in the 1980s and early 1990s, when I was immersed in the politics of gender representation

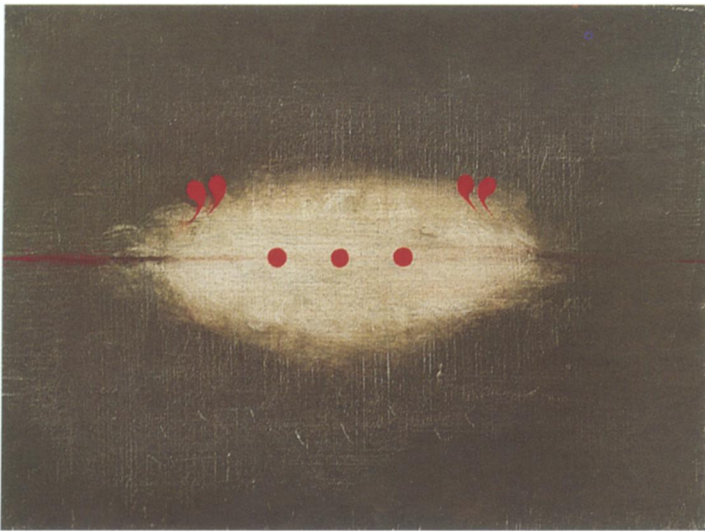
in both my visual and my critical work. At the time, I painted sexualized body parts and texts that spoke about the gendered circulation of power in society, wrote about representations of femininity and masculinity in works by male and female artists, and analyzed the gendered nature of the critique of painting.

More recently I represent language in my paintings—words for colors or language at the level of sounds. The body most evident is the materiality of paint itself. I write about painting in relation to challenges from the real and the virtual. It is entirely possible for me to imagine writing an essay on painting in which the word feminism would not appear.

I like to think that the work remains close to feminism as subtext, if not image. I make a case

for myself that the kind of fragmented narrative structure I bring to large-scale painting installations is a feminist intervention into the grand tradition of painting, as much a critique as a participatory gesture, and that what I write about painting will always contain the fact that when I began my career as an artist, its history and its philosophy excluded me and my desired content. But let's put it this way: one of the last paintings I did that retained a direct illustrative link to the polemical imaging of the feminist body was a vertical person-sized white surface punctuated only by a single red period, more or less at the viewer's gonad level. But I would like not to have to make art about my period for the rest of my life. It's bad enough that contemporary science and youth culture demand that women's bodies be on hormone-replacement therapy. Does feminist art have to follow suit? Do I have to continue to make my period visible in order to be seen as representing feminism? Or can I punctuate one paragraph in my thinking and go on to the next, without betraying my political ideals? This is the familiar problematic of political art: to be perceived as feminist in a polemical, activist sense, does feminist practice, in art, teaching, and critical writing always have in some sense to be representational?

Many recent encounters with young women artists have framed these questions about what constitutes a feminist practice. In October 1997, a panel



Mira Schor. "...", 1993.
Oil on linen. 12 x 16 (30.5
x 40.6). Courtesy the
artist.

at Art in General in New York, moderated by Faith Wilding, was the occasion for a contentious discussion in which a number of the women in the all-woman exhibition *Between the Acts* evidenced in their work both a catalogue of visual and conceptual permissions and influences from 1970s feminist art, yet considerable resentment for having to admit to the legacy. Various protestations, from “Yes, I’m a feminist but,” to “I’m a woman, so of course I’m working from that experience, but I’m not a feminist,” or “above all I’m an artist,” crystallized for me that there was no point insisting that they must be feminists just because they used feminist-inspired forms and tropes. If they say they’re not, they’re not. It bugs my generation to know that this generic feminist style’s permissions came from, generally speaking, our efforts, just as it drives some young women crazy to have to acknowledge any legacy. I was heartened when other young women in the room rose up to say this kind of disclaimer was complicit with patriarchy. But I was disheartened when several young women artists preferred not to participate in this forum for *Art Journal*, whether because feminism is not their issue or because they were afraid of losing points in the mainstream by using the “F-word.”

But when I say I am interested in doing work that directly addresses painting, and that I want to paint about paint rather than about the female body, am I engaging in the same kind of strategy that ultimately is complicitous with a patriarchal universal? Does their desire to flee the association to feminism condemn me to a kind of feminist practice I feel I have outgrown, just in order to constantly bear witness? Is there a danger of a doubly essentialized feminism on the one hand or a loss of specificity and acuity on the other?

The other side of my dilemma is represented by another encounter. With great trepidation, prefacing her question by the fear that it was stupid, a young woman art student asked me quite simply, “What is feminism?” She told me that she had asked the same question of a distinguished older feminist artist, who brushed it off, perhaps because it was too exhausting and demoralizing to have to go back so far, to retell the story. And yet the question had to be answered, calling me back to the start of my own journey and to a consideration of the meaning of my role as a feminist.

Mira Schor is a painter and writer living in New York City. Her book *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* was published by Duke University Press in 1997, and she was awarded CAA’s Frank Jewett Mather Award for Art Criticism. An anthology of *M/E/A/N//I/N/G*, co-edited with Susan Bee, is forthcoming from Duke.

Collier Schorr

I feel privileged to have gone to school at a time (School of Visual Arts, 1981–85) when women artists were key figures. Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Sarah Charlesworth, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Mary Kelly, and some others who perhaps didn’t fit into the mainstream (white) world, like Adrian Piper and Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Feminism was everything then; it was cool and accessible, and women weren’t the only ones talking about it. Photography was a tool, a material way to attack, critique, and demand. It was very empowering to be at panel discussions, and most of the participants were women. In fact, it was something I soon took for granted. Watching Carol Squiers and Richard Prince, who essentially agreed with one

another, argue about the cover of *Mademoiselle* was as MTV as the art world got. Feminism was what drew me into art making—the idea that one could take a politic and blow it up and shout an opinion into the white cube. For me, it was a continuation of the education I received reading my mother’s *Ms.* magazines. But the feminism of the eighties as it pertained to the art world also disturbed me. Like any ism, it did not fit everybody like a glove. The discussion between us and them or you and me, in, for example, Kruger’s work (in all of them in less obvious ways) always revolved around a male dominant. It was as if all this energy was feeding into the male ego. Part and parcel of the psychological burden of fighting a gender that most of those artists were wed to, I felt as though women never discussed each other, but rather, they defined themselves by the battle with men. (We had this joke then in school that all these political women were really home talking on the phone, flipping through *Vogue*, whining about boyfriends. The lucky ones got to go to *Comme des Garçons*.) But that was fine, because the lack of a “homosocial” (not exclusively homosexual) discourse was what instigated my own work. I really just started to make art because I felt like no one was talking to or about me.

Of course, this changed in the nineties. I think it is the duty of every young artist to battle their inheritance. Usually, if you’re lucky, you still have a few idols standing when you hit thirty. I also realized that one never “works

it out” in one’s lifetime. You chip away at ideas and build something, but that something is never the total answer. For me, my work started out being very didactic. I used the tool of appropriation and tried to personalize it by collecting handwritten texts from friends. The work introduced in the advertising-driven works of Prince and Kruger a depiction of homosexual dialogue, particularly revolving around the notion of a second adolescence to replace a closeted primary one. Now it is an open road. If gender contradictions were the focus in the late eighties, presently it is about how the character moves, not what their make-up is. I’m more interested in national than sexual identity, particularly in the case of Germans and Jews. I don’t pretend to provide an answer, but rather to pull at the questions.

What feminist theory I had when I was in school has slowly evaporated. I remember that I thought Craig Owens was smart, but I also remember straining in his class to understand some of the inside theory and art historical jokes that went over my nineteen-year-old head. I would say that someone like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who has become a bit of a cliché, has made reading dense texts more attractive. But I suspect in part this is because she riffs off literature, which I have always leaned toward, rather than art history. Now I make and talk about my work more intuitively. The joy of building on your own visual vocabulary is almost intoxicating. And it is the real reward of keeping at it for an extended period.



Collier Schorr. *Bismarck Kaserne*, 1999. C-print, 115.9¼ x 13 (23.5 x 33), unframed; 18 x 22 (45.7 x 55.9), framed. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York.

I once heard a story about a very well known female artist of my generation who was not happy identifying herself as a feminist. Perhaps she found the label limiting. For me, I just assume if you're a woman and you have a brain, you're a feminist. Why wouldn't you be? But perhaps, I would not be considered a good feminist by some people, among them ex-students of mine, who might have found me too overbearing, sacrilegious, and not nurturing enough to be a good feminist. I have come to realize that each generation has a different relationship and claim to and with the term. For me it feels nostalgic in a really good and positive way.

Collier Schorr is an artist and writer living in Brooklyn and Swäbisch Gmünd, Germany. She is Editor-at-Large for the British arts magazine, *Frieze*, and has also written for *Parkett*, *Artforum*, and *Harpers Bazaar*. She is represented by 303 Gallery.

Faith Wilding

In spite of an appearance of apathy in social feminism, many strong voices are calling for a new activism and vision in global feminisms today. bell hooks speaks about community, and also about “feminist movement,” which implies constant mobility—thinking as action, movement, and flux. Avital Ronell calls for a “justice” feminism that is not simply reactive, but inventive, creative—and that presupposes a feminist embracing and use of technologies and new social models that can assist communication and promote ways of living and working that are more just, pleasurable, and autonomous. Donna Haraway—who would rather be a cyborg than a goddess—proposes a world without gender in which the patriarchal power structure is thoroughly disturbed within its own technological networks. Nancy Lublin calls for a “praxis feminism” rooted in a material analysis of women’s actual lives and situations.

I don’t think feminists generally have worked out yet in practice how to live in a house of difference. We still lack the lived experience of affirmative work in groups and on projects with people from diverse backgrounds, ages, races, and classes, without resort to quotas, tokenism, political correctness, or “special” considerations. It is crucial for the development of contemporary global feminisms that we acquire this experience.

We live in a time of crass power consolidation in global pancapitalism. Information technologies are profoundly changing our public and private lives. For those who would resist the relentless erasures of history and try to disturb the monumental reign of market ideology, it is necessary to muster all their knowledge and cunning to find ways of creating active nodes of subversion and resistance on some scale, however modest. As a long-time feminist activist, I’ve found recently that collaborating with different groups of younger women who are eager to develop a contemporary feminist practice and theory revitalizes my desire to create bridges to past feminist histories, strategies, and tactics that I perceive as important resources for contemporary feminist activism and theory today.

An example at hand is the working symposium held at the California Institute of the Arts from September 29 to October 3, 1998, entitled “The F-Word: Contemporary Feminisms and the Legacy of the Los Angeles Feminist Art Movement.” It was organized by a group of students, both undergraduate

and graduate, calling themselves FAWS (Feminist Art Workshops). The young women I met at this symposium evidenced an earnest desire to reexamine and even reexperience the legacies of “the original participants, foster understanding of contemporary feminism, and create dialogue between the different generations associated with feminist practice” (Andrea Richards, FAWS). This is a promising beginning in an institution which to date has seemingly deliberately ignored and buried its own radical feminist history.

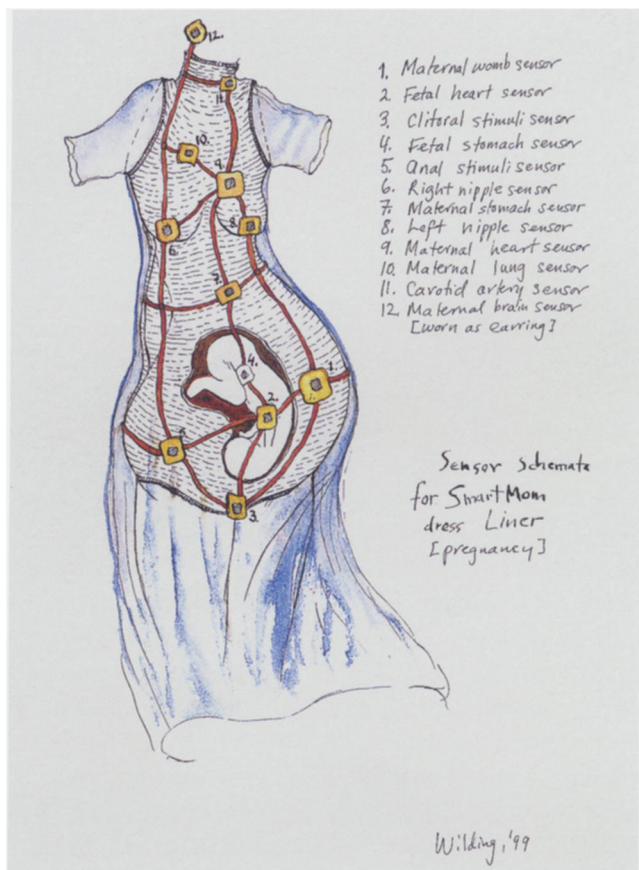
Also, in Rotterdam recently, I met with an international group of cyberfeminist artists and theorists organized by the Old Boys Network (which I wrote about in the Summer 1998 issue of *Art Journal*). In March 1999, this group held the Next Cyberfeminist International Symposium: Strategies for a New Cyberfeminism, which focused on the feminist critique of technology; activism; biotechnology; difference; and cyberfeminist theory, strategies, and practices. Such international communication and collaboration is a crucial step toward understanding (and being able to act on) local and global differences that are affected by the ways that new technologies are reconstructing women’s lives and subjectivities.

My own artistic beginnings were concurrent with my committed participation in the “second wave” feminist movement in the United States. The theoretical basis for this activist movement was radical socialist, antiracist, civil rights, and liberatory politics. The Feminist Art Programs (at Fresno and CalArts) also developed along a theory/praxis model, using consciousness raising—the recounting and analysis of personal experience—to study power and gender relations, and to arrive at the subject matter, content, and forms of our work. Today I still use interdisciplinary research, real life experiences, and feminist analysis of sociopolitical issues to make

work that isn’t media-specific but situational. My transition from making “cunt art” and trying to image female bodily experience, to my present work about new body processes of biomedicine and biotechnology, seems integral and organic to me.

Feminism is still the F-word for many. It is a sore loss that many artists who began working in the 1970s and are now doing mature work that is often strongly influenced by 1980s and 1990s feminist, psychoanalytic, critical, and postcolonial theory are still nearly invisible. Many women artists in their late thirties through early fifties have lived twenty years of change in feminist activism, research, and art practice and incorporate these into their art making and teaching. This rich resource could be a welcome inoculation in the often jaded, confused, and formally and spiritually exhausted art academies and art world today.

I certainly think feminist ideals can be perpetuated without writing about or representing women, gendered practice, or gendered identity—that is, one



Faith Wilding. Sensor Schemata for Smart Mom Dress Liner [Pregnancy], 1999. Mixed media drawing. 17 x 12 (43.2 x 30.5). Courtesy the artist.

can do feminist work on environmental issues, for example, without representing women or looking at gender roles. But I think we still have a great deal of work to do in raising gender consciousness. Consider, for example, how new technologies are being introduced into the classroom. Though boys and girls are usually taught the same techniques, and use the same textbooks, software, machines, and programs, studies show that there are strong gendered and racial differences in children's uses of these technologies. Rarely addressed are the (white) masculinist cultural assumptions that are built into the very configurations of hardware and software, and naturalized in the technological environment itself. In this case an explicit feminist analysis is obviously needed. Institutions must still be goaded to implement what the feminist analysis of gender construction has long since taught us. Going far beyond instituting sexual antidiscrimination rules, teaching girls to use power tools, or mentioning a few women artists in art history courses, feminism still calls for nothing short of a complete overhaul and restructuring of the obsolete sexist and racist educational systems still in place everywhere. We've still got a long way to go, baby!

Faith Wilding is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and teacher working on issues of sex, gender, and biotechnology. She is Associate Professor of Art at Carlow College, Fellow at the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, and visiting faculty in the MFA-Visual Arts Program, Vermont College.