

Jacqueline Millner and Catriona Moore

# Contemporary Art and Feminism



# CONTEMPORARY ART AND FEMINISM

This important new book examines contemporary art while foregrounding the key role feminism has played in enabling current modes of artmaking, spectatorship and theoretical discourse.

*Contemporary Art and Feminism* carefully outlines the links between feminist theory and practice of the past four decades of contemporary art and offers a radical re-reading of the contemporary movement. Rather than focus on filling in the gaps of accepted histories by 'adding' the 'missing' female, queer, First Nations and women artists of colour, the authors seek to revise broader understandings of contemporary practice by providing case studies contextualised in a robust art historical and theoretical basis. Readers are encouraged to see where art ideas come from and evaluate past and present art strategies. What strategies, materials or tropes are less relevant in today's networked, event-driven art economies? What strategies and themes should we keep hold of, or develop in new ways?

This is a significant and innovative intervention that is ideal for students in courses on contemporary art within fine arts, visual studies, history of art, gender studies and queer studies.

**Jacqueline Millner** completed studies in law, political science and visual arts, before specialising in the history and theory of contemporary art as an arts writer and academic. She is Associate Professor of Visual Arts at La Trobe University, Melbourne, where she also lectures on contemporary art theory and history. She was previously Associate Professor of Art History and Theory, University of Sydney. She has published widely on contemporary Australian and international art in key anthologies, journals and catalogues of national and international institutions, and has received prestigious grants and awards for her research including from the Australia Council for the Arts and the Australian Research Council. Her books include *Conceptual Beauty: Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art* (2010),

*Australian Artists in the Contemporary Museum* (with Jennifer Barrett, 2014), *Fashionable Art* (with Adam Geczy, 2015) and *Feminist Perspectives on Art: Contemporary Outtakes* (co-edited with Catriona Moore, 2018). She co-convenes the research cluster Contemporary Art and Feminism across La Trobe University and the University of Sydney, and is currently leading *Care Project: Feminism, Art and Ethics in Neo-liberal Times*, a multiple location series of exhibitions and symposia (2019–21).

**Catriona Moore** has been a Senior Lecturer in Art History & Film Studies at the University of Sydney. She has published widely on feminist art and activism, and more broadly on modern and contemporary women artists. Her research and writing have opened up cross-cultural connections between women artists and explored the visual expression of cultural diversity in modern and contemporary Australian art, within a comparative international framework. She is the author and editor of books central to the development of the feminist history of Australian art, including *Indecent Exposures: Twenty Years of Australian Feminist Photography* (1991), *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970–1990* (1991) and *Feminist Perspectives on Art: Contemporary Outtakes* (co-edited with Jacqueline Millner, 2018). She co-convenes the research cluster Contemporary Art and Feminism across the University of Sydney and La Trobe University.

# CONTEMPORARY ART AND FEMINISM

*Jacqueline Millner and Catriona Moore*

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# INTRODUCTION

We have been waiting decades for a book like this. As feminist researchers, teachers and activists, we recognise the need for a history of contemporary art that understands the key role feminism has played in enabling current modes of artmaking, spectatorship and theoretical discourses. Ethics has once again become the touchstone of art; we see it in contemporary work that concerns itself with how to live sustainably, how to relate to oneself, others and the world, and how to align values to actions. A consolidated theoretical and historical treatment that identifies the feminist roots of this re-emergence and feminism's ongoing contribution to ethical aesthetics is sorely needed. Current approaches in contemporary art include: social practice, with its emphasis on collaboration and coalitional action, progressive pedagogies and ongoing community engagement; performance art, with its desire for presence and authenticity, and its political emphasis of putting one's body on the line consonant with the recent protest movements such as pro-democracy, BLM, #MeToo, international student strikes for climate, and Occupy; and 'new materialism', with its affirmation of the animacy of matter and its complication of hierarchies of all kinds, including human/animal, artist/material, and art/craft. Such approaches engage with notions such as leaving a light footprint, caring for country, relatedness, and the embrace of alterity; they move Western cultures beyond a respect for difference and the politics of witnessing, into complex affective territory more akin to love. So many of these ideas and practices, at their most politically savvy and theoretically sophisticated, are pre-figured and find their deepest rationales in feminist research and debate yet are rarely recognised as such.

*Contemporary Art and Feminism* argues the links between feminist theory and practice of the past four decades and contemporary art. It provides a radical re-reading of the contemporary moment, beyond the more conventional attempts to capture the unique nature of art today in art historical discourses.<sup>1</sup> Such a re-reading provides alternative ways to think about the phenomenon 'contemporary art', and also takes

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into account recent doubts about the usefulness of the term and speculation as to what may supersede it.<sup>2</sup>

*Contemporary Art and Feminism* relies on, but has a different emphasis from, recent publications on feminist art that focus exclusively on art by women and on individual artists rather than on an epoch, movement or underlying currents.<sup>3</sup> Its primary concern is not filling in the gaps of accepted histories by simply adding the 'missing' female and queer artists, but rather offering broader understandings of contemporary practice through feminist critiques and methodologies. While there has been some localised focus on the disavowal of feminist contributions to broader contemporary currents,<sup>4</sup> our book offers a more comprehensive analysis that enables these local voices to talk with each other. In addition, it integrates recent scholarship and practices informed by care ethics, which position art at the forefront of forging alternative ethics in times of crisis. In bringing these perspectives together, our book is fuelled by the current political priority of coalitional feminism.

*Contemporary Art and Feminism* also addresses the urgent desire among younger feminist artists and writers for analytical frameworks to consider key questions of political strategy, activism and practice, in particular given the contribution of First Nations and Women of Colour to understanding our historical moment. What is to be done? Where are we going? What lies beyond equal opportunity feminism? Can the relative autonomy of the aesthetic realm and the newly empowered cultural producer change prevailing discourses and pave the way for more ethical social outcomes? We ground our research in examples of contemporary work, contextualised in an art historical and theoretical basis: we want readers to be able to see where art ideas come from and offer them theoretical and art historical frameworks that enable an evaluation of past and present art strategies. What has worked, and why? What strategies, materials or tropes no longer work in today's networked, event-driven art economies? What actions and themes should we keep hold of, or develop in new ways? And can we enhance feminist revivals and art 'herstorical' retrievals<sup>5</sup> through this integrated questioning?

As authors, we offer a unique perspective given our long-standing work as art critics, educators and historians. We have consistently observed an ethical commitment to be close to the artwork, and close to the artist, so that our criticism and historical analysis are grass roots and embodied. Over several decades we have developed ideas in connection with artists, writing catalogue essays, critiques, interviews and histories based on first-hand experience of art and a long, durational relationship to it: in other words, our research method reflects our feminist principles. While the artist's voice and practice-based insights are often missed in meta-discursive art history, our writing honours them along with art historical, curatorial, multi-disciplinary, community and activist perspectives.<sup>6</sup> As part of our commitment to the embodied experience of the artwork and close dialogue with the makers, our research is based primarily in Australia. We would argue that this grants us particular analytical insights that can make significant contributions to discourses on contemporary art, and on feminism, emanating from artworld 'centres'. Australia's 'second-tier' peripheral vision offers a distinctive critical vantage point on the global play of politics and art; we necessarily see international art relationally, across so-called peripheral cultures as well as along more

traditional art trades routes from centre to periphery and vice versa. Furthermore, Australian feminism—including feminist art—has always had a pragmatic bent; its history attests to a close connection to practice and lived experience, including to working conditions.

Partly on account of First Nations and migrant influences, and in response to the challenges of postcolonial politics, Australian feminism is a hybrid mix of ‘what works’, not hamstrung by a commitment to theoretical purity. It is also marked by Australian black (and *blak*<sup>7</sup>) humour, often ironic and wry, sometimes socialist, sometimes anarchic. Their looseness, responsiveness and wit grant Australian cultural perspectives a particular agility—something like the insight of an in-the-know outsider—when it comes to developments at ‘the centre’. Given most material on feminist art<sup>8</sup> has been written from the metropolitan centre, Australia’s well-developed tradition of anti-colonial art offers innovative insights: First Nations’ art and cultural politics have fundamentally challenged any thought of white Western universality of experience. Such cultural relativity has always gone hand-in-hand with politically strategic thinking, and enriched feminist thought and action. While we are grounded in Australian experiences, we have contextualised our argument by reference to several artists and works from other locales. In particular, we were interested in those practices which resonated with the themes we had identified through our long-term, embodied experience of the Australian scene, and which set out to experiment with new forms of ethical aesthetic entanglement. We made our decisions by first seeking recommendations from international feminist colleagues and those specialising in other contemporary art and art historical traditions,<sup>9</sup> and also by reviewing those artworks we had personally encountered at Biennales in Australia and abroad. In line with our feminist methodology and values, we also thought it important to emphasise those practices which have received less mainstream attention, while not ignoring those practitioners whose contributions have been more widely recognised.

## Our approach

For us, feminism questions how power privileges some to the disadvantage of others and challenges the logic of domination that justifies the status quo. It is anti-hierarchical and inclusive, rather than oppositional and mutually exclusive. Feminism calls to account conceptions of knowledge that are represented as objective, impartial, detached and gender-neutral. It demands more complex ways of knowing by encouraging us to always situate ourselves within specific historical, cultural and economic contexts, and hence to generate knowledge from gendered, concrete, daily experiences. Feminism embraces art as an agent of social transformation. From the 1970s, feminist art has focused on the relationship of art practice to public life. Its critique was ‘tied to an activist project of shifting power relationships in daily life rather than a theoretical exercise in a rarefied language addressed to an art world viewership’,<sup>10</sup> seeking a shift from symbolic to actual action. American artist and activist Suzanne Lacy argues that ‘it was feminism that most clearly posited political and cultural activism as part of 70s conceptual and performance art’,<sup>11</sup> while British art

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historian Griselda Pollock observes that a feminist political gesture links process, practice, making, history and subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> This complex entanglement of actions, forces and discourses is how we think of contemporary art and feminism, a generative phenomenon always in relationship, always responsive, cognisant that power is exercised everywhere. Feminism's insistence on the links between personal stories and broader social and cultural questions, on the capacity of 'small' acts of material nurture to resonate widely, on the centrality of bodies, and on the coming together of these approaches to cultivate an alternative ethics founded on care and generosity that honours the equivalence of all things, be they human or non-human, organic or non-organic: these commitments capture the values revolution that contemporary times call for and distinguish the artworks we discuss here.

The feminist philosophy of the body developed by Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz in the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>13</sup>—founded on Michel Foucault's notion of bio-power via Freudian psychoanalysis and lucid readings of French feminists Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva—influenced a whole generation of local artists and art theorists. It was a particularly empowering interpretation, one that manoeuvred beyond the structuralist *cul de sac* that viewed social inequality as the product of deep underlying systems with little potential for change, and the left-wing credo that only an overwhelming revolution—economic and political—could ever achieve social alternatives. This empowering reading emphasised the role that representation plays in constructing social realities, and offered a model of social analysis whereby many different views of the world vie with each other, with each, depending on circumstances, having a chance to gain traction. In such an understanding of the process of social change, those who imagine and represent alternative realities—among them, artists—become key. A woman does not recognise herself in patriarchal colonial society, seeing instead only a distorted image created in an alien language. She is deterritorialised; assaulted and bereft, she must fight and invent to locate herself. But in that estrangement is also the possibility for something new, another world. That feminine proximity to how things could be different was another appealing implication feminism wrought through productive amalgams of psychoanalytic theory, Foucauldian readings of power, philosophies of deconstruction and postcolonial analyses of Western hegemony. This sense of the potential impact of artistic practice on broader social realities was suffused in the political project of feminism, offering artists the tools to explore their own narrative within the wider context of the historical repression of women's experience. Our book begins at this historical juncture with the feminist contribution to the politics of representation, although it argues that already within these feminist debates and artistic approaches there were the inklings of a more entangled, fluid, material politics that set the scene for what was to come: a politics of acts, rather than representation. While positing more generative, inclusive and responsive ways to engage with the relationship of art to social change beyond 'the politics of representation', feminist artists and writers at the same time problematised 'identity politics', dreaming up alternatives to 'performing identities' in part by engaging with theories of affect and new materialism.

While feminism has always been concerned with representation—the way that femininity is constructed in part through how female bodies are represented—we have

also always been attuned to how bodies manage to exceed that very process. The unsayable, the inscrutable, intuited knowledge: feminism reclaimed these from pejorative terrain long ago, so anticipating and laying the groundwork for several recent developments in the humanities and the arts. Feminist theory has been at the forefront of ‘the ontological turn’ in philosophy linked to ‘new materialism’—that has seen a shift from epistemological questions to a renewed focus on the nature of pre-discursive realities—and the ‘affective turn’, that has seen emotions take centre-stage in a range of disciplines, including as a way to access life ‘that exceeds the social regulation of our existence’.<sup>14</sup> These feminist preoccupations and their development over recent years provide a compelling context for contemporary art. A sense that identity is embodied and relational, that human social realities exist at pre-discursive, cellular levels, and that often incommensurable emotions are what drive and define us: such reconceptualisations find remarkable resonances in what have become the institutionally privileged practices of contemporary art, including participatory work (at times with a pedagogical dimension) and performance. We argue that to understand the (re)turn to the live body in art and to further the aims of such artistic projects, it is crucial to acknowledge this feminist context.

Along with granting us insight into how and why contemporary art has turned to the live body in recent years, feminist theories and practices also allow us to understand the concurrent ‘pedagogical turn’. Feminism is a political project that is driven by a desire to change the psychic and social conditions of all subjects. It is by definition activist, seeking transformation by uncovering, expanding the discourse, positing alternatives, imagining. Feminism’s early discovery of the relationship between one’s very (private, individual) subjectivity and the public sphere shaped its political strategy and from the outset tied transformation to teaching. Feminist consciousness-raising was based around personal story telling; it provided space for many perspectives and acknowledged the relative nature of knowledge and its interconnection with power. This intersection of political consciousness, activism and education—that has pre-occupied several leading cultural theorists in recent years including Jacques Rancière—is what guides many artists searching for ways to understand political action beyond the predominant Marxist framework of ‘revealing’ the ‘hidden truths’ of exploitation. The art of institutional critique, for example, has feminist antecedents and fellow travellers that more fully contextualise contemporary pedagogical practices. New models of art as pedagogy emerge with early feminist public projects which created works through personal story and supportive listening environments, and have been retrospectively described as ‘expanded public pedagogy’.<sup>15</sup> Through such expanded practice, feminist work reinserted the body and the psyche into institutional critique, and along the way helped open up the role of the artist to the curatorial function and its pedagogical register: another hallmark of contemporary art practice. Feminist pedagogy has long-standing links to extra-mural art activities including exhibitions, public programmes and art publishing, informal art networks, campaign work, online resourcing and debate in the blogosphere.<sup>16</sup> The pedagogical turn in art has also entailed ongoing debates about the role of art education within neoliberal societies and what alternatives it may offer by way of tacit, embodied knowledge grounded in the

personal experience of making and a genuine embrace of interdisciplinarity—all principles championed by feminist pedagogy.

The return to the body and materiality in contemporary art has also entailed a revalorisation of craft-based practices, with the emergence of ‘craftivism’ and many forms of activist, politically driven work underpinned by sewing, knitting, embroidery<sup>17</sup> and other media. The relationship between traditional women’s handcraft, strategies of survival and remembrance has a long history in feminist art. Back in 1984, Rozsika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch* first mapped the status of embroidery through the ages according to gender politics, from a professional and high form practised by men and women in the Middle Ages, to a domestic and low form in the nineteenth century associated almost exclusively with women.<sup>18</sup> But Parker also documented how women used embroidery as a weapon to negotiate the limitations of femininity, including its use by socially disadvantaged and marginalised women. A particularly potent contemporary strategy is the exploration of the links between textile and text, of the process of literally crafting words, and taking that labour—that so explicitly integrates material, body and thought—into the public sphere. Stitching, handkerchiefs and garments all have strong associations of home and childhood; the intimate experience of sewing or knitting is an act of care that is also meditative, a way to challenge anger with haptic engagement. Bringing such experiences together in a public space is potentially transformative and has a strong affiliation with feminine resistance to the violence of patriarchal forces. There is an inherent creativity within such a practice and materials, one with strong feminist associations that include the inter-generational transmission of knowledge, tending to family, and weaving as a form of connecting with other women, building community and caring for country.

The revalorisation of craft, including First Peoples’ cultural traditions, in contemporary art connects strongly to environmental ethics. Feminist environmental philosophers conceive of the self as a relational, ecological being who is a member of the larger biotic community, and hold that ‘moral emotions’, such as empathy and care, are important to environmental ethics.<sup>19</sup> According to Australian eco-feminist Val Plumwood, humans are *both* continuous with and distinct from nature, both individual selves (who are different from nature) and ecological selves (who are a part of nature). Such an approach allows for relationships between selves and others, community and individuals, that are not based on positing human identity in terms of individual interests, autonomy and separation from nature. Caring for self, then, goes beyond individual rights and liberties to also involve protection of the ecological well-being of others (including nature) with whom we have a relationship.<sup>20</sup> Caring—unlike justice—is not reducible to individual rights or duties. If the ability to care is necessary for ethics, then the failure to care for others, including nature, is a moral wrong.<sup>21</sup> These ethics underpin the idea of an ‘ecological democracy’, where notions of the public sphere, democracy, citizenship and free speech are reconceived based on an understanding of the unjustified dominations of women, animals and nature. Ecological democracy recognises that we live in cultural and ecological communities founded on relationships, and that being a good citizen means to nurture the health of ‘the land’—all soils, waters, plants and animals. Feminist practice brings to material life many of the principles of an ecological democracy, in work that cultivates an alternative ecology founded on the ethics of care and generosity, an ethics

that aspires to honour the equivalence of all things, and through that non-hierarchical acceptance, attempts to make amends for injuries both personal and historical.

As Lucy Lippard claimed over forty years ago, feminist art replaced the modernist ‘egotistical monologue’ with a dialogue—between art and society, between artist and audience—with collaboration as a creative mode. Feminist art deliberately pitched to a public and social context characterised by ‘an element of outreach, a need for connections beyond process or product, an element of inclusiveness’ that ‘transcended the individual’.<sup>22</sup> From the 1970s on, the entire field of public art projects was shaped by feminist artists,<sup>23</sup> who ‘exemplified a rapport with their site and their material rather than a victory over them’.<sup>24</sup> They pioneered site-responsive, collaborative approaches, working with, listening to, and negotiating with communities in ways that anticipated today’s social practice, and provided clear alternatives to artist-imposed work in public spaces.<sup>25</sup> As American feminist art historians Norma Broude, Judith Brodsky and Mary Garrard write,

Women introduced new attitudes and iconographies to public art projects, in which they sought to express the self not simply as the personal ‘I’ but worked instead to blend the personal with the public, pointing a way to the traditional concerns of the artist with those of the community.<sup>26</sup>

Through considering non-artists as equal collaborators in the construction of artworks, and drawing on practices not conventionally defined as art, ‘artists were in effect redefining the tools, skills, audiences, makers and imagery of art’,<sup>27</sup> and feminists led the way. Artist and activist Suzanne Lacy argues that it was feminist art that ‘gave public life and political meaning’ to Allan Kaprow’s prophesy in 1958 that artists ‘will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies, store windows’. Without feminism, such gestures had remained largely in the art world without crossing over into the public sphere and everyday lives.<sup>28</sup>

This overview of our approach, which integrates feminist ethics, politics and creative practice to situate contemporary art within an expanded historical and theoretical frame, explains how we arrived at our six themed chapters, which focus on the politics of representation, performance, pedagogy, craft, environment and publics.

## Chapter topics

Chapter 1: ‘From the politics of representation to a politics of acts’ follows the currents of feminist insights into the politics of representation from the 1970s to the present. Our focus is largely on photography, and to a lesser extent painting and print-making. Photo-media has provided feminists with a persuasive and sustained platform from which to firstly call out stereotyped mass media images of femininity, and then create more nuanced analyses of visual representational systems. The world’s ubiquitous Imperial archives have also been re-routed through feminist and decolonial photography to reclaim and re-enliven their historical captives. The chapter canvasses important aspects of gender, racial and cultural identity politics from a feminist, anti-identitarian and studio-centric approach that has sought to imagine resistant and

alternative forms of subjectivity since the late 1960s. Artists discussed include Helen Grace, Susan Norrie, Vivienne Binns, Paula do Prado, Fiona Foley, Karla Dickens and Tracey Moffatt, alongside work by the Indonesian artist Octora, Alice Maher from Ireland and South African photographer Zanele Muholi.

Chapter 2: 'Beyond performing identities' proposes reasons for the current importance of performance in contemporary art and contextualises this relative to historical and current feminist theory and practice. It provides case studies and examples that canvass the range of practices in performance and the value-addition of a feminist framework of analysis to understand their currency and operation. Artists discussed include Hannah Raisin, Anastasia Klose and Justene Williams, along with Hoda Afshar, Salote Tawale and Parachute for Ladies (AUS). We also consider Sonia Boyce (UK), Pushpamala N (India), Patty Chang (US) and Eisa Jocson (Philippines/Australia), together with the legacies of Marina Abramović (Serbia/US) in contemporary performance.

Chapter 3: 'Feminism and art's pedagogical turn' focuses on the strand of contemporary art that incorporates pedagogical elements and the ethics of progressive teaching (such as those expounded in Paolo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*). This includes new forms of art practice and curating, like lecture/performances and ongoing 'social sculptures' such as workshops that aim for innovative activism. The chapter traces these forms back to feminist theory and practice, and offers insights based on this analytical framework. Artists and artist groups discussed include communities and collectives BC, LEVEL, Euraba Papermakers, Warmun community, and Soda\_Jerk, individual artists Emily Floyd, Alex Martinis Roe and Elvis Richardson (AUS), as well as Vanessa German (US), Anita Dube (India), Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (Thailand) and Caroline Woolard (US).

Chapter 4: 'Craftivism: a material ethics of care' argues the links between 'new materialism' and preceding feminist theory and art. It also contextualises the contemporary turn to craft within both recent philosophical developments and historical practices, analysing works that have problematised the public/domestic divide by connecting domestic crafts with politics and institutional critique. In particular, the chapter reads these developments through the perspective of innovative First Nations' practices and care ethics. Artists and curatorial projects discussed include Ernabella and Utopia batik, The Sydney WAM-affiliated Women's Domestic Needlework Group, intergenerational and community-based projects like *Mothers' Memories, Others Memories* (1979–1981), Yolngu string work (Ngarrawu Mununggurr and others), Esme Timbery, Dulcie Greeno and Liam Benson, and the campaigning of the Knitting Nannas Against Coal Seam Gas. We also consider the work of Narelle Jubelin, Sera Waters, Michele Elliot and Raquel Ormella, along with the Oregon-based artist Natalie Ball and Inuit artist Taqralik Partridge.

Chapter 5: 'Avant Gardening: Western landscape, ecofeminism and First Nations care for country' connects contemporary environmentalist art with early feminist contributions to notions of deep ecology (such as the work of Australian philosopher Val Plumwood) and First Nations' spiritual ownership, knowledge and care for/of/with 'country'—an active colloquialism of Aboriginal English referring to culturally-inherited tracts of land that conveys both place and practices of belonging and belief. The chapter

argues that ecofeminism has, over several decades, challenged Western landscape traditions, particularly the latter's dualistic framework of nature and culture, to promote a non-anthropocentric praxis that dovetails with First Nations care for country/work on country in a coalitional environmental politics that is particularly relevant today. Artists, curators and curatorial projects discussed include the Tjanpi Desert Weavers from Central Australia and projects based at the Boolarng Nangamai (Together Dreaming) Art Centre, south of Sydney, Patricia Piccinini, Cat Jones, Sasha Grbich, Barbara Campbell, Bonita Ely, Rox de Luca and Sarah Goffman. Alongside, we consider the work of Inuvialuk artist Maureen Gruben, Sámi artist Sissel M. Bergh, Indonesian artists Irene Agrivina and Tita Salina, and US artists Basia Irland, Mary Mattingly, Chrissie Orr and Jeanette Hart-Mann.

Chapter 6: 'Feminist worlds: reimagining community and publics' makes a feminist analysis of public and community engaged art, including forms of social practice or participatory art, a prevalent form of contemporary art. It contextualises and critiques this approach by reference to historical feminist theory and artwork, and contributes new perspectives through close readings of a diverse set of works that extend and complicate ideas of community and the public, and that affirm the activist nature of spatial interventions. Artists and curatorial projects discussed include Angelica Mesiti, Bianca Hester, Deborah Kelly, Cigdem Aydemir and Natalie Thomas (as Natty Solo), with international counterparts Lhola Amira (South Africa), Marisa Williamson (US), Nona Faustine (US) and Teresa Margolles (Mexico).

Our conclusion, 'The herstory and future of feminist arts activism', sums up the collective wisdom offered by contemporary feminist practice, in particular about what strategies might be effective for understanding and ultimately changing the current ecology of contemporary art to better reflect the ethical objectives of artists.

*Contemporary Art and Feminism* re-reads contemporary art within a feminist framework and offers a radically new interpretation of the current moment. It goes beyond the addition of female artists to an existing canon by questioning the canon itself, and asks what feminist cultural strategies are apposite today. It draws on a feminist methodology and an art critical approach informed by intimate contact with the artworks and deep respect for artists' practice-based knowledge, while leveraging off the 'peripheral vision' of an Australian perspective to engage with global debates and developments to bring to light new work to an international audience. It is indebted to the innovative perspectives of First Nations artists, and integrates new scholarship and practices around care ethics and art. We hope that for these reasons it will contribute to new understandings of art, ethics and politics in the visual arts and art history classrooms, but also among an interdisciplinary and general readership.

## Notes

- 1 Such as Terry Smith's *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009; and Julian Stallabrass' *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- 2 Such as Peter Osborne's *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London; Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2013 and Edward Colless's notion of 'the uncontemporary':

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- public lecture at Contemporary Art Tasmania, 2016, <https://contemporaryarttasmania.org/programs/the-uncontemporary/>
- 3 For example, Eleanor Heartney et al. (eds) *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, Munich; London: Prestel, 2007; and *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium*, Munich; London: Prestel, 2013.
  - 4 For example, Helena Reckitt's essay on social practice in Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (eds) *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
  - 5 For example, exhibitions such as *WACK! Art and the feminist revolution*, 2007 curated by Cornelia Francis at LA's Museum of Contemporary Art, and publications such as Heartney (2007, 2013).
  - 6 The book draws on research conducted by the research group that we co-convened at the University of Sydney, Contemporary Art and Feminism, in collaboration with Jo Holder from the Cross Art Projects. Since 2013, we have hosted conferences and symposia, and curated exhibitions, that have allowed us to bring together the most exciting feminist artists, writers, educators and curators in Australia. It also draws on the insights offered by the Care Project running out of La Trobe University and engaging artists, theorists and students from around Australia for a series of roundtables, symposia and exhibitions.
  - 7 A colloquial Aboriginal English term coined by Erub/Mer (Torres Strait) and K'ua K'ua (Cape York) artist Destiny Deacon to reclaim identity from non-Indigenous people's persistent labelling and misrepresentation of First Nations Australians. See Clare Williamson, Hetti Perkins and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative (curators), *Blakness: Blak City Culture!* (exhibition catalogue), South Yarra, Vic: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994; and Kate L. Munro, 'Why "Blak" not Black?: Artist Destiny Deacon and the origins of this word', NITV, 29 June 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2020/05/07/why-blak-not-black-artist-destiny-deacon-and-origins-word-1> accessed 23 November 2020.
  - 8 Including its 'revival' almost a decade ago in exhibitions such as *WACK!* (2007) and *elles@pompidou* (2009).
  - 9 We are so very thankful to our wonderful colleagues based or specialising in South and North America, UK and Europe, Africa and South East Asia, including Sherry Buckberrough, Brenda Schmahmann, Karen Cordeiro, Hilary Robinson, Clare Veal, Roger Nelson and Yvonne Lowe.
  - 10 Suzanne Lacy, *Leaving Art: Writings in Performance, Politics and Publics, 1974–2007*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 186.
  - 11 Lacy cites Allan Kaprow and Judy Chicago in making this assertion: Suzanne Lacy, 'Affinities: thoughts on an incomplete history', in Norma Broude, Judith Brodsky and Mary Garrard (eds) *The Power of Feminist Art*, New York: Harry N Abrams, 1994, 269.
  - 12 Griselda Pollock, keynote address, 'Femininity – the feminine and the feminist as critical terms' for *The Subversive Stitch Revisited: The Politics of Cloth Conference*, V&A Museum, London, November 2013. Audio recording published by Goldsmiths, University of London, 2018, <https://soundcloud.com/goldsmithsuol/subversive-stitch-pollock?in=goldsmithsuol/sets/the-subversive-stitch> accessed 23 November 2020.
  - 13 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994.
  - 14 Eve K. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 2003, cited in Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, 'Affecting Feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory', *Feminist Theory*, 13 (2): 115–129, 2012, 117.
  - 15 Vivien Green Fryd, 'Suzanne Lacy's three weeks in May: Feminist activist performance art as "expanded public pedagogy"', *NWSA Journal*, 19 (1): 23–38, 2007.
  - 16 Recent Australian exhibitions and related events have foregrounded pedagogical, trans-generational exchanges. These include *Backflip! Humour in Feminist Art*, curated by Laura Castagnini (Melbourne: Victoria College of the Arts, 2012), *Contemporary Australia: Women*, curated by Julie Ewington (Brisbane: Gallery of Modern Art, 2012), *A Different Temporality: Aspects of Australian Feminist Art Practice 1975–1985*, curated by Kyla McFarlane (Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2011), *The Baker's Dozen*, curated by Lorna Grear

- (Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney Gallery, 2012), *No Added Sugar: Engagement and Self-determination/Australian Muslim Women Artists*, curated by Rusaila Bazlamit (Sydney: Casula Powerhouse, 2012), *Curating Feminism* exhibition and conference, organising curator: Jacqueline Millner (Sydney: University of Sydney, October 2014), *Doing Feminism/Sharing the World*, curated by Anne Marsh (Melbourne: Victoria College of the Arts and other venues, 2018), *Shapes of Knowledge*, curated by Hannah Matthews (Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2019), *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, curated by Deborah Hart and Elspeth Pitt (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2020–2021).
- 17 For example, the Craftivist Collective was founded by Sarah Corbett in 2009 in the UK. *The Subversive Stitch Revisited: The Politics of Cloth*, a conference held in 2013 in the UK with British feminist art historian Griselda Pollock as keynote speaker, highlighted the range of contemporary feminist activism through domestic crafts.
  - 18 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, London: The Women's Press, 1984.
  - 19 Many early eco-feminists credit American scientist Aldo Leopold's concept of 'land ethic' as expounded in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). This ethic held that the moral community should include soils, waters, plants and animals, and that the role of humans should be changed from conqueror to plain member of the land community. Further, Leopold argued that we can be moral only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, respect, admire or otherwise have faith in, and that 'a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise': Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949, 224.
  - 20 See Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, 1993; and Chris Cuomo, 'Ethics and the eco/feminist self', in Michael E. Zimmerman (ed.) *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005.
  - 21 See Karen J. Warren, 'Feminist environmental philosophy', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-environmental/> accessed 23 November 2020.
  - 22 Lucy Lippard, cited in Broude, Brodsky and Garrard, 1994, 22.
  - 23 Including Suzanne Lacy, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Betsy Damon, for example, in the US.
  - 24 Cited in Judith Stein and April Kingsley, 'Collaboration', in Broude, Brodsky and Garrard, 1994, 243. Damon's work includes *A Memory of Clean Water* (1988), a 250 foot paper casting of a dry river bed; Ukeles' work includes *Touch Sanitation* (1979–1980) where the artist shook hands with every garbage collector in New York City; Lacy's work includes *Crystal Quilt* (1985–1987), a two-year project on women's aging comprised of community engagement, classes and workshops culminating in a collaborative performance in a shopping mall with more than 400 local women over 60.
  - 25 Of which Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) is the iconic example.
  - 26 Broude, Brodsky and Garrard, 1994, 23.
  - 27 Lacy, *Leaving Art*, 2010, 189.
  - 28 Lacy, in Broude, Brodsky and Garrard, 1994, 264.

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# 1

## FROM THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION TO A POLITICS OF ACTS

### Introduction

Over the decades, artists have creatively probed the many (mis)identifications, pleasures and objectifications of stereotyped femininity. As the 1984 Australian feminist pub-rock classic told it, 'the girl in the mirror ain't the same as the girl on the wall'.<sup>1</sup> And who was that 'man in the head' who made that girl so self-conscious, prompting her to constantly watch herself being watched?<sup>2</sup> Why do women internalise objectifying gender representations? From the later 1960s, these questions were asked across a broad spectrum of feminist consciousness-raising scenarios. The more important question then became: once feminists stood behind the camera, what alternative images of femininity, including female beauty, could we create? This chapter investigates these speculations on the contradictory pleasures of feminine display and female spectatorship.

We argue that feminism re-routed Marxist theories of ideological interpellation through creative analyses of mass media and high art representational systems, helping to drive the politicisation of culture as a relatively autonomous sphere of New Left political action. We use the term 'New Left' to designate broad, post-war shifts within Marxist theory and practice from an orthodox framework of economic base and superstructure, which had held the sphere of economic production as determinant (at its simplest, the idea that consciousness was determined by one's relation to the means of production).<sup>3</sup> Yet what if one's consciousness is contoured through capitalism's reproductive relations, as is the case for half the world's population, i.e. women? Moreover, orthodox Marxism could not adequately account for the non-repressive yet compelling ideological workings of the capitalist state. Traditional reflection theory was too mechanistic to be useful when analysing our increasingly mediated and information-based post-war world economies. The rise of post-war social movements such as civil rights, anti-colonial and anti-nuclear movements, along with battles over the environment and women's and gay liberation, forced a radical re-thinking of the