Mobile Fidelities

Conversations on Feminism, History and Visuality

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Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issue 19, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue19.pdf
e-book available at www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/mpachmanova.pdf
July 2006, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

ISBN: 0-9536541-1-7 e-book
ISBN 13: 978-0-9536541-1-6

First published in Czech as *Vernost v pohybu*
Prague: One Woman Press, 2001
ISBN: 80-86356-10-8

Chapter III. Kaya Silverman 'The World Wants Your Desire' was first published in English in *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* (print) Vol. 6 July 2000 pp.5-11

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Marcia Tucker

In 1977, you founded the New Museum of Contemporary Art, which became one of the most challenging art institutions in this country. The New Museum seems like a Kunsthalle-type of institution because it doesn't have any permanent collection, and yet collecting became an important aspect of your activities. Considering the fact that what is once contemporary becomes quickly historical, you introduced an unprecedented acquisition practice into the museum world that was based not on permanence but rather on fluidity. You called this hybrid and very organic concept "the semi-permanent collection." Could you explain this concept, and reasons that led you to such a radical redefinition of the traditional museum as a treasury back in the 1970s?

When I started the museum, I wasn't interested in starting an alternative space. Rather, I was interested in trying to redefine what a museum could be in terms of contemporary art. When I worked at the Whitney Museum of American Art as a curator, it was clear that the contemporary area had become very complicated. In the mid-1970s there was an economic recession, and suddenly corporate sponsorship of exhibitions became a crucial factor for art institutions. This meant that contemporary art was the runt of the litter, so to speak, because, being the most controversial, it was the most difficult to fund. Moreover, as an art historian who had always worked in museums, I felt that if I were going to challenge a paradigm it needed to be the paradigm I knew best.

What defined museums as opposed to galleries or alternative exhibition spaces in that period was the collection, which struck me as highly problematic because it

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created a strict value system of hierarchies and judgements that I thought was inappropriate for works that had been made very recently. The second thing I saw was that as museums focused increasingly on their collections, on acquiring works and showing them, and on looking for collectors to donate or to will their collections to the museum, they became increasingly out of touch with what was actually happening "today." The resources taken up by the collection expanded at the expense of contemporary, experimental kinds of programs and exhibitions. Contemporary art is always fluid and changing, and its value is contingent; it calls for a very different kind of research and scholarship than a historical approach does. I thought that the only way to build a collection of contemporary art is to change it constantly and make it potentially transient in the way that cultural critic James Clifford talks about. The premise for putting together such an unusual kind of collection was to acknowledge that artistic value is not absolute, and to make transparent the critical and historical judgements that create the collection. I assumed that if the New Museum could collect, hold something for a certain period of time, and then either sell it or trade it for another work, it would help to create a more appropriate and more challenging kind of collection.

How did you develop such a critique of the museum's mandate from within the museum?

When the museum first began, we acquired works in two ways. One was through a very small acquisitions fund coming from the trustees, and the other was through gifts from artists who were happy not only to have their works in the collection, but also to have it eventually sold to support other young artists' work. The collection grew rather steadily. We tried to acquire at least one work from every exhibition, a work to be held by the museum for up to twenty years. Even though we didn't show the collection very much, we sometimes picked a number of works from it for a special exhibition. However, my original intention was to tour the collection.

I assumed that after a period of ten or twenty years there undoubtedly would be some pieces which had no commercial value at all, and couldn't be sold or exchanged; I wanted to group them, and donate them to institutions that had no real or interesting art, such as community centers, senior citizen's residencies, or nursing facilities.

Another idea I had was to display the collection in a way that avoids the usual chronological structure. For me, chronology is an artificial history, and doesn't necessarily do justice to the works of art, or create an appropriate context for them. This led me to begin thinking about different ways of displaying the collection: by affinities, by themes, or by issues important for a particular moment in history. Although we continued to acquire works of art over many years, it took us a while to do an exhibition of the entire collection, which we finally organized in 1995. The

team that organized it consisted of several staff members – the junior curator, the registrar, the education curator, and the publications coordinator. Having such a diverse and also unusual group of staff members working on a major show like this one allowed many new and fresh questions, ideas, and approaches to emerge. They did an amazing job, including putting together a catalogue which covered the history of the New Museum, the way in which the collection was built, and how it changed over time. Yet, to our great surprise and dismay, people had a difficult time understanding the concept of the collection. Some artists got very upset that their works would be sold again; but the group that was most outraged was the dealers. It made a lot of sense because the concept went against the art world convention, in which the value of a work of art is considered to be timeless or unchanging, and thus also commercially very easily exploitable. Not many people were able to disassociate themselves from this.

I knew that a radical transformation is always accompanied by a lot of criticism, so I didn't give up. I started to think about shaking up the paradigm again. The first idea I had was to continue maintain a collection, but to acquire only "ephemera," which no other museum does. The New Museum already had a number of works of this "nature" that could become the core of a collection, and the Artists' Advisory Board was very interested in the idea. The second concept I had wasn't popular with anyone, but was extremely fascinating for me. In the 1980s, I saw other museums booming. They were acquiring a lot of works of art, and expanding their facilities and their personnel to house, conserve, and show these works. While they were hiring the most famous architects to design large additions to the existing museum buildings, I started to feel that there was something wrong with this bombastic approach. I realized that no amount of expansion of either collection or facility could substitute for an absence of critical assessment, or fulfill the need for an intellectual, social, cultural, and political evaluation of the works in these institutions.

Thus, instead of increasing the physical bulk of the collection I wanted instead to expand its intellectual base. How could you do that? I thought about buying only one work a year, but having a series of debates and discussions taking place in the museum – with the board of trustees, curators, artists, young people, people from the neighborhood as well as from other countries. We would record all of these debates, put them into the computer, edit them, and publish them online. Why not dedicate a gallery space to one work, equip it with a number of computer stations, and offer it for a year to a graduate student or a young curator from elsewhere so that he or she could organize a series of exhibitions, workshops, or simply anything that a guest curator would want to do with and around the work and its topic? For me, this was a way to make issues relevant to both contemporary art and the museum structure itself more transparent than they usually are.

This is an extremely interesting approach, but I see one "shady" aspect to it. As soon as you commit a special space in the museum to one work only, especially since this work is labeled as the "piece of the year", you very likely make it a masterpiece, which – if I understand your project correctly – was exactly what you wanted to dismantle.

This was the argument the Advisory Board made. However, I always considered the New Museum to be a smaller, more experimental space whose structure and program were fundamentally oriented against the idea of the masterpiece. Picking one work at the specific moment doesn't have to be about celebrating and canonizing it. For me, turning away from the auratization of a work of art meant it was possible to analyze it in depth, and contextualize it in order to make various visual and ideological mechanisms apparent – as well as show how arbitrary the categorization of art can be.

Your idea of reconsidering museum practices seems to have a lot in common with the process-oriented, site-specific, and often very ephemeral works of art done at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s. Was your "semi-permanent collection" connected to rethinking the notion of fixing art in time and place, which was so crucial for video, installation, body art, or performance in that period?

If there was a connection between the two, it wasn't deliberate. Also not all art that was done during that period of time was taking place in open and public spaces, working with time-based media, or being produced through use of new technologies. There were still artists who used more traditional media and techniques, and it certainly didn't mean that their work was less interesting or less important. We should not forget that whatever appears to be the art of a particular decade is simply the art that has surfaced publicly through the activities of museum professionals, curators, critics, and dealers. As a curator, I have always been interested in all forms of art, and I always tried to reveal this selective aspect of historical and artistic value making in the New Museum as well.

As James Clifford put it, 'the making of meaning in museum classification and display is mystified as adequate representation.' It seems that the New Museum has provided instead a model that destabilizes the authority of art history itself. How can one write history from a position which has this anti-preservationist perspective?

In my opinion, art history should be thought in terms of history in general; with both, there is never one history but multiple histories, which must be examined from multiple perspectives. The authoritative version of history, which for the most part represented a white male perspective, has been dominant and unquestioned for so

long that to start writing history differently is a very complicated process. However, I'm convinced that such a process is not only under way, but for some years now has been making major changes in the way we look at art and art history. An art historian like Linda Nochlin has rethought many canonized styles and works of art from a totally new and very anti-authoritative perspective. The fight against the establishment of a "correct" version of art history, that is, a critical perspective, should be an imperative for anybody who deals with art of any period.

Looking back over the exhibitions in the New Museum, it seems that group and issue- or theme-based shows were more dominant than monographic ones. Was this part of your attempt to introduce art as a discourse (which is an attempt strongly informed by feminist ideas) rather than a canon or an expression of "genuine" minds?

This is a fiction people have about the New Museum! I find this story and the way in which it was constructed fascinating, but I have to object to this notion once again. Looking at the record of New Museum exhibitions, you can clearly see that there were a large number of solo exhibitions; in fact, we were very careful to create a balance between them and the issue-based projects. We had solo shows of artists like Leon Golub, Louise Lawler, the Komar and Melamid, Allan McCollum, Hans Haacke, Bruce Nauman, Andres Serrano, Ana Mendieta, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Christian Boltanski, Nancy Spero, Mary Kelly, as well as groups like Guerrilla Girls – to name only a few. However, you are absolutely right about structuring our shows – whether individual or group ones – as their discursive practices were more important than whether they were examples of what was "hot" at a particular moment in time. We wanted to emphasize the relationship between works of art and the world at large, because without that connection art – and contemporary art especially – becomes valued by only a few people within a very small, closed system. Moreover, only through making this relationship clear could various neglected groups, including women, finally emerge from obscurity, and the reasons for their historical and cultural dislocations be properly examined. I also firmly believe that if the connections between art and the world at large are clearly established, then not only do patriarchal or racist systems lose the means to exclude the "other", but repressive groups and governments run out of arguments with which to attack contemporary art. It doesn't even matter what kind of "contemporary art" it is; during the Nazi regime it was non-objective or expressionist art, in Communist China it was something else. The very reason to use political power to repress contemporary artists is that their works engage people in a way that encourages them to think independently. Repressive governments see this kind of thinking as a potential source of societal subversion and revolution. It should be noted, though, that the kind of anxiety contemporary art still creates can be found in so-called democratic societies as well, and today's United States is certainly no exception.

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The New Museum has relatively quickly built its prestige on the contemporary art scene. It became remarkable not only for its challenging exhibitions but also for its relentless attempt to bring art into a larger context of intellectual endeavor, and to undermine the notion that works of art are merely objects for aesthetic pleasure and possession. In 1984, you started a special publishing project "Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art." Books from this series such as Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation *(1984),* Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures *(1990), or* Mechanisms of Exclusion and Relation: Identity *(1990), to name just a few, have been having a big impact on art, and its theory, history and criticism ever since. In the U.S., where the division between academia and museums/galleries is quite rigid, bringing together scholars, critics, curators, and artists to talk and write about contemporary art – something you did – is still a rather unique phenomenon. The only other initiative that might be comparable to yours (but which followed it by a few years) is the book project of the Dia Center for the Arts in New York. Why did this interdisciplinary communication become so important for your work?*

While the Dia Center publishing project was based on the symposia they did, the New Museum's project was conceptualized differently. I would like to emphasize again that dealing with contemporary art requires a different kind of inquiry and practice than traditional art history does. Moreover, the criteria of uniqueness, authenticity, or originality were dismantled by postmodernist theory, and to continue applying them to works of art in general – contemporary or historical – no longer holds water. Thus an inquiry based on a multidisciplinary and nuanced set of critical ideas could provide access and understanding for very difficult works of art we dealt with in the Museum.

When I was setting up this project, I wanted to hear artists' voices together with those from other disciplines so that their "polyphony" couldn't be drowned out by the authority of art historians and theorists. I wanted to unsettle the myth that artists are exclusively makers and not thinkers, and vice-versa, that thinkers have an elitist detachment from art practices. This is how it started, and it was an important impulse for avoiding a traditional reading of art. The way most books about contemporary art are written essentially follows the pattern of "Here is an artist; this is his/her background; these are his/her works; and this is the 'scene' at the time." For me, this is a very limited way of approaching art. I believe that the meaning of a work of art doesn't reside in the artist's intention nor in his or her biographical background, and similarly that it is not simply a reflection of the "scene." Rather, it is a complex web of all these things interacting with other more or less visible ideological mechanisms in our society.

Before you founded the New Museum you worked at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Unlike these large institutions, the New

Museum became known for its criticality and anti-establishment orientation. At the same time, it soon became an authority in the intellectual world, and gained unprecedented power. To be powerful without either losing criticality or constructing an intellectual ownership is usually very difficult. How did you manage to balance these two?

For me it's a feminist task. Jane Gallop talks about the possibility of 'relinquishing authority from a position of authority'. I find this idea very compelling, but I also think that in such context power should be distinguished from responsibility. While I have never found power to be appealing, I have always been very interested in responsibility – not in terms of responsibility *"for"*, but in terms of responsibility *"to"*, someone or something. For all those years I spent at the New Museum, my so-called leadership skills were always under attack both from inside and outside. However, with time I realized that what others call a lack of leadership can really be a different kind of leadership, one based not on hierarchy and power, but on empowerment – communication, collaboration, listening, and consensus building. That's my idea of responsibility.

As for your question about intellectual ownership, my effort has always been to change things, not to preserve them, and that goes against any notion of owning the "truth". Of course, once you gain some recognition, it can be an invaluable tool in supporting radical ideas. Yet, instead of using it as a means for claiming power, I'd prefer to use it for dispersing power, even if it casts doubt on my own artistic position. In a 1995 essay, 'From Muse to Museum: Late twentyeth Century Feminism & Artistic Practice in the U.S.A.', I wrote that 'we clearly need to think not about substituting women's power for men's but about how to examine, critique, and unsettle the very *"*concept*"* of power, not just in terms of gender, but of race and class as well. But we need to think and to act.' For me a constant unsettling of power is a feminist project, and I still strongly hold to this notion.

Assuming from the work of yours that I know, your lifelong engagement with feminism started back in 1968, around the time when Women's Movement hit New York. How did you become a feminist, and how did it influence your professional career?

I'm not sure how somebody actually becomes a feminist. Part of what made it easy for me was that my father, who was a lawyer, always hoped that I would become a lawyer too in order to become his partner. His intent was very unusual for the 1950s. Even though he was very disappointed that I decided not to follow in his footsteps, he encouraged me in my scholarly and intellectual activities. In 1968, I went to a Red Stockings meeting, and that was a turning point for me, and the beginning of my commitment to feminism. I recall this meeting taking place in a

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huge room where there were gathered at least two hundred women. Being only with women was not just a totally new feeling, but also incredibly powerful and remarkable experience for me. About ten of us formed what became the longest-extant consciousness-raising group in New York. The group lasted five years, and we still occasionally meet. Talking honestly with a group of women with whom you know you are completely safe opened up a new way of being for me. I found out that many other women shared my experience, which was extremely illuminating.

The personal became political for us; shared personal experiences have moved us into the dimension of action. For instance, our group participated in marches against the conditions in women's prisons, facilitated new consciousness raising groups in the arts, and did all kinds of organizational work to support women both inside and outside the arts. Then the first feminist books such as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique,* came out. Understanding the particular mechanisms in which we as a "class" (and, ironically, a majority) have been oppressed resulted – at first – in rage. Fortunately, that rage had a focus; we tried to do something not only for ourselves but for other women as well. We met with groups of older women and with lesbian groups to see how and where the issues we dealt with overlapped, and how we could work together. However, there was one very problematic aspect of the movement, which we were very aware of – it was almost exclusively a white, middle class movement. But slowly the debates about feminism in relation to class and race started to take place, and the situation today is very different – at least in the United States. The book *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, the last publication of the New Museum's Documentary Sources series which I edited in 1998, clearly documents this transformation. One of feminism's greatest legacies for me personally was experiencing the pleasure of communicating and collaborating with others whose background and concerns were different from my own.

The relationship between feminism, class, and ethnicity in the West might be much tighter today than it used to be. However, many Second- and Third-World countries, where feminist and gender agenda are only slowly being introduced into the social, political, and other discourses, are still ignored. Feminism is often thought of only within the geographical frame of the United States or Western Europe, which might be the most visible part of the world but there is still the "rest."

I am very happy to see books such as Talking Visions *being published today. And yet, besides an increasing interest in racialized and gendered subjectivity that is dominant in books like this one, "other" women who are ethnically indifferent but who are located outside of the Western territory are often rendered invisible. Who I have in mind are, for instance, women in Eastern Europe (even though Russia might be an exception in a certain sense). It makes me wonder whether Western feminism's apparent disinterest in "others" of white color doesn't somehow substitute one system of exclusion with another?*

I don't think it's necessarily a question of ignorance by default. Rather, it may be related to the fact that the process of transformation is never as fast as we would wish. Going to the former East Bloc countries and critiquing their attitudes about feminism, while at the same time having many issues here that still have not been properly explored or dealt with, seems questionable. Also, there is a great deal to be said for voices from outside the U.S.A. initiating their own feminist inquiries rather than having the West speak for them. However, deconstructing the problematic binary notions of "center" and "periphery", and examining how any given group is marginalized - women among them - is an extremely important task for today's feminism on a global scale.

At least since the end of the 1980s, rumors about feminism's death have been appearing not only in the mainstream press but also among a number of progressive intellectuals who welcomed the arrival of post-feminism. Many feminists, including, for instance Amelia Jones, pointed out that post-feminism is used to a certain extent to recuperate the feminist project back into a white, Western, and male humanist or critical theory project. Today, we witness a strong conservative comeback in countries like the U.S.A. which puts feminism in a very difficult position. What is in your opinion the role of feminism at the turn of the millennium, and what kind of strategies should it use to resist the appropriating power of the mainstream?

I don't believe that feminism ever "died," or even came close to it. Whether these proclamations are driven by the optimistic belief that we have already won the battle, or whether they reflect a conservative backlash, we need to keep asking just who claims this premature death, and for what reasons. Feminism has never been just one thing; it is a very diverse movement with various perspectives, which makes its potential demise unlikely, and which also shows how superficially it is understood by all these "death" prophets. Like any other crucial political movements, feminism has morphed into other forms, or their proponents choose to call it by another name.

To me "post-feminism" doesn't mean "after feminism," but rather feminism from a certain moment on. I won't believe the issue has died until there is no sign of gender inequality in the world we live in. Inequality shouldn't be an issue only for women, but for men as well. As to the question of whether or not men can be feminists (an issue that has been debated for a long time), I think that any important movement for equal rights or civil liberties should include as many supporters as possible. Civil liberties extend across the board, and, as a feminist, I consider the civil rights issues of gays, lesbians, and people of color to be part of my battle.

Your activities in art are always politically and socially engaged, and what you just said proves it. As a curator you of course deal with works of art and not with propaganda, but your approach significantly differs from apolitical or aestheticized approaches operating in most US museums.

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I think that since art is made by people, and since people are citizens, there is no such a thing as apolitical art, and curatorial strategies need to reflect and work with that fact openly. Curators, artists, critics, and art historians live in the real world, and they are engaged with it, whether they admit it or not. Unfortunately, many representatives of art institutions think that politics is anything other than their *"own"* politics. They take their politics as the norm, and we know that norm is never politicized because it preserves the *status quo* and its own fiction of universality. In my opinion, it's important to remind people that the origins of the term "political" come from the Greek word "*polis*," which has to do with the power relations in any given community of people. How can you then dismiss politics from your work when you run or work in any public institution? Power relations are present in every single thing we do, whether it is growing food, writing a law, fighting, teaching, or making art.

When I started to work at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1968, I was only twenty-eight, and I was the first woman curator to be hired since its founder who was a woman. Not only that I had to deal with all-male crews who occasionally did things like use vulgar language to see how I would respond but also in order to be accepted by the staff and by my male colleagues inside and outside the museum, I was expected to behave authoritatively and to write in a very "objective" and intellectually distanced way.

However, over the years I've moved away from that disembodied voice of authority. It was a very hard thing to do, but I gradually started to write in my own voice, with a bit of humor and a lot of attention to the world around me. I tried to make my writing both very personal and also very honest. The reason I decided to inscribe myself into the writing, so to speak, was not that I wanted to be narcissistic or even autobiographical. Rather, I realized that as soon as you position yourself as a real, tangible person, who is speaking, then you allow others to have their own opinion about what you're saying. Then the writing is not only about you but about others as well, and this dialogical process makes the writing "political." The same applies to organizing exhibitions. An "objective" exhibition is an illusion; there is always something deeply personal about choosing the artists, the topic, or even the way you want to display the work in it. But again, for me the personal is not about self-indulgence - it is an ideological position.

Writing about art in a more personal way could be a risky and vulnerable business but I find this mode much more interesting than pretending that the person behind the text is an authority without body, feelings, emotions, and personality...

One of the things that I've learned from feminism is that making a distinction between one's personal and professional voice is possible, but it's an artificial, hypocritical, and highly biased separation. Blurring those two voices together, I started to feel more secure about being less secure, about not having all the "right"

answers. To say "I don't know" shouldn't be humiliating or painful. Not only is it a very human condition, but it can also be extremely productive and challenging, because it makes you question what you think you unmistakably know. Giving up all these kinds of artificial hierarchies and qualitative distinctions allows you to enter into a much more interesting world, and even to surprise yourself from time to time.

In 1995, you organized and curated a show called Bad Girls. *The works of art that you selected for this show shared nothing with old-line feminist doctrines and, as the co-curator Marcia Tanner put it, they were "thoroughly unladylike". How do contemporary feminist artists differ from their predecessors in the 1970s and 1980s?*

This question should be asked to the artists themselves, not me. As a curator and writer, I am bound by my own perspective and my generation. However, I can say that there are many ways in which feminist artists of today are very similar to their older "sisters," and many ways in which they differ enormously. For one thing, we all want to be equally valued, to be paid equally for equal work, to have a voice in our own government, and to take charge of our own bodies. On the other hand, the feminists of my generation were, I think, more politically active than this generation, which has had the luxury of growing up with the rights and privileges that were hard-won by us older women. To be fair, I don't think we had much of a sense of humor about our situation at that time. Distance has allowed women today – including artists – to see humor in our own private and professional situations and struggles. And I greatly appreciate this attitude.

Most of the feminist shows are all-women shows. However, Bad Girls *had a number of male artists, and besides repeating the misogynist naming of women as "girls", it also included many sexually explicit images of both women and men. These "politically incorrect" features of the show aroused a lot of disagreement by some radical and anti-porn feminists. Did you want to be a "bad girl" yourself in order to rebel against feminist stereotypes?*

I didn't want to be a "bad girl" at all. I just saw a lot of work being done that was very funny, and that was subversive through its use of humor. The works of art that caused so much fuss might have been sexually explicit, but they were not even remotely pornographic – they were humorous and not exploitative. I even took my (then) nine-year-old daughter to see the show, and she wrote an exhibition guide for children! As long as I can remember, I was interested in the power of humor and laughter, and to suddenly find so much of it in recent art works was incredibly enlightening, and also reflected something important at that particular moment in history. I used the title *Bad Girls* because it is an old expression connoting the subordinated and objectified status of women, which I wanted to turn on its head.

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Although many people think that men can't be feminists, I disagree. So I decided to open up the territory traditionally assigned to "bad girls" to include men whose work also resists power and authority, and subverts social and cultural stereotypes in a feminist way. In my opinion, laughter is the first and finest form of self-criticism, and, when used by artists as a feminist tool, it can very effectively challenge even the biases which feminism itself sometimes constructs.

You collaborated with children in other shows as well. The educational program has always been a very important part The New Museum's activities, and I wonder what are according to your experiences the most efficient ways of bringing a wider audience to the museums and galleries, and to dismantle the common notion of art as an elitist activity?

In *Bad Girls,* I tried to show the close relationship between contemporary artistic practices and popular culture. Besides works of fine art, the exhibition included music, television, cartoons and comic books, and the work of local school children. This was certainly not a unique curatorial experiment for me because many other shows I did at the New Museum also focused on removing the barriers between "high" and "low" culture or "amateur" and "professional" art, as well as the isolation of art from quotidian life. One of the best examples of this strategy was a 1986 exhibition called *Choices: Making an Art of Everyday Life.*

My last exhibition at the New Museum, *The Time of Our Lives*, dealt with age and aging. It was very well attended, and I realized once again that in order to make contemporary art accessible to the public, one has to show how issues in the work concern everyone, and how we can use what we all know from our lives to understand art. Blurring the boundaries between the artistic and the everyday is not about selling out to commercialism, the entertainment industry or the mass media, even though you can learn to use what they've learned about communication. Rather, it is about building criticality, which would help to undermine a highly restrictive and elitist definition of art. To make art and the institutions that support it transparent could consequently help us to look in a more complex way at how our society is constructed.

American feminist art activism represented by groups like Women's Action Coalition or Guerrilla Girls is, among other things, important also for this kind of criticality. Yet its political character represents only one aspect of what contemporary feminist art discourse is about. While feminist theory is often criticized for giving up political commitment, the activism-oriented feminists are accused of not adequately addressing the deeper reasons for male dominance that are connected to language, or psyche. I personally believe that theory could be as politically charged as action, and that this conflict (that very much mirrors the old controversy between essentialist and social feminism) unfortunately often reduces the complexity and

diversity of problems connected to sexuality, gender, and women's equality. Your work has always been politically and socially very engaged but it is significantly informed by theory as well. Before we will conclude this conversation, could you comment on how political, social, aesthetic and theoretical meanings are interwoven in feminist art?

Well, that's a big question. Just as I believe that the eye, the mind, the heart or the hand are not separate human faculties, but are interrelated aspects of the same organism, I believe that you can't isolate the political from the social, the social from the aesthetic, the aesthetic from the theoretical or any combination thereof. All are part of the complex, interwoven fabric of ideas and actions that constitute any move toward social change, whether this move takes place directly in political lists or in art. The "either/or" formulation is a product of the eighteenth century Enlightenment's separation between mind and body, idea and emotion, reason and instinct – but we are living in the twentyfirst century, when this approach is archaic and outmoded, and it's time to let it go.

Marcia Tucker is an art historian, curator, and writer. In 1977, she founded the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, which became one of the most challenging art institutions in the United States. As a director, she run the Museum through 1998. Among her most remarkable exhibitions are *Not Just For Laughs* (1981), *Choices: Making Art of Everyday Life* (1986), *Bad Girls* (1995), *The Time of Our Lives* (1999), and many others. In 1984, she started a long-term publication project, "Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art," which generated a series of influential books, including *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis, ed. (1984), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Russell Ferguson, Martha Grever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds. (1990), *Mechanisms of Exclusion and Relation: Identity*, (1990), and *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, Ella Shohat, ed. (1998), all of them published by the New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press. She has been the recipient of the Bard College Award for Curatorial Achievement and the Art Table Award for Distinguished Service to the Visual Arts, as well as four Yaddo fellowships. She is currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at Otis College of Art and Design in LA, and has completed a memoir entitled *A Short Life of Trouble*, covering over four decades in the fast lane of the museum world.

n.paradoxa online issue no.19 May 2006
ISSN: 1462-0426