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# Introduction to Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Hilary Robinson**

When the call for papers went out after the last College Art Association Conference, I was surprised to notice that out of 129 proposed panels on Historiography at that stage, only one or two of them were from a feminist perspective, and that none of them actually addressed the issue of feminist historiography as such. I was quite surprised by this and raised the question in an email to the Feminist Art History Listserve and this generated some fierce and fast discussion.

My question was basically why had no one proposed a panel on feminist historiography? It seems to me that after thirty years of feminist work in art history we are actually at a crucial stage. Amongst the students that I was teaching in Belfast, the early women's movement for them is like the 1940s for me, it is real history, it happened before they were born. I was trying to raise the question of feminist historiography in terms of how we approach something in which we have a vested interest. This is a period which we have lived and are living through; how do we reassess this in a way which both honours that personal investment and actually works as some kind of feminist art history and a history of feminist art. I did wonder if assumptions are now being made about feminism in this kind of environment - the CAA. Has feminism been incorporated, has it been depoliticised or is it seen to be self evident? Has it been reduced to an acceptable academic style, or methodology or set of methodologies rather than operating as an expanded grouping of political positions?

So I wrote a paragraph with some questions and sent it to the various women who agreed to participate. I thought this would be published in the programme but

as it is not I will read it out to you. I asked: what are the intersections between feminist politics and historiographical practices? What constitutes feminist historiography? Given that the women's movement in art and art writing is now three decades old, and a new generation of artists and writers have emerged for whom much of the movement is historically situated rather than in living memory. How will the movement itself be historicised? How will the art works of the 1970s be written about? How will the early feminist art histories be re-visited? How will this feminist analysis of the field of art history develop? How can we maintain feminism as a political practice in art writing and not allow it to collapse into style, methodology or a sub category of the discipline.

My aim was to have people giving very short papers followed by open discussion. I am at present working on a book, an anthology called *Feminism/Art/Theory* which is to be published by Blackwells this time next year (early 2001). While doing my archival work on that I realised that what I have now assumed is the history of feminist art history and art practice can actually be disproved within the archives. The time I spent at Rutgers University, for example, looking at the *Heresies* collective archives, looking at the other art papers collected there, I found a lot more diversity in the strands of what was happening than is now accepted as the "history" of feminist art and feminist art history. Our differing histories, allegiances and political engagements (inside and beyond the academic and art worlds) may spur us to develop differing strategies as feminists and as 'historiographers', in response to recognition of the same events/symptoms.

So my question here will be: how do we write the history of a movement of which we have been part? How do we relate personal experiences to the wider picture? How do we reference, what Mira Schor has termed, our "matrilineage"? How do we teach/write the history of the movement and at the same time develop our particular passions? (why do I hate mentioning certain artworks to students?). Is some of the impulse towards discovering/assessing the work of "forgotten" women no longer seen as urgent? Or is it just not "hip" enough? Is there now a case for doing some of this work on the 1970s as well as on work from earlier centuries? etc.

I didn't expect the panellists to provide answers to those questions but I released that as a background to their papers and asked them for six minute presentations, short and to the point. The session was called Historiography/Feminism/Strategy and I'm particularly keen on that word strategy and on asking, what are the strategies that we will be using in the future. The panellists will be speaking in alphabetical order starting with Renée Baert...

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# Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Renee Baert**

## **Subject and object**

What I'd like to do on this occasion is to focus on exhibitions, and more specifically on feminist curatorial practices as a research object. Feminist art history and theory has largely concerned itself with artworks and texts, overlooking this site, which has its own specificities, contingencies and even, in some instances, poetics.

To speak of feminist curatorial practice is clearly to speak of something new, something which has arisen in our lifetime. Yet it is an activity through which we can already trace 30 years of feminist engagement with art, with history, with theory, museology, communities of knowledge and much more.

I want to understand curating as both a practice and an object. It is, in the first instance a practice that - among the many ways we might conceive the concept of 'practice' - produces specific cultural texts. And many of these productions are, directly or indirectly, engaged with feminism's own recent histories. Thus feminist curatorial practice - its processes and its outcomes - needs to be understood as itself an object for historiography (something that's only just beginning to happen).

## **'Space apart'**

We don't have much of a purchase on feminist curatorial activity as such because of the relative paucity of feminist exhibitions, especially those which command broad attention by virtue of scale, institution, prestige or related factors.

However, *vis-a-vis* this more relative absence within the field at large, I think we need to recognise its indirect presence: that is, the extent to which feminist research,

issues and methodologies may be folded into other curatorial projects, rather than existing in a designated space apart (where, of course, it is more readily identified as such.)

Unlike the labours of artists, theorists and art historians, I'm acquainted with few, if any, curators who are able to pursue feminist projects as the singular focus of their research and exhibitions projects. Yet if curatorial work is understood as a site of feminist practice, we are enabled to identify ways in which feminist issues, theoretical understandings and scholarship may wholly, importantly - or even just partially - inform or underpin quite a wide sphere of curatorial investigation, be it:

- \* in the work of individual curators, many of whom have long-standing feminist commitments

- \* in exhibitions the subject of which is framed in quite different terms (e.g. landscape, cultural memory, etc.)

- \* or in feminisms' allegiances and intertwinings with other critical sites in culture - nationalisms and internationalism postcolonial struggles, multiculturalisms, gay rights, to name a few.

In any of these instances, we may find the impact of feminism as something folded in or partnered, rather than singular or a space apart. Further, vis a vis the term 'strategy' in the topic of this panel, we might consider the ways that the 'folding in' of feminism itself returns as a kind of 'stretching out'.

## **Models**

I do, however, want to turn to some models of feminist exhibitions. And here I'd have to say, we don't have very many models or we don't have enough models.

In the 1970s, public institutions everywhere faced unprecedented challenges to their exhibitions and collection policies for their paltry representation of women's art. (We might want to remember here the revealing statistic that, in the 1969 Whitney Annual - a watershed year in terms of focusing this state of affairs - of the 143 artists in the exhibition, 8 were women.) A corollary move centred on the need to frame and present work by women artists, and this often took the form of survey exhibitions, often mounted as collective projects, sometimes by museums, sometimes with guest curators. Today, with presentational histories we can build upon, there is far less critical viability for an exhibition whose curatorial thesis is exhausted once the commonality of gender has been identified.

An approach related to the survey is one in which an additional element has been incorporated e.g. women and video. In such survey shows - as also often is the case of solo exhibitions - the specifically curatorial initiative may be occluded behind a kind of curatorial 'transparency': that is; the viewer is invited to see 'through' to the art itself, eliding the exhibition itself as a text.

A further model (following the lines of feminist art history) has been the recuperation of women's practices, particularly within art movements from which

women's contributions have been diminished. This approach may proceed as an 'adding on' to the canon (women and minimalism, surrealism, etc.) but might, more rigorously, interrogate the very processes of canon formation. In a development more dominant in recent years, there has been a shift away from gender exclusivity through a foregrounding of politics of gender representation. And we can also note a curatorial attention to feminist work not conceived in the "generic" but through very specific topics of investigation. In short, we can see how developments in feminist theory and in feminist art historical models find their way into exhibition practices.

But less often do we see exhibition practices as themselves theoretical enactments, or that might be understood in terms of a poetics, an act of re-vision and re-making, a making anew.

### **Exhibition poetics**

In this light, I'd like to spend a moment discussing a specific exhibition, Catherine de Zegher's *Inside the Visible*, which I think is of interest and importance both for things that it does, and doesn't, do', of which I'm able here to cite only a few:

- \* the exhibition retrieves some astonishing work by a number of women artists (e.g. Claude Cahun, Carol Rama, Charlotte Salomon) who were marginalised in the histories of the periods in which they worked. This is not in order to 'correct' an existing canon, nor to accumulate 'great women' but to identify and articulate a body of practice that doesn't 'fit' past histories and current debates, which has existed in its byways, and whose 'non-fit' speaks to aporias within modernism, and indeed within contemporary feminist theory.

- \* in gathering together works from three periods - the 1940s, the 1960s/70s and the 1990s, all identified as periods of particular political urgency - the narrative of generations of women's history being constructed is not the one we've become familiar with of late, of succession and superseding, but a way of understanding links and connections between practices in different times and place, through the kinds of affinities the exhibition identifies.

- \* the exhibition is composed exclusively of work by women artists, but the unifying element doesn't rest with gender but rather with characteristics of this aesthetic production, further identified as a strategy of practice vis a vis other norms, not as a feminine 'essence'. In this way, the exhibition makes its case for a practice in, of and for the 'feminine', on the side of women.

- \* the thesis of the exhibition arises from and through the artwork, that is, through its materialities, spacialities, haptic properties, iconography, etc. (rather than, as too often the case, the other way around, art pressed into service as illustration to a pre-established theoretical argument). Thus the exhibition is not a mere 'fastening' of art and theory but is itself a necessary form.



### **Potential site**

In concluding, I'd like to try to think feminist curatorial practice as a potential site, a space for speculation, for local contingencies, for new structures of knowledge and pleasure, and, more largely, for poetics. There aren't many models of such a practice around, within feminism or elsewhere, so I would like to give the last word to de Zegher, in appreciation for her conception of the possibilities, and realisation, of the curatorial process as "a space of amazement"

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Whitney Chadwick**

Lisa Tickner once observed that although feminism is a politics, not a methodology, there is nevertheless a feminist problematic in art history, and in work which carries the analyses and goals of political feminism into the realm of cultural inquiry. The questions Hilary Robinson has posed to today's panel challenge all of us to reconsider the literature that has emerged from what is now a thirty year inquiry into the intersections and disjunctions between the terms art, history and feminism. I want to keep my comments today brief and focused on a few observations derived from my own work, and from my ongoing project of interpreting this field to students at a large, diversified public university.

The publication of my *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* in 1985 coincided with the widespread incorporation of post-structuralist based theories into academic discourses, including that of art history. I found myself digging in the archives at a time when there were sexier intellectual things to do, and the publication that resulted raised as many questions as it answered. Among them were the place of recuperative histories within both feminism and art history, the construction of gendered narratives, the question of whether or not it was possible for archival research and theorization to coexist in a meaningful way within the same publication and, if so, what might be the compromises on both sides. And then there remained the thorny issue of how to view the relationship between artistic practices which are not self-consciously critical, but often rest on assumptions of female agency, and current challenges to the very notion of female subjectivity. We are fortunate in possessing a growing body of literature that since the early 1980s has taken up these and related questions with sophistication, albeit with varying degrees of subtlety. Yet many questions remain.

Without getting into the tensions that have arisen as a result of the institutionalisation of feminist practices and feminism's histories in the 1980s and 1990s, I would like to identify a few areas that seem to me particularly problematic as I confront feminism's growing body of literature in the area of visual culture. Something is still missing for me in much of the literature that has resulted from the often tense dialogue between attention to individual women's practices and analyses of the social construction of gender and the inscription of sexual difference. I keep waiting for more signs that the same scepticism that has so often been directed against early feminist practices in recent years is also being brought to bear on recent historical, theoretical, political, or ideological formations regardless of how accurate they may be. And why, I ask myself, does it seem that there was so little sustained political analysis of the implications of theorizing away female agency at an historical moment when ever larger numbers of women and artists of colour were emerging from BFA and MFA programs in search of a voice, if not a room, to call their own. Moreover, while it has become fashionable to critique the artist monograph and the survey text, that critique has disrupted neither market forces nor the fact that the majority of undergraduates continue to receive their initial exposure to art history in survey courses and I for one, hope that we might build their needs into our history.

Reconsidering the history of feminist critical practices while doing research for a catalogue essay for the exhibition *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 1970s* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Rose Art Museum: Brandeis University, 1996) a few years ago, I was struck again by the fact that despite the intellectual sophistication of much recent writing on gender and representation critical and art historical writing has often failed to engage in an equally complex and challenging way with the issue that dares not speak its name - I mean the question of qualitative evaluation (somehow the argument that quality equals taste has never quite convinced me). And while feminism has contributed much to exploding the fiction of a monolithic mainstream, our literature suggests that we continue to form and reform elites around privileged media and practices without always deconstructing the ideological forces that underlie those formations. Critically surveying the state of literature on gender and post-minimalism, I was surprised to discover how thin was the pile of monographs and scholarly catalogues for a very important group of women artists, when compared to their male colleagues and to theorization's of more contemporary practices. Yet university art museums and galleries remain in the forefront in exposing and documenting the work of women artists, while many other institutions that bowed to social action in the seventies appear to have more or less returned to business as usual, and this seems one area in which the institutionalising of feminism within the academy has effected real change. Working on women artists may not have much intellectual caché at the moment in some quarters, but it seems to me that our failure to attend to the realities of women's production, and to add to

its record, risks knocking the history out of feminism and art history.

As we move into a new millennium, the recent past becomes history. At the same time, I personally remain suspicious of histories that periodize feminism, i.e. that map its organisation along a sequence of what Helen Molesworth and Amy Lyfford recently referred to as “progressive moments” because they at least implicitly privilege developmental paradigms and reinstate notions of “progress” (the latter usually viewed as advancing from states of naive expression to those of critical sophistication). While the jettisoning of historical narrative as totalizing and/or essentializing has led to a few recent publications that are little more than collections of mini-monographs strung together with big words, the generational approach to feminism and art history, or feminism and postfeminism, may result in the same a-historical approach for which many of us have previously criticized the literature on modernism.

Finally, while remaining committed to revisionist impulses, I also remain sceptical of models that propose to reread/reinterpret historical practices exclusively through the lens of current theory. Contradiction, multiplicity, conflict - indeed the ability to navigate between apparently contradictory or mutually exclusive ideas - must remain, I think, central to feminist projects. Friedrich Nietzsche may seem an odd source to invoke in a feminist context, but I can't help but be reminded of the opening lines of *The Birth of Tragedy* with their call for an acknowledgement of the dynamics of conflict and resolution.

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

### Deborah Cherry

At the cusp of a new century and at a conference preoccupied with disciplinary boundaries and legitimations I would like address the three issues of the panel, 'feminism/ historiography/ strategy' as three concerns about the past, present and future. And they are inter-related, for to talk of one is immediately to talk of the others. To focus on the middle term, historiography, that is, the ways in which history is or has been constituted, is to focus on strategies and on making definitions about something called 'feminism'.

Although recent literature about feminism and the arts tends to assume that any connections start around 1970, it is I think important to remember that feminism's encounters with visual media and with their histories are of a much longer duration than the past three decades. Nor have they been confined to the west. Phoebe Farris's new book is an eloquent testimony to the creative activities by and writings about art and artists of colour in the Americas, south as well as north. Beyond the Anglo-American context as well as within it are uneven developments in which "feminism" has become "feminisms". Healthy and vigorous debates have taken place and are underway to rething and claim feminist practice and theory for culturally diverse constituencies. Feminisms are sites of struggle and contradiction, defined and redefined by movements in and against culture, discourse and the institutions of power.

Convening the panel, Hilary asked us to ponder 'how feminist analysis in the field of art history has developed.' In reflecting on this question, I am struck by disjuncture and disagreement, difference and diversity as well as bridge-building and coalitions, and the urgency of historical strategies which encompass these uneven developments and contradictions. As Ella Shohat's recent account of

feminism in a multicultural society indicates, linear histories which begin in the 1970s and which prioritise what is called “second wave feminism” tend to miss much of texture of debate and political activism generated in the civil rights movements while they position women of colour as coming late to debates conceptualised by white women. A multiplicity of interventions into the professional discipline have challenged existing concepts of art and artist, theory, practice and history. They have been shaped by changing agendas in feminisms as well as by a raft of broad cultural changes such as “post-modernism” or “post-coloniality” which have also reshaped art history, its approaches and its objects of concern. Moreover, accounts beginning in 1970s tend to set up comparisons between an early and a later phase, between the recovery of women artists which characterised the first stages and more sophisticated analyses of gender and culture produced in the 1990s. In some versions what’s noticed is a shift from feminism to gender, from women’s studies to gender studies, a move perhaps to “post-feminism”. But it is I think difficult to ascribe historical precedence or to delineate either strand as unitary in their preoccupations. Writings about women artists who have been or are under-represented in the canon are still a priority, and a focus on the monographic or biographic has meant neither the neglect of sophisticated questions about visual representation, complex critical theory, nor indeed the analysis of the cultural formations of gender. Much writing today is not so much prompted by an urgency to add women in - to received histories or the canon - as to radically reformulate a field of enquiry, its priorities and its strategies. As Marsha Meskimmon argues, this reconceptualisation cannot be undertaken without the injection of new material and the new analysis which it demands. In these terms, the monographic approach cannot be abandoned or dismissed as untheorised when so many women and so much work still lies unresearched and un(der)-considered. The address to women artists has also brought to visibility the heterogeneity of femininities, variously formed by ethnicity, class, sexuality, ‘race’ and indeed generation. It has argued for a fissuring of the feminine and a deconstruction of binary opposition which seeks to position the ‘one’ against the ‘other’. Furthermore, what has been or can be defined as feminist has profoundly altered over time and across culture, so much so that there are now considerable difficulties in seeing women of another generation as feminist at all. Coming to terms with feminism’s volatility means acknowledging definitions and understandings of feminism which may be unrecognisable to women of an earlier generation or another cultural constituency. Living in a multi-cultural society means coming to terms with feminism’s heterogeneity, acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity.

A cursory survey of existing literature indicates that neither the study of women artists nor the study of the gendering of culture are exclusively feminist undertakings. For me what differentiates feminist accounts from others is the address to power and power/knowledge. It is feminism’s abilities to analyse power

which have profoundly shifted over the past thirty years, and it is the different analyses of power and its social, cultural formations which demark the varying kinds of feminist analysis. Some sort of self-reflexivity about these issues has been central to a feminist approach.

In conclusion I would say that feminisms's restlessness, its constant reinvention, has been partnered by its spatial proliferation. Feminism's encounters with visual media and their histories are by no means delimited by the professional discipline and its institutional locations. This panel brings together women who work in diverse places, spaces and ways: writing essays and studies, curating exhibitions, running journals and galleries. In this feminism differs profoundly to the highly institutionalised "social history of art", whose demise is the subject of another panel today. If feminism's activities and interventions have often been contingent and transitory, they have taken place in social formations charged by diversity and difference. How feminism conceptualises relations of power and acknowledges diversity and difference between women as much as in the writing of history or the development of strategy, remain I think, the most urgent issues now and in the future.

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Katy Deepwell**

I wanted to speak about the topic of strategies from the point of view of being an editor of a feminist art journal which began online in 1996 and in print in January 1998. I wanted to try and explain the politics of what I do in relationship to the question of feminist historiography. The best way I could think of explaining my strategy was to borrow a phrase from Drucilla Cornell when she spoke of feminism as being marked by a strategy of the 'future anterior' - a phrase which seemed to sum up my work. I am projecting into the future with a knowledge of the past and I am looking both ways at the same time, using knowledge of the past, to try and move forward. This is because I am very conscious of the fact that I would not be editing the journal today if it had not been for my early encounter as a 19 year old foundation student with Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker's book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Pandora, 1981) and the questions it raised. The other phrase, which seemed to me to be important to describe my strategy - which I believe is from Gramsci - was 'pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will' as it seemed to me that anyone who continued to work as a feminist art historian through the 1980s and into the 1990s had to be in that category.

My decision to start an international feminist art journal also arose from what I perceived as a 'boredom' - a set of closures - which have also been described by the other speakers here today - with the dominant Anglo-American agenda. This was a very very strong feeling from Western feminists who I encountered when I started an extensive research project in 1996 and whose work I had read for many years which could be summed by the feeling that this agenda was dead, that its work was over, that it was no longer fashionable, even a relic from the past. This perception,



however, was in conflict with my own knowledge and my experience that the most interesting and exciting possibilities to learn and create was from professional exchanges with women from all over the world, particularly from different European countries, with whom I had the opportunity to meet since 1989 in several international conferences. I couldn't understand why given twenty/thirty years of work that this closure had occurred.

And then I realised as I was looking around, where is this knowledge in print? This was the way to share and exchange this kind of knowledge amongst many people but this shared knowledge of these other women's projects, the different explorations of feminist histories in Europe particularly, didn't exist in print. It wasn't available. And although people were telling me that it was 'known' and 'accepted', this was knowledge shared only by a few. Looking across the literature in 1987, feminist work on contemporary women's art practices was newly available in 3 or 4 anthologies of Anglo-American work but one has to remember that unfortunately the reality became that the next anthology of new previously unpublished work in the same vein did not come out until 1995 when *New Feminist Art Criticism* came out. (Qualification: Frueh and Langer's earlier *Feminist art criticism*, Janet Wolff's *Feminine Sentences* were exceptions to this) While in these 8 years many exhibition catalogues were published and several feminist/women's art magazines were published, anthologies of new writings were very scarce. These kinds of closures in debate are what I as an editor/researcher, now try and pay attention to.

At the same time, I also want to encourage a memory and a cultural understanding of what women artists are doing in many different parts of the world because our level of understanding and professional exchange internationally are still extremely poor. Our understandings of how feminism has taken up very different inflections in many different parts of the world, where quite different debates and discourses have been initiated and developed. This is what I am seeking to reflect in my journal as and when I can negotiate, receive funds, encourage articles to be written by women artists, curators, and critics from different parts of the world. Each volume of the print version, for example, contains artists or writers living in at least 10 different countries in the world.

I also want to explain the title of the journal as it is part and parcel of the spirit of enquiry which I am trying to foster. *n.paradoxa* is a play on Donna Haraway's discussion of a parasite called *mixotricha paradoxa* which lives in the gut of a termite in South Australia. This parasite has paradoxical and unexpected habits of survival and reproduction. It seemed appropriate as a paradigm of feminist research, as Donna Haraway suggested in the original article, but I have adapted. Firstly, it survives only by attracting other parasites or bugs to live on it (which for a web-site seemed appropriate as the site hosts different articles). Secondly, it always reproduces by division. Conflict and debate are what I see as an essential part of feminism; they are what has formed its problematic. Argument is the way in which

we move forward, it is not something to be repressed - so that we can be nice to each other - it's part of the debate that we have to have and to identify the places where we disagree and the tendencies which develop as a result. Thirdly, *n.paradoxa*'s discovery as a unique species in the gut of a termite makes one wonder about the level of in-depth research which is needed as who but a feminist would search so hard to cut up and identify such an object of knowledge. And sometimes when one is doing feminist research it feels like that - this kind of discovery reveals the value of seemingly obscure forms of research and the real time and effort needed to make such discoveries.

Here I would like to agree with Whitney's remark - that there remains still a huge amount of very boring and very predictable empirical and bibliographic research to be done - we have taken far too much for granted if we keep on reproducing a self-complacent and self-evident understanding that we already all know what feminism/s are and are lulled into a secure sense that we all know what feminist historiography is when this is really not the case. It's a shame, for example, on our panel that we have no one from Germany because of the great work that has been done in their biannual feminist art historians' conferences where the German language art historians have debated issues which have parallels with what goes on in America or the UK but they are not the same debates, artists or areas of work discussed. They have a different set of values, ideas and issues and certainly a different hierarchy of artists who they consider worth studying and worth doing in-depth research on. So this is my plea for an acknowledgement of your European and international colleagues as well as to stress that the more editorial work I do for *n.paradoxa* the more I am trying to open up the discussion for Asia, Latin America and Africa to try and make people aware that feminist art practices are not exclusive to or centred in America. One way I wanted to underline this point was to remind this audience of two major international feminist exhibitions which took place in the 1970s ; the *Magna* 1975 and *Feministische Kunst International* 1977 where in both exhibitions around 20 countries took part and this was for me an early inspiration for international co-operation in feminism and for *n.paradoxa*.

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

### Phoebe Farris

Phoebe Farris spoke in her paper for Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies from the introduction to her book *Women Artists of Color: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook to 20th Century Artists in the Americas* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1999).

When I begin to read a book I am always curious about what inspired the author to undertake the project. Many colleagues and friends have asked me why, how, etc., I initiated this particular research endeavor. I have to confess that the initial idea was not mine originally. Having just completed writing/editing *Voices of Color: Art and Society in the Americas* (Humanities Press) and waiting for my complimentary author's copies, I looked forward to a temporary break from writing. But I received a phone call from former Greenwood's Acquisitions Editor, Alicia S. Merritt, who having seen *Voices* at a trade convention, wanted to know if I would be interested in writing a biographical dictionary or bio-critical sourcebook on *Women of Color in Contemporary Art*, in the United States, all of the Americas or worldwide. Alicia sent me a copy of Greenwood's recent book, *Women Film Directors: An International Bio-Critical Dictionary* by Gwendolyn Audrey Foster. I enjoyed the book, still refer to it for research purposes, and was impressed by Foster's inclusion of women of color filmmakers throughout the book. The proposal I submitted to Greenwood indicated that I would include four racial/ethnic categories (African-American, Asian Pacific-American, Latin American, and Native American, acknowledging that these "identifiers" can be problematic at times and go through political changes (black, Negro, Hispanic, Oriental, American Indian, etc., to name a few variations). Almost

a hundred artists are profiled, with approximately one quarter in each category.

I felt qualified to select and write about African-American, Latin American, and Native American women artists, having already researched artists from those backgrounds, lived in communities with those three racial/ethnic groups since childhood, and coming from a bi-cultural background (Native American/Powhatan and African American). However, I could not meet Greenwood's deadline unless I had the assistance of other writers. Through consultations with colleagues from around the country I selected Cynthia A. Sanchez, Executive Director of the State of New Mexico Capitol Art Foundation (recommended by Professor Miguel Gilbert, University of New Mexico), Nadine Wasserman, Curator of Art at Lawrence University Art Department (recommended by Frida High-Tesfagiorgis, University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Kathy Kramer, Art History professor at S. U. N. Y. Cortland. Often they suggested artists I had not considered and vice-versa and I am pleased with our mutual decisions. Moira Roth, Art History professor at Mills College, agreed to contribute an afterword.

My knowledge of Asian-Pacific American women artists working prior to the 1980s was limited. The Asian American artists I knew personally were either mid-career or emerging and the book needed to cover the entire 20th century. Professor Dennis Ichiyama, Head of Purdue's Visual and Performing Arts Department recommended Professor William W. Lew from the University of Northern Iowa. Due to personal circumstances beyond his control, Lew was unable to complete the entire chapter. Just a few months prior to production time, Melinda de Jesús, Asian-American Studies professor at San Francisco State University, Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Art History professor at Mills College, Reena Jana, art critic for Asian Art News, and Khris Kuramitsu, U.C.L.A. graduate student, graciously agreed to complete the chapter with additional entries. Unfortunately, time constraints resulted in a shorter chapter than originally expected but in no way implies a scarcity of dynamic Asian American women artists.

It was difficult to choose which artists to include with the limitation of 100 artists in an entire century and the inclusion of four racial/ethnic categories. My apologies to any living artists and to the families of any deceased artists who feel slighted. Letters were sent to living artists, art museums, and artists organizations requesting resumé's, and updated information on permanent acquisitions. This book attempts to have a balance of older and/or deceased artists who helped pave the way for future generations, mature, mid-career mainstream artists with national/international reputations, and younger, emerging artists. The media represented spans the gamut from traditional painting and sculpture to newer forms such as video, conceptual, performance, etc. Women who write, sing, paint, or run for political office are called "women writers", "women singers", "women painters", and "women politicians". It reflects the male bias in society and language. There are no "male artists", only "artists" and "women artists". Women artists, writers, etc., are considered

representative of all women while men are perceived to be unique individuals. Man is privileged as the “norm” and woman is the “Other”.<sup>1</sup>

This male “norm” is also a white norm. Artists, writers, politicians, etc., that are not white (regardless of gender) are labeled black artists, Hispanic writers, Native American politicians, etc., And, thus, women of color have double labels. My use of the term women artists of color is not of my own volition. It is a term imposed on me by a society that is still racist/sexist and seeks to categorize me and the artists profiled in this book. Until racism/sexism cease to operate in all aspects of life in the Americas, artists who are not white men will continue to be described by their gender and/or ethnicity and be discussed in books such as this.

The historical circumstances of minority and oppressed groups within the Americas have required the initiation of a period of separatism from the majority culture for self-articulation, knowledge of history and heritage, and awareness of unique culture.<sup>2</sup> When we as women in a reaction/response to sexism/patriarchy are forced to separate ourselves, create our own spaces, write about each other, then we are labeled “essentialists”.

When this project began I was Purdue University's Interim Women's Studies Director and used the term feminist in my teaching/writing. Although familiar with Alice Walker's term “womanist”, i.e. ‘a black feminist or feminist of color committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female, not a separatist, one who loves struggle, loves the folk, womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender’,<sup>3</sup> I didn't use it much working in a predominantly white Women's Studies Program. However, my summer residency at the University of Georgia's Womanist Studies Consortium (sponsored by U. G. A.'s Institute for African-American Studies and the Rockefeller Foundation) in which I interacted with Filipina Asian-Americans, African (via Ghana & London), Canadian-Caribbean, and U. S. African-American women scholars increased my commitment to use the term womanist more frequently when discussing women of color who are committed to feminism. Although many of the artists in this book lived prior to the 1970s women's liberation/feminist movement, much of their art practices, life styles, and political commitments can be considered “womanist”. I choose to use this term as a way of honoring those who have passed on to the spirit world and those who are still with us in the struggle.

This book is a modest attempt to rectify the inequality of information on women artists of color. The early feminist art movement of the 1970s prioritized gender over race or class. But for women artists of color-despite their concerns with women's issues-ethnicity more than gender has shaped their primary identities, and often the content of their art.<sup>4</sup> Women artists of color were active participants in the civil rights movement and later the anti-war/peace movements, student movements, and leftist politics. As cultural workers/political activists, it was a time of cultural affirmation/celebration as well as anger/outrage at injustice.<sup>5</sup>

'Expressions of early feminism - between 1968 and 1973- took place alongside events like the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam, and the U.S. invasion of Cambodia. The same period witnessed the incarceration and trials of the Chicago Seven, Huey Newton, and Angela Davis, as well as the Attica prison rebellion; student campus protests around the country and the killings at Kent State; the Native American occupation of Alcatraz Island and the confrontation at Wounded Knee...protests and meetings were announced by posters. The streets were alive with murals, graffiti and slogans. The demonstrations and strategies of the civil rights and antiwar movements were important models for feminists. For many women, protesting was inseparably fused with their identities as artists, critics, and historians.'<sup>6</sup>

Women artists of color have expanded the scope of protest art. Working in a myriad of media and styles, they are researching the fusion of past and current history and of gender with race, de-constructing stereotypical mainstream representations of their identities as women and persons of color.

A motif often used in the art of this period was an upraising arm with the hand clenched in a fist. This symbol of struggle for power can be viewed in the 1968 sculpture of African-American artist, Elizabeth Catlett's, *Homage to My Young Black Sisters*. A cedar wooden sculpture, striking in its monumentality and evoking memories of Mexican pre-Columbian art, it 'symbolizes women's participation in the global struggle against the subjugation of women of color, engaging the language of struggle in form, iconography, and iconology.'<sup>7</sup>

Chicana artist Yolanda M. López reaffirmed identity stimulated by cultural and individual memories in a series of work that thematizes *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. López's series of the *Virgen* as her grandmother, mother, and herself (dressed in everyday clothes and working) stimulates thought about feminist/womanist struggles within political and nationalistic struggles. In her 1978 *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen de Guadalupe*, the figure is a youthful Chicana, actively running toward the viewer as opposed to the traditional, suffering religious icon. "By embodying *La Virgen* in real lives of Chicanas, López calls attention to idealized representations of women whom she sees as meriting the kind of passion and honor bestowed upon the *Virgen*. She commands respect through her self-portrait in her activism to take control of her life and her environment."<sup>8</sup>

Often women artists of color also play dual roles as curators, critics, and art historians. Margo Machida, a New York based Asian-American artist organized the well-received 1991 symposium, '(re)ORIENTING: Self Representations of Asian American Women Through The Visual Arts'. Participating artists Tomie Arai, Hung Liu, and Yong Soon Min discussed the clichéd images of Asian women in American popular culture as opposed to their lived realities and investigated the positions that gender, race, and ethnicity occupy in Asian American women's self-definitions. Machida critiques Tomie Arai's 1988 print *Laundryman's Daughter* as an 'immigrant

legacy of all Asian women because it emphasizes the close intergenerational ties between them'.<sup>9</sup> She contrasts this to the concept of 'white feminist critiques of patriarchy and emphasis on individual independence, which for many Asians is read as a threat to family unity.'<sup>10</sup>

Currently, the Native American woman artist with the most national/international exposure is Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish-Flathead). As an artist, curator, lecturer, and political activist, she is a role model for many Native American artists, male and female. Her multi-media paintings which incorporate sign language, glyphs, pictograms, and collage are concerned with issues such as the environment, Native American sovereignty, and civil rights. In Smith's *The Red Mean: Self Portrait* (1992), the traced outline of the artist's own body is drawn out in imitation of the form of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Golden Mean*. Superimposed over the form of Smith's body is a large red medicine wheel. Smith has 'conflated an outline specifically of her own racially and sexually marginalized Native American female body with that prototypical and stereotypical icon of perfect human proportions so fundamental to patriarchal western culture, the Vitruvian Man.'<sup>11</sup>

Many women artists of color such as Elizabeth Catlett, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Frida Kahlo, Lois Jones, Edmonia Lewis, and Helen Hardin were expressing concerns about the intersections of art/gender/race/politics in their art, sometimes in subtle, understated ways long before these issues became "trendy" and articulated by feminists, postmodernists, and poststructuralists.

According to Goldman, the leap from modernism to postmodernism was also that from the concept of the artist as a bohemian to the artist as a social thinker; from the microcosm of the studio to society; from art as unigeneric to interdisciplinary; and most important, from culture as a static self-contained system to a dynamic one encompassing multiple territories of thought and action, semiotics, politics, social anthropology, media, education, etc.<sup>12</sup> I would argue that few artists of color (male and female) had the luxury of being "bohemian" and that artists of color were always "social thinkers."

The 1980s were dominated by poststructuralism adopted by the visual arts from philosophy, literary criticism, anthropology and the debate on postmodernism. The 1980s witnessed a politicization of cultural workers, along the lines of the liberating aspects of postmodern theory...what can be called a critique of postmodernism or a postmodern discourse of resistance.<sup>13</sup> Goldman cites the writings of Martha Rosler, Lucy Lippard, Laura Mulvey, Craig Owens, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks as helping to shape the theories of postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminism.

One can ask the question, why is it necessary in 1998 to write/publish a book titled, *Women Artists of Color: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook to 20th Century Artists in the Americas*, if postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminism have "liberated" academia, art, and society as a whole from the rigid boundaries of race, sex, class,

gender, etc. A brief background/overview of affirmative action and multiculturalism as they apply to the art world is needed to that question.

Affirmative action policies were enacted in the corporate world which includes the art world and in academia in a temporary period of a liberal reform (as I write, these policies are now being dismantled in universities across the U. S.) which sought to increase “minority” access to the middle class and to repress more radical “minority” voices such as the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, and A. I. M. (American Indian Movement). It was during this initial phase of affirmative action that African American, Latino, Native American, Asian American, and Women's Studies programs proliferated in academia. During the 1980s affirmative action became diluted/watered down into a superficial version of multiculturalism. As the term multicultural became more mainstream its initial purpose as a cultural expression of affirmative action became lost and unfortunately multiculturalism became co-opted as white educational/cultural institutions sought to make profits by securing grants to host so-called multicultural art exhibits, symposia, and artist/scholar residencies. The definition of multicultural populations expanded from minority/people of color to include women (often white), gays/lesbians, and the physically disabled/challenged, etc., when institutions realized that huge profits could be reaped by attaching the term multicultural to every conceivable category. This is not to slight the real needs and issues affecting women of all races, gays/lesbians, and the physically challenged-but to point out how capitalism seeks to profit from disadvantaged/marginalized groups.

Into this arena walk artists of color and for the purposes of this book, specifically women artists of color. Women artists of color have had to walk a thin line between so-called “co-optation” as they enter the mainstream art world and the middle/upper classes and maintaining their artistic, racial, ethnic, and gender integrity and political commitments. University art departments transmit ideology as well as produce artists. They educate future art critics and art historians, thereby creating the components that feed the art market. Financial rewards and status can be inducements to co-optation, accompanied by a change in the artistic ideology reflected in the art work.<sup>14</sup>

Even more so than artists from the dominant society, artists of color have to face harsh economic realities. The ways in which women artists of color attempt to maintain and creatively express their oppositional stances to racism and sexism vary. Many of them bravely refuse to compromise the quality or content of their work for prestige or financial rewards. Whether working for grass-roots arts organizations, creating public murals, or working within the establishment as art educators, museum professionals, etc., the women artists profiled in this book maintained their specific community ties and in some cases involved themselves in national/international coalitions with other peoples of color.

Back to my original question, why is it necessary to write/publish this kind of



book in 1998? The answer-racism and sexism are alive and well in the art world. Mainstream art exhibits/criticism/history is still not fully integrated. If books such as this are seen as “ghettoizing” or “essentializing” women artists of color-then my challenge is for the art establishment to go beyond tokenism such as black art exhibits only in February, Native American exhibits in November in conjunction with Thanksgiving, and multicultural art chapters at the end of the book (back of the bus).

Before the arrival of Europeans to the Americas, Native Americans from Canada to South America honored the Four Directions expressed in the four sacred colors, white, red, black, and yellow assigned to the four directions. In most indigenous societies the north is represented by white/Caucasians, the south by the color red/ Native Americans, east is yellow/Asians, and black, the west/Africans. These directions and colors, often placed on a medicine wheel also have social, personal, and emotional attributes which vary among indigenous nations. In the spirit of Alice Walker's concept of “womanism”, the contributors to this book, women and one man from different races/ethnic backgrounds came together to research and write about some of the peoples/colors on the medicine wheel that have been ignored/neglected/ silenced. Womanism activates female energy toward empowerment, not only of women, but of communities, foregrounding the unity of community so that group mutuality is not attained at the expense of individual affiliations of race/ethnicity, religion, class, etc.<sup>15</sup>

We (the authors) look forward to receiving critical commentary about our essays, choice of artists, and suggestions for future research. Information on “emerging” artists of color in the Americas and around the world would also be appreciated. The medicine wheel of knowledge is continually turning.

## Notes

1. Frances Bonner, Lizbeth Goodman (eds.) *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (United Kingdom: Polity Press/The Open University, 19.).
2. Shifra M. Goldman *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
3. Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1983).
4. Yolanda M. López and Moira Roth 'Social Protest: Racism and Sexism' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds) *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s' History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 141.
7. Freida High-Tesfagiorgis 'Chiasmus-Art in Politics/Politics in Art: Chicano/a and African

- American Image, Text, and Activism of the 1960s and 1970s' in Phoebe Farris-Dufrene (ed) *Voices of Color: Art and Society in the Americas* (Atlanta Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), p. 150.
8. Ibid pp. 154 - 157.
9. Yolanda M. López and Moira Roth 'Social Protest: Racism and Sexism' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds) *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 156.
10. Ibid.
11. Erin Valentino 'Coyote's Ransom: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and the Language of Appropriation' in *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* (London: Kala Press, Spring 1997) p. 35.
12. Shifra M. Goldman *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Barbara McCaskill and Layli Phillips 'We Are All 'Good Woman!': A Womanist Critique of the Current Feminist Conflict' in Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry (eds) *Bad Girls/Good Girls: Women, Sex and Power in the 1990s* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Dori G. Lemeh**

In response to the question how will the early feminist art histories be revisited? which was put forward by our panel chair Hilary Robinson, I have to say that the words written by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard in the introduction to their book *The Power of Feminist Art* became the focus of my brief paper. In unison these women reminded us that:

‘Feminist art’s revolutionary lessons have been so successfully assimilated into contemporary artistic practices that its own history as well as the histories of many feminist artists organisations and publications that helped to generate this work seemed in imminent danger of being forgotten and lost’

Forgotten and lost - wouldn’t that be a tragedy? Wouldn’t it be a historical atrocity, if those unknown and unsung women, who laid everything on the line securing the future for this and the next generation of women was not recognized? Through extraordinary forms of protest, those incredible women brought all of us forth where some of us now rest comfortably today. Wouldn’t that be a great loss if their contributions, for whatever reason, were not recognized?

Yes, I believe most of us, if not all of us, would agree that to overlook, exclude, limit or ignore, even the smallest contribution to our collective history would be to misrepresent or deny our unsung solidarity. This brings me to a particular point, on which I am certain we can all agree, which is our feminist focus appears askew when within the context of feminist historiography, the historical contributions made by African-American women and other women of color are not to-date fully recognized and/or acknowledged.

I do have to say that to some degree the presence of black women and a few black

women's organisations as well as the presence of our sisters of colour as contributors to the cause of women's rights is well documented within the collected essays of *The Power of Feminist Art* and other writings of equally great importance. However, we still have a ways to go in order to integrate the collective efforts made by women of color, who assisted in transforming the feminist movement.

After speaking with several women of color attending this conference about the feminist movement, each in turn remarked that it is their belief that they have become the "Other" within the feminist movement. These same individuals expressed that this otherness is connected to a power struggle, which is encouraging disunity and fracturing within the group to occur and consequently splinter groups emerge. Whether this difference is socially, economically or racially motivated, I agree with author Audre Lorde, who said, 'our future survival is predicated on our ability to relate with/in equality. As women we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves, if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are equals, neither inferior nor superior and we must find ways to use these differences to enrich our ambitions and collective struggles.'

The future of the feminist art movement depends as Lorde says, on 'the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across differences.'

Audre Lorde quotes from Audre Lorde *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (California: The Crossing Press, 1984).

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

### **Marsha Meskimmon**

In beginning to develop a brief position paper for this panel, I went back to the description Hilary Robinson sent to all participants in order to clarify the aims of the discussion. I was struck by one particular rhetorical question which she set out there: 'Is work on women artists just not trendy enough?'

This question struck me for two reasons. First, it was clearly provocative; it begs an answer by its very cheek. The second reason I fixed upon this question, however, was that it was recognisable. There is a recalcitrant binary thinking which dogs feminist art history, pitting the 'untrendy' reclamation of women artists against 'trendy' theoretical revisions of the discipline as two opposing forms of scholarship. In these terms, it is not 'sexy' to be in the archives exploring primary material about women's art long since forgotten and, moreover, it is assumed that such research can only produce additive surveys or basic biographical information. By contrast, the clever working and reworking of sources already known represents the trendy end of feminist interventions even while it signals its own material limits.

The questions which interest me in pursuing research on women's art, both historical and contemporary, are not contained by this oppositional model. My strategies link primary research and theory at a fundamental level since what I find most fascinating about exploring the art of women are issues of epistemology - what kinds of knowledges are made when women make art and what forms of knowledge am I making in engaging with its presence?

Addressing women's art, means confronting a paradox: how to acknowledge its historical occlusion without reproducing the paradigms which render it as 'other'. Scholarship which defines women artists as an homogeneous cohort, irrespective

of the dynamics of their histories, or which seeks in women's art some unified 'female essence', preceding specific practices as their knowable 'origin point', erases differences between women and reinstates the binary logic through which female subjectivity is rendered invisible, illegible and impossible to articulate. The theoretical task is how to engage with women's art and radical difference; how to think women's art 'otherwise'.

A crucial shift in perspective from object to process helps to move beyond the deadlock of the binary opposition. Rather than seeing women's art as a category of objects to be defined, it is more useful to explore the processes by which women's art comes to make meaning. These include the processes by which we, as art historians and critics, make connections and contexts in the present - to paraphrase Rosi Braidotti on the transdisciplinary action of the feminist theorist: 'creating connections where things were previously disconnected or seemed unrelated, where there seemed to be 'nothing to see.'<sup>1</sup>

Such a perspective explores art-making as a performative act through which embodied subjects negotiate their particular material and discursive positions across a variety of historical moments. Thinking women's art within an intersubjective frame, as instances of articulation, capable of change and reinscription through activities in the present, invites critics to engage in dialogue with works, contexts and ideas. Hence, the very opposition between 'additive reclamation' and 'theoretical revision' is rendered redundant.

In fact, I would argue that maintaining this dualist paradigm actually enacts another, more insidious form of exclusion through producing an acceptable 'alternative canon'. That is, by pitting new primary research against theoretical reconceptions of existing material, we reinforce the 'catch-22' of women's art - either we add their names to the canon and do not question its standards of judgement or we harness all of our most skilful thinking to rework the canonical tradition itself, thereby reinforcing it by default. Significantly, this insight links feminist ethics with feminist interventions into aesthetics.

For example, if we take corporeality and difference (rather than universal laws) to reside at the heart of ethics, then we can situate processes and work toward material change without falsely seeking transcendent, static truths. Here, I am indebted to the insights of such scholars as Moira Gatens and Elizabeth Grosz who, in thinking through becomings, process-based agency and an ethics of sexual difference, speak directly to the role of the feminist art historian/critic as a maker of meanings and knowledges.<sup>2</sup>

While the logic of 'becoming' may offer the potential for an infinite variety of constellations, forming and reforming in perpetual change, specific 'becomings' are always located and material. Additionally, the elements which have combined in any particular becoming are derived from specific, located and material conditions.

So, in response to the question of the 'trendiness' of research into women's art,

and the binary which this traces, the link between corporeality and becoming is crucial - and replicates the link between primary research and theoretical reconception. While it is possible to have any number of theoretical reinterpretations of the canon, for example, these will provide only the 'becomings' which are fostered by their particular situation, historically, materially and critically. Without more diverse work entering the sphere of reconnection, making itself available for new and radical combinations with other ideas, objects and images, the results will never wander far from that which we already know. This is at the heart of the theoretical importance of work on women's art in epistemological terms - it enables and necessitates new ways of making meaning which move beyond the logic of binary historiography to mobilise radical difference for new feminist strategies.

### Notes

1. R. Braidotti 'Toward a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism' in C.V. Boundas and D. Olkowski (Eds). *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy* (pp.159-85) (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) p.177.
2. M. Gatens 'Sex, Gender, Sexuality: Can Ethologists Practice Genealogy' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* vol. XXXV (1996) Supplement (pp.1-19); E. Grosz (ed.) *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

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## Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

**Janet Wolff**

I would say that one of the most important, and interesting, developments in feminist art history in the past decade has been the turn to the question of the gendering of culture itself. This has meant, among other things, getting away from some rather sterile (and sometimes hostile) debates, including in the pages of the *Art Bulletin* in the mid-1980s (e.g. Thalia Gouma-Peterson & Patricia Mathews 'The Feminist Critique of Art History' Sept.1987 Vol LXIX, No.3 & 'Reply' in March 1989 Vol.LXXI, No.1).

These oppositions are pretty familiar, though they have taken different forms: 1970s vs.1990s feminism; American vs. British (or French) feminism; celebratory vs. deconstructive art practice, and so on. Argument about these issues has occupied scholars and critics in relation to each of the three main areas of feminist concern - namely the study (and rediscovery) of women artists and their work; the representation of women and gender in visual culture; and the question of feminist art practice. It is not so much that these questions have been resolved, but rather that the focus has shifted to a more fundamental problem - namely the "gendering" that goes on in the production of art and culture more generally. I have come to think that this rather different emphasis allows us to continue to talk about art practice and about representation, but without getting stuck in debates about essentialism, or questions about the difference between men's and women's work. I will explain this in relation to some of my own recent and current interests - three short examples.

In a study of women artists in the Whitney Studio Club, in the two decades leading up to the founding of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1931, my initial



assumption was that the virtual disappearance of almost all of these artists from the historical record (and from the museum) was the usual case of gender-related exclusion. Many of these artists (Peggy Bacon, Katharine Schmidt, Dorothy Varian, for example) were very successful, and highly visible, during those decades, and indeed for another twenty years after the Museum's founding. (Their works were included, for example, in the 1949 *Memorial Exhibition for Juliana Force* at the Whitney.) It was also clear, though, that the male artists associated with that group did not fare much better (though the names of Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Alexander Brook and Guy Pène du Bois are perhaps better known than those of their women colleagues). The real story of exclusion here, of course, is the well-known narrative of the ascendancy of modernism (or rather a particular Barr/Greenberg/MoMA version of modernism), and the consequent sidelining and marginalization of other forms of twentieth-century art. The realist and figurative painters of the teens and twenties are constructed as second-rate and out-of-date by this narrative. (The more recent revival of such work - for instance in the 1995 exhibition of the *Ashcan painters in Washington, Metropolitan Lives*, and in the Whitney Chadwick's own *American Century 1900-1950* last year - is something that interests me a great deal, but that's another matter.) Eventually I came back to the question of gender in this study - no longer in terms of looking for the processes of exclusion of women and their work, but through a recognition that the opposition of modernism/realism in the post-War period was itself gendered. The relative feminization of realism, then, becomes the more important insight, and not least because it renders irrelevant any debates about gender essentialism.

My second example is the flâneur. Fifteen years ago, I wrote an article about the impossibility for women to inhabit this role, and hence the invisibility of women in the literature of modernity, in which the flâneur appears as a central figure (reprinted in J. Wolff *Feminine Sentences* Cambridge: Polity, 1991). I've come back to this question once or twice in the meantime, and others have suggested ways in which women could, in fact, occupy the role of flâneuse - for example, in shopping or cinema-going. Now I am inclined to think about this question from a somewhat different point of view, exploring instead the very constitution, in critical and historical thought, of the category of "modernity". If the definition of "the modern" privileges the anonymous city stroller (and I still maintain that this figure is paradigmatically and practically a man), then we must reconsider the ways in which we conceptualize modernity - for example, by placing less emphasis on the street and the public arena, and exploring the intersections of home and work, family and enterprise, city and suburb, men's and women's work.

Lastly, I am interested (as are a number of other feminist art historians) in looking at "the feminine" in modern art. I think that it is time to retrieve this category for feminism, in order, as Griselda Pollock has put it, to decipher 'inscriptions in the feminine', which will allow us to 'confront the difference of women as other than

what is other to [the] masculine order while exposing the politics of dominant discourses and institutions'. Of course we have also, in the past, needed to do considerable critical work on the manipulation of the concept of "the feminine" in the service of the denigration of women's work. But we are now well placed to address the question of the discursive and ideological constitution of gender in art-critical and art-historical practice.

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## Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

### **October (near the end)**

Oh! Why? Oh! Why do I continue to go art slutting with either G. or Bet.?

One has legs so long they make a giraffe look like a midget and the other walks so fast that your legs are worn to stumps!!! But as usual I can not say no to either of them because basically I perversely enjoy their company. What with Em being so do-lally this past year. (I dread my Xmas present this year. Probably another post modern piece of ceramics, courtesy of the National Health Services art therapy unit.)

But to get on with the story, I had agreed to meet Bet at Bar Italia on Frith Street to start our West End tour of current gallery shows. As usual Bet was late so I just sat and enjoyed my cappuccino and listened to the New Orleans jazz band playing up and down the street. It was the yearly Soho jazz festival. These two young hip characters on the next bar stool were offering people free mobile telephone calls anywhere in the world as a promotion for intergalactic mobiles. I had been very non-discreetly listening in on their conversation regarding who they could nab. Not for them plying their wares in the street. No way! they picked Bar Italia and slumped on a bar stool.

‘Oh I do want to get some hot Italian chick so she could phone home and I can hear her say CIO MAMA!’ the male of the species said.

But to avail. So in their boredom he turned to me and offered me to chance to phone anywhere. Laying aside my fresh cappuccino, like a fool I tried near and dear and he told me to stop bothering him. So taking pity on me with my dejected face and its tear running silently down it, he said ‘Phone your mum!’

What a charitable young dick head I thought to myself.

As, no way do I look like a hot Italian young chick; more like her stylish aunty. So I dialled Mum and Dad while the jazz music got even more louder and raucous.

'Mum, it's me!'

'Where the hell are you?'

'In Soho, waiting for Bet and there's a jazz band marching outside the Bar Italia.'

'Wow its sure clear ! Why are you phoning? Are you okay?'

'Yeah! There's this promotion going for mobile telephones that can phone anywhere in the world and they asked me if I wanted to talk to somebody anywhere in the world. So I phoned you two!'

'It's sure nice to hear your voice,' my dad butted in.

'C. Its your daughter on the phone and she's in a bar in Soho. Dad was just putting the coffee on. The last time I was in a jazz bar in Soho was during the war with your father. There were air raids on all the time. Is that strip club that never closes still going?'

'I really wouldn't know ,Mum.'

'Hi dear ! It's great for you to phone and boy that band sure is great.'

'You okay, Dad?'

'We miss not being the centre of life any more.'

'Mum, you haven't been there for years.'

'Well! I mean it gets lonely being old. Everyone writes you off as old and boring just because you can't get about that much any more. Wait and see it will happen to you one day'

'Thanks Mum!'

And so we went on for a while. It seemed like they were just around the corner and I started to cry. Then Bet charged in and wanted to get in on the action. When I hung up she tried to phone New Zealand despite my warning that it would be three in the morning and whoever it was they weren't going to be very pleased. But as usual she did it anyway and was told to piss off by her friend for waking her up just as she was dropping off to sleep after settling the baby again. The look on Bet's face said it all.

So I ordered another large cappuccino as the first had grown cold and listened to her assault plans for the afternoon. I swallowed hard at the course laid out. First it was the Frith Street Gallery. I can't remember what was there because I ripped my tights on the trendy refurbished Georgian panelling just as I entered. By the time I had sorted myself out Bet was ready to go on to the next venue. This was, of course, White Cube which had another completely unmemorable show. So after her touching base with the other art admin. people we whizzed off to another gallery whose name I can never remember, but who was showing a not-so-young New York artist's work of constructed urban landscapes. For all unknown reasons and purpose it really looked just like miniature train sets; the type your dad would make insisting that it was for his son, then the next door neighbour would come over and they would retire

to the attic to play trains while my brother and I watched Dr. Who instead. Now I ask you who wants to buy what looks like a model train landscape? Apparently somebody does. The curator, along with Bet, ranted on and on about the cutting edginess of it all. Urban decay! City angst! Physiological squalor! What language my ears were burning!! That last phrase really had a mind boggling twist to it. So I resorted to pushing Bet out the door after ten non-stop minutes of this talk. Who knows where it could lead?

We then decide to try and get the last half hour at the Saatchi Gallery in North London. So off we went and landed up running all the way there from the tube as we discovered that my watch was a bit slow. We had ten minutes.

'I am not paying for ten minutes!' she said and we didn't.

Bold as brass she went up to the counter and asked for a catalogue while I hovered near a picture. She then turned to me and said "That one you were looking at. I want to check it out before closing" and we went off and did just that. Fifteen minutes later they were dragging us out.

My pleas to find a coffee bar and actually finish a cup of coffee were put to rest with the information that she had to meet another curator at the Round House installation piece which Brian Eno and MIMO Palladino had collaborated on. So, no coffee! It wasn't bad. But very damp. Afterwards she phoned the person we were supposed to meet at the phone box outside to find where he was.

'Why don't you get a mobile?' I asked.

To which I already knew the answer but I thought that a little friendly wind-up was in order.

'We need to find the pub he's in.' She said in her best 'I am going to ignore you' tone. We did find the pub down the road and on Bet's instruction looked for a man that 'looks like he works at the British Museum.'

'He's over there.' I said within nano seconds of walking in the room.

'How do you know that's him.'

'Bet, do you know what he looks like?' Then the man whom I pointed to turned and greeted her.

'He's had a haircut since I last saw him.' she hissed.

Well, she could have fooled me. He had British Museum written all over him. I just gratefully accepted a very large pint of Guinness and drank it straight down. Then I had another one. They didn't serve coffee at this pub and after the second Guinness I was beginning not to care.

### **November (mid)**

The country curator came down for the mid term break with his daughter. We did such exciting things like the children's embroidery workshop at the Geoffrey Museum and I got to eat up her leftovers because she stuffed herself on to much of MY chocolate bar before lunch.

I bumped into my photographer when I was crawling around under the table looking for a lost needle. She was looking for her two year old. "Ah this is why you couldn't photograph my work today!" She just grunted and crawled away. The new extension at the Geoffrey Museum is just brilliant. Got a book on china from the 1950s and 1960s for referencing my collection. After the workshop I insisted that we go home for an afternoon nap before we go out to the ballet.

In the end I backed out of the ballet and went to a private view with G. who informed me that her life plan for 2000 was to have a baby. I've heard it all before and reminded her that she couldn't have her wonderful swinging lifestyle with a child. 'But it's so fashionable to have a baby.'

'Believe me when its two in the morning and the little blighter won't stop crying and you don't have a partner to relieve you, the last thing you will be thinking of is fashion. Except the type you can no longer afford.'

That will sober her up I thought!! Beside she's pushing on a bit and a reminded her of that but to no avail.

'It's fashionable to a mother in your forties. Just look at Cheri Blair!' was her retort.

The Prime Minister has a lot to answer for.

### **Decemberish**

Country curator came down again for three days. I gave him the door key and he volunteered to make supper as he would be home before both of us. Well, me anyway! When I arrived home after evening lectures at 9:30 there was a Chinese takeaway on the table with two bottles of wine. The explanation being he couldn't get the key to work so he went to the pub to find dearest and nearest and one thing led to another...so much for the new man theory of evolution. Participated in a Group exhibition as part of the Hidden Art in Hackney Festival.

A rich collector and his wife, the head hunter, managed to visit the exhibition. Her nose was so high up in the air from disgust at having to slum it in the East End that she couldn't really see any of the art. When I phoned him the next day to ask how he liked it. He replied 'We found it all rather ethnic.' A stunned silence on my part was then followed by a tirade of abuse on the misuse of the word "ethnic".

A week later he apologised to me at an opening and said he was only trying to be loyal to his wife. It must be hard being so rich!

### **Mid December**

As part of 'Let's be nice to the aging art slut so she won't divorce me campaign,' the bedroom floor of maple has been laid (six years of waiting and more than I can say for me), the velux window in the hall ceiling has been installed (ten years of waiting) and the roof has been fixed (three years of a water damaged ceiling). Not bad for one month. The roof being fixed turned into an event out of Chaucer. In

order for the roof to be fixed we had to hire scaffolding and roofers, as one does, but we didn't reckon on the flu epidemic striking so apparently, just as we started. The two week delay ran into three as a roofer is laid low in bed with flu.

My next door neighbour, the ex-cop, stops me in the street and informs me that he and his good lady wife have now barricaded themselves in their front bedroom as a preventative measure against robbers hoisting themselves straight up some twelve feet and absailing into their room from the scaffold. I poo pood such athletics being attributed to the weedy species called an East End burglar. Sad to say I ate my words that very next Saturday night. I had not accounted for the effect of "being a plain shit scared 18-year-old villain with five coppers chasing you" on a fellow.

Just as I was about to snuggle in with my pot of tea and the latest Vogue magazine on Saturday night, after a healthy bout in the garden of brick throwing at the local mating moggies, I hear a scrabbling and desperate panting going on outside my window as a man's figure shoots past up the scaffolding. Leaping out of bed I rush down stairs to nearest & dearest, who is calmly watching the Test Cricket match from South Africa.

'Someone has got up the scaffolding on to the roof !!!'

'Don't be daft I never heard a sound.'

'You wouldn't with your deaf ear to the street.'

We ran to the front door. If you could call climbing over various roofing materials, scaffolding boards and tools that now had lined our hallway for the last three weeks, as running; followed closely by near and dear.

A scene worthy of every cop show you ever watched on TV was going on in our street. Police cars were everywhere and followed by police men running down the street, then followed by my next door neighbour and a few others. People were leaning out of windows and doors calling to each other. "What's going on?" "Don't know!" Dogs were barking. Festering Patty, the old mongrel from two dogs down burst out of her front door and the grasp of her owner, shot across the street and bit a plain clothes copper in the leg; or at least she tried to as she is totally toothless. She just gummed him in reality. Six men in plain clothes and uniforms ran up to our door and asked every so politely if they could go into our back garden. So we all scrabbled over all the roofing paraphernalia in the hall, through the kitchen and then into the garden. But not before they all wiped their feet on the front door carpet. The last one to do so looked sheepishly at me and said 'My wife kills me if I go into the house with muddy feet.'

Well, I thought the secret weapon of the force is a policeman's wife !!

Why the police were swarming down our street was for a very good reason? The story goes that they stopped and questioned a suspicious looking car with four men in it. Apparently four men in a car on a Saturday night can look very suspicious. Once stopped and asked to get out of the car the men did so, then legged it down the Mile End Road and up our street with police in hot pursuit; soon followed with re-

enforcements wailing their way. Unfortunately everything took a turn for the worst when a very scared and frightened villain saw our scaffolding, and somehow probably out of sheer fright, leapt twelve feet straight up into the air and grabbing the scaffolding bar lifted himself up and onto the structure. Meanwhile out in the back yard everyone was peering at the moon lit roofs. Lo and behold! the villain was leaping from roof to roof better than Dyck van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*.

‘Why didn't you guys go after him up the scaffolding,’ I enquired.

‘You got to be kidding. That only happens on TV. I couldn't do that.’

They all to-a-man murmured ‘No way. I'd kill myself.’

So they sent for the search helicopter instead - as one does.

Meanwhile in the street out front more cars had arrived and more neighbours were in the street in their robes and slippers having either woken up or pulled themselves away from the late night movies on television. People were chatting. Calling back and forth to each other. Enquiring where they were going for the Millennium break and so forth and so on. More dogs were barking. Positively mediaeval and Chaucer-like was the atmosphere. It all seemed quite normal. Like this is what one does every Saturday night at 12:30 in the morning!!!!

Then the mood changed as the helicopter arrived, going chukka, chukka, chukka with its powerful search beam on the scene of the crime. It focused on the roof of No.42. Out in the back yard the police were calling out to each other and the neighbours to see where the villain had dropped down and into who's yard. They caught the silly fool because he fell into the water feature at No.57. The old Anderson shelters were never dismantled in our neighbourhood after the last war, so when it was homesteaded in the 1980s they were still there. The concrete structures were too difficult to remove in most cases and the only creative option was to make them into water features with fish and fountains. Very bijoux! Hedgehogs that fall into them can't get out because the sides aren't sloped. Now it seems the valiant little Anderson shelter that saw off Hitler's bombs did it again with another generation of villains. Out the front door and down the street the wet and very remorseful villain, held by the scruff of the neck, was hauled and wailed:

‘I am knackered. I can't go a step further.’

‘Yes, you can sonny because you're nicked.’

The street cheered. Back in the kitchen six policemen wiped their feet and handed me their empty tea mugs.

‘Night all. Thanks for the tea’ and left except the same chap who was still wiping the floor of excess mud. ‘My wife...’ ‘Yea, I know.’

Neighbours drifted back into their homes and police cars melted away. The neighbour next door was ranting about cutting thieves hands off as punishment. The Ayatollah pales beside this man. Perhaps he could get a job in the Iranian civil service. N & D said nothing till we got inside.

‘He doesn't realize it but there is probably some very big holes in his roof tiles



from all this. I'll go up tomorrow and check but if there is I won't tell the Fascist.'

Ah, I thought, signs of latent radicalism are rising from the past. He's not completely dead yet.

So at 2:30 am we all turned out the lights and went to bed. Dogs quieted and sleep descended once more on the street.

The epilogue to this event happened at 7:30 the next morning when the phone ran. Cursing I stumbled out of bed to answer it.

'Wadda want.'

A bright and breezy voice chirped from the other end incredibly clear.

'Hi! Its me, D. I'm in an Indian market buying pashminas like you asked me to and wanted to know what colour you wanted. Also what colour would G. want?'

'Why don't you ask her?'

'Oh she's probably in bed with some man after a party. I wouldn't want to ruin her social life.'

'You mean because I don't have a social life it's okay to phone me at 7:30 on a Sunday morning.'

'Something like that. After all you are married to the living dead!'

I explained what happened only five hours before in the briefest of terms before stating the colour of my choice. There was some Indian music playing in the background and a mans voice was haggling. A familiar sound, just like the East End of London. I could almost smell the curry.

### **January 2000 reflections on the festive season**

Well I managed to duck all the aircraft falling out of the skies from Millennium Bug Syndrome. What tickles my fancy is that the Italians didn't do anything except turn the clocks on their computers back 28 years. Nice One! have we something to learn from them I ask myself?

My last cocktail party of the Millennium went off without a hitch; not too many drunk neighbours staggered home. In fact not too many neighbours came as so many people had succumbed to the flu that is raging around and striking all and sundry down. I kicked the last two out at 1 a.m. still arguing about the validity of reincarnation and the virtues of forgiveness!!! A cheery lot they are.

### **Christmas Day,**

I had had my former student over, who is from Nigeria. He nows brings his wife and his brother. They gave me a beautiful Nigerian robe and woman's head dress which I proceeded to dance around the kitchen in during the preparation of the meal. As usual I got so tipsy that I phoned all my relatives in North America and woke everybody up. As usual we had our traditional argument when the Queen gave her speech and decided to toast the Commonwealth instead of dear Lizzie.

But it was the Millennium Eve that I shall always remember. London at its finest. Three million people out on the streets for the party of a lifetime with fantastic fireworks. I get all gooey over thinking about it. Dear & Near reminds me that we fired up walking a mile home at 3 am in the morning, even though there was public transport and it was free. But drunks always forget those minor details.

I went down to the centre and along the Embankment in the afternoon to see the funfair set up in the Mall. Trafalgar Square had two huge screens set up on the side of Canada House. At first I couldn't make out why everyone was dressed as if they were going on a camping expedition with knapsacks and ladders but then it dawned on me that most people were staying for a party and had their booze in the bags. I had agreed to meet Bet and some of her friends whom I didn't know on the steps of St. Martin's Church. I had gone out for a few hours to see London before returning home to get ready for our party in Wapping. While I waited I watched the scenes relayed of ITV's coverage of the Millennium from over over the world. However at 5:30 pm. Coronation Street came on and suddenly the whole square and surrounding area turned into someone's front room!! Everybody sat down and opened out their thermos flasks of tea and watched it for the duration. The bobby next to me turned and asked his mate if he should go put the kettles on for a cuppa. Ironically, of course, but said in a deadly serious manner.

Families were everywhere and all the children were really, really excited about being able to stay up for the Millennium. You could tell by the way they were so well behaved and kept asking how many minutes was it till midnight, every ten seconds or so. By eight o'clock all the bridges over the Thames were full of people. When Bet arrived I followed her back to a flat in St. Martin's Lane for pre-cocktail cocktails which sort of set the tone for the evening. We, that is near & dearest and I, saw it all from a penthouse on the Thames in Wapping. Old friends from years ago who had made good had a wonderful black tie affair. There was a telescope focused on Big Ben. Near the time I got all romantic and was about to give Dearest a big snog when he announced

'No tongues.'

I vowed to myself I will divorce him this year and tongued him.

On the way home at three in the morning all London was still up and walking.

'Happy New Year' everybody I passed was saying to everybody else.

I hope it truly is.

The next day after I staggered out of bed and travelled to St. Paul's to hear the Millennium peal. It was supposed to be eight hours but they managed only through to five. Still it was spectacular and a wonderful way to greet the new Millennium. Where shall we as a race be in a thousand years from now? I was thinking these deep and profound thoughts when the peal stopped. The American tourist bedside me asked 'When are they going to do it again?'

'Oh, in a thousand years from now.' I answered and walked off.

London was so awash with champagne bottles that all the gutters were full. It was a reassuring sight to see so many empty champagne bottles every where. Knee deep the street cleaners told me!!! Shows just how strong the economy really is!!! Happy New Millennium Everybody!!!

### **January 30**

Had another argument with my collector at a rather farty private view. He is such a snob! Unfortunately I can't seem to not bump into him. The following week I scarpered off class early and caught the Docklands Light Rail home. Sticking my nose into a book I didn't look at who got on at the next station till a few stops later. There he was- the collector.

I sat down beside him and for a few seconds we just stared at each other.

Then we both said at once. 'What are you doing here?'

He was going home from somewhere and decided not to wait for the mainline train but take the DLR as I had always gone on about its great view of Canary Wharf. The last person he expected to see was me.

'Ditto!' I said.

We rabbitied on till we reached Canary Wharf then I showed him where to get his connection before catching mine. We decided to meet in town for coffee the next day at Maison Bertoux. What a disaster that turned out to be. He was 45 minutes late having walked around the block three times before finding the door. I knew when he came in he was pissed but only after he kept trying to put his elbow on the table and missing for the fifth time did I realise how pissed he was. 'Jus a lille farewell party in the thity for a friend who is retiring.'

'Real small I can tell. Where are you going tonight after this?'

'A small dithner party.'

'Just a small one then? Because your wife will kill you if it's a big one and your in this state.'

'My wife is out of town.'

'Lucky you.'

'You don't like her'

'Let's say you could have done better.'

'I married her for companionship.'

'So that's why you're so happy and hang out with artists like me.'

He gave me a very narrowed eye look and then slowly slipped under the table. At that point I got up, went downstairs and said when he finished he would pay the bill and went out into the Soho night feeling very smug.

### **February 19**

Very busy with my new exhibition coming up very soon!!! Sharing with two other artists and they are very thick together. Think trouble will occur over the hanging???

Had a great Valentine supper. Country curator was down so he and dearest cooked a wonderful meal for me. I worked late at evening classes and really didn't expect it, complete with flowers from both!!! How lucky can a girl get!

Next day Bet phoned and as she is now totally without man in life, ex-husband and married lover having both decamped, so she asked me to come as her guest to the Tate Britain opening, Black tie event!!!! Luckily I had nothing else on that night. Have visions of moi in Yves St. Laurent Le Smoking suit. I must find an up market dress retail and see how much it cost. If not it's the same old stuff from the back of the closet. Had tickets for tour of almost finished Tate building and have asked dear & near, as the only other choice was the collector. No one else in town. Near & Dear declined, he preferred the pub. But as I am not talking to the Collector after another serious dispute at the opening of Live in Your Head exhibition at Whitechapel Art Gallery I went alone; besides he is skiing and not back until the day of the tour.

I should learn to keep my mouth shut but when seriously rich people start criticise artists for their precarious lifestyle, I see red. How does he know how hard it is to make ends meet and carry on some semblance of normality like own a house, pay a mortgage, buy nice clothes that aren't always in sales and maintain a studio and buy art materials, not to mention having children. It's tough! But so many people think it's romantic!

He should try living as an artist without his private income and rich wife.

I called him "inauthentic"..... how's that for big words and being really mean!!!

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