

Editorial

What marks an end or a beginning? Is it always an exact moment in time/space? Or are they only a product of a narrative form, reconstructing events and people of significance: a fiction based around facts? And is this History? Myth? Or a story? How can we narrate the ends and beginnings of a person's actions, a single event, a mass political movement or a nation, when their significance continually unfolds over time? How can we write narratives which do not return us to pre-scripted formats and already known and over familiar patterns through which we name or mark an end or a beginning?

Are all events, like the moment a child is born, marked by an absolute start, a new beginning? And who is this moment significant to or for: the child, the mother who gave birth, the father, the family, the nation, the world? In naming a moment for the beginning of a life, we tend to remember it as significant only because it is recast into a day within a historical era, rather than an exact time? We are not writing horoscopes or predictions of auspicious events! Let's remember that conception itself is typically shrouded in mystery (hidden inside a womb, even when it is known exactly when an embryo was scientifically implanted). When it comes to identifying an exact moment in this process, a beginning makes little sense as a marker because what follows, gestation and growth, has no fixed or pre-determined period in time. Does the same apply to the moment of death? It is an absolute end but the events surrounding it or the circumstances in which it happened were never pre-destined. The significance of either birth or death – life's two great events – acquire importance only with time and with a narrative. They require someone to reflect on life lived at a particular time. It is narrative which re-makes and creates the event in its telling. Which narratives prevail and who tells them matters as much as the attention of the person who listens and observes.

Isn't the end of an era, a common historical trope, always the beginning of another? Is succession of one era to the

another, always measurable or absolute? Or is a beginning invented only to name and create an end, in the sense that it is only the present that has the privilege to name the past? Postmodernism did this in its naming of modernism. Postfeminism does this, if it claims feminism is over. When did contemporary art begin and what ended for it to begin? Are ends, always named because they are the beginnings of something else:- another period, another phase, another set of possibilities, another kind of "*becoming*"? Both an end and a beginning mark out the stakes as a difference in time, expectation, memory and possibility.

In art history, when does an artwork begin? When the artist conceives it, as it develops or when it is first shown? Does this humanist model copy the idea of conception, gestation and birth? Art history is notorious for tracing only beginnings, seeking first origins, to create successions out of these ends and beginnings in the production of artworks, in movements, in periods for art, and in terms of the rise and fall of dominant trends. Why do we mould our stories into these models? Do we only want to identify "*firsts*" and innovators, and does this automatically relegate everyone else to "*followers*"? If the beginning was original, was everything that followed, just a copy? Why are we always on the lookout for emerging trends, new beginnings? What happens when ignorance or lack of memory/historical knowledge, even amnesia, play a part in changing the story? Is it a beginning or an end, if an artwork is rediscovered, remade, recirculated or is it only the new narrative that remembers it differently? When can we say this change happened? Does the reception of an artwork change, each time it is exhibited or written about? One would hope so, otherwise there would be no need to change how we display or collect or "*aggregate*" works or why should we write new essays or books.

Feminism similarly has many stories about its birth, gestation and growth: recounted in decades, in events and in waves. In its stories of progress, loss and return for feminism, what narrative models are being followed? Are we only looking for the "*new*"? Are we looking for certainties and continuities or for ruptures and breaks? If we declare the death of feminism of a certain kind, are we so sure that a new beginning for another has started? If we celebrate only a few pioneers, do we undermine a mass or collective movement? Maybe we need to look harder at what is being claimed and how any declaration that a new beginning or an absolute end has happened is made.