

Pollock

Vision and Difference

Vision and Difference

'*Vision and Difference* is a needed and major contribution to feminism and art history.'

Carol Zemel, The Art Bulletin

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'Pollock's account points in an exciting direction for the future of feminist artistic production and theory.'

Jo Anna Isaak, Art History

'An excellent up-to-the-minute exegesis of post-structuralist feminist analysis on women and art.'

Patricia Sagall, City of London Polytechnic

Griselda
Pollock

Vision and Difference

Feminism, femininity and the histories of art

With a new introduction by the author



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For Tony, Benjamin and Hester

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It is normal to take this space to thank colleagues and friends who have helped in the making of a book. There have been so many contributions to the development and excitement of feminist art history that the list of names would and should be long. I hope those whose example and practices have helped me will find themselves acknowledged in due place throughout the text.

It is also common for authors to leave until last their families, as if the domestic backup is less valuable than the intellectual input of academic colleagues and friends. This is not so. The people who have given generously of their time, patience and support to make this book possible are my children and their father. The book is dedicated to them with deepest thanks. I have not yet found the balance between the passions of motherhood and the thrills of feminist scholarship. It is my children and their father who live out the painful effects of the struggle which feminism has brought to us. It is they above all and by name who must be acknowledged as my co-producers, Tony Bryant, Benjamin Pollock Bryant and Hester Pollock Bryant.

INTRODUCTION TO ROUTLEDGE CLASSICS EDITION

Vision and Difference was my fifth feminist book thinking about and analysing culture for inscriptions 'in, of and from the feminine'.¹ Its title is typical of my project. It conjoins two issues: looking, seeing and representing visually with the problematic of difference. It does not mention gender at all. The subtitle: *Feminism, femininity and histories of art*, links three terms. One stands for a political movement that is also an intellectual revolution. The second uses a psychoanalytical term for a psycho-linguistic position within the structuring of sexual difference. 'Femininity' does not invoke any empirically experienced notion of women. It refers to a position within language and in a psycho-sexual formation that the term Woman signifies. As a position, therefore, and not an identity, a fiction produced within that formation, femininity may be something of which its defining Other, masculinity, speaks, dreams, fantasizes. It signals at the same time that which subjects living and thinking from that position labelled 'women' have to contend as an imposed or created positioning. It is also a structure and realm of experience women

subjects need to explore since it may not be known to us, given its configuration through certain patterns of discourse and psycho-sexual formation under a phallic Law.

The pluralization of the histories of art is especially significant since it opens out the field of historical interpretation beyond a selective tradition, *The Story of Art*, a canonical version masquerading as the *only* history of art. Whose stories are told, in whose interests? Whose stories will we need to find? How can we read differently?

In the end, all our histories will be just that: stories we tell ourselves, narratives of retrospective self-affirmation, fictions of and for resistance that are, nonetheless, answerable to a sense of the real processes of lived and suffered histories. Thus to enter critically into the problematic of narrative, representation, history and the politics of meaning, we shall need self-awareness of who we are when we 'tell a story', what its effects will be, what is excluded and how contingent it will be, however diligent we are in our scholarship and research. Situated knowledge, recognizing our socially overdetermined positions, does not create a free-for-all of limitless relativism. That is the slur the canonists wish to cast upon the ethical scholar, the politically self-aware thinker, artist or writer who engages with study at the highest levels of responsibility but honestly offers her/his interpretations as *readings*, as a situated work of attempted understanding which, in that awareness, is both confidently creative and modestly critical of inevitable limitations.

What has happened between 1988 when *Vision and Difference* first appeared and its re-issue as a 'Classic' in 2003? At times, I feel as if the waters of 'art history as usual' are closing back over the site of what I named in *Vision and Difference* 'feminist interventions in art's histories'. It is as if there is a will to cast feminist work in, and on, the histories of art back into the momentarily ruffled surface of the history of the late twentieth century as an intellectual curiosity, no longer relevant to current practices. These

can continue, undisturbed by the questions feminism poses: the questions of gender as a continuing axis of power and domination, and of sexual difference as the ambivalent scene of meaning, fantasy and desire.

I have been told on more than one occasion that my work is 'history' now. That is, the debates have moved on to other questions such as internationalism, postcoloniality and post-gender studies of sexuality and queerness. The possibility and necessity of opening other investigations around cultural difference and globalization in our study and analysis of cultures is unquestionable. I would, however, argue that this is so precisely *because* of what we have learnt by the historic feminist interruption: that knowledge is shaped in relations of power and invested with interests, political, ideological and psychological. Feminism was never alone in making this claim; but it made the challenge central to its politico-intellectual project.

It was Rozsika Parker's and my opening salvo, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, in 1981, that first tracked what we could now call, *pace* Fredric Jameson, 'the political unconscious'² of art history as a discursive formation institutionalized in museum and academy in the twentieth century. We argued that despite art's deceptive marginality in real material and political terms, the privileged discourses of and on art served symbolic purposes that disseminated, beyond their own privileged sphere, concepts of Eurocentrism and masculine supremacy. The core narratives that encode Western phallocentrism's political unconscious serve not merely to structure the study of the histories of art, but to establish a story of art as *The Story of Art*, the canonical legend of Western masculine Christian creativity which becomes synonymous with art, pure and simple. Against this formal creation of a version of the past that serves to consolidate gender as an axis of power on the one hand and, on the other, as a mark of exclusion and devaluation, it is not useful to aim merely to correct the oversights and ignorance that led art history to

ignore the art of almost all women who have participated in creative cultural activity. Such a short-sighted, if always necessary, objective swings the issue of gender over onto the artists who are women having to make their case for re-incorporation after declarations by scholars such as H. W. Janson, the author of the most widely used textbook in art history, that no woman has ever made any innovation in art sufficient to justify inclusion in a one-volume survey of world art.³ Token women are merely offered for re-introduction into a canon, whose own construction by exclusion on the grounds of the sex of the artist renders that canon already a gendered and gendering discourse and thus will always position artists who are women as marked, othered, as *women* artists. How essential is femininity? I once asked. The answer: it is structural to the maintenance of a certain Eurocentric masculinist conception of art and artist. Femininity is invoked as the deficient, but always named and marked other, that which then allows art to be understood as inherently what men make, without having to spell out that blatantly false narcissism.

Many people misrecognize feminism as a merely historical phenomenon, limited to a certain time and place. The work of feminist theory is a radical questioning, a way of thinking and not just a short-lived partisan advocacy. There have been moments of feminist challenges to patriarchal and phallogocentric thought and formations throughout history, for example in the late medieval period, during the Protestant Reformation and in the revolutionary period of the late eighteenth century. Politically and militantly, feminism took on the modern bourgeois state at the end of the nineteenth century and continued to battle not only for political emancipation throughout the twentieth century but for a deeper sense of the modernization of sexual difference. After a quiescent period following the reaction against women's movements by fascism from the 1930s to the 1950s, feminist theory after 1960 became a major intellectual force because, for the first time in the history of the West, more

women have won, to a still limited degree, general access to education. There are now a sufficient number of critically self-conscious women academics for whom the question of sexual difference is a major academic project. In a radically changed situation, the woman question is being posed in the name of women by highly educated professional women forming an international intellectual community.

Not a mere moment in a social movement for equal pay or better employment opportunities, our moment of feminist theory is a work that has only just begun with a first generation of women professors in a quantity sufficient to progress an intellectual revolution through a volume of writings that have emerged in every academic field, from genetics to art history, and through the training of generations of women scholars who are allowed to be scholars of women. These women scholars can confront the full implications of sexual difference as a complex structuration of subjectivity and social relations in perpetual play with other determining and over-determining relations of power and formations of subjectivity, notably, in the modern period, of 'race' and class.

Feminist thought has never meant limiting women to the study of women's issues. Thus feminist work in and on art history is not just about the restitution of women artists to official histories (although given the almost complete annihilation of their histories by Art History (the discipline) we have a really exciting job to do there as my first book *Old Mistresses* (1981) demonstrated). It must mean broadening the entire field of intellectual endeavour to acknowledge the significance of sexual and other differences amidst the play of many social, economic, ideological, semiotic and psychological factors one might consider. Feminist thought confronts the entire field of the histories of artistic and cultural practices with questions about difference, formulating new theories and methods of analysis with which to rewrite Western phallogocentric monoculture in a way that

fully includes the missing histories of women's and other contributions so that the next generation inherits a sense of the diverse and multiple cultures of our world in their living historical and social complexity. But as importantly, 'feminist interventions in and on the histories of art' reveal how significant what I would prefer to rename symbolic-aesthetic practices are within culture as a whole, in representational regimes that traverse disciplines, media and practices as well as in their own specific address as aesthetic practices to signification, visibility, embodiment, desire, pleasure and, of course, trauma.

The current pressure on younger scholars to banish feminist interventions to the dustbin of history and proclaim a post-feminist age is, in fact, a sign of the opposite: of the continuing necessity for tracking the politics of knowledge and its will to power that operates by means of veiling, suppressing, ridiculing or trying to carry on as if feminism had never exposed fundamental ideologies and interests at work. But there is more.

Turning our backs on feminist interventions represents a refusal at the heart of the traditional art historical establishment to open itself to the larger intellectual and political revolutions of the twentieth century that co-emerged with its modernist forms. Einstein, Saussure, Freud, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, Freud, Lyotard, Adorno, Benjamin, Klein, Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Bal, to name but a few, have transformed thinking about language, meaning, subjectivity, textuality, history, aesthetics, the body, visibility: the very stuff of artistic practice and the aesthetic domain. Feminist interventions were made possible by our full participation in this surge of intellectual curiosity and thought, this site of intellectual dissidence in the face of what Adorno lamented as the increasing commodification of all aspects of culture. In the field of art history, there has been considerable reluctance and even anxiety about having to confront the redefinition of the intellectual map created by this massive reorientation of twentieth-century thought.

I am constantly confronted by people, complacent in their art history training in a narrow corner of the humanities, who declare that they do not 'do theory'. Protected in the sanctuary offered by official Art History, they tell me that they do not have a 'feminist methodology', as if either of these questions, theoretical or methodological, were optional, something you can decide not to do or to ignore without appearing to be disqualified from scholarly respectability. It is as if feminism is *de facto* an outsider, an interloper, simply not art history. I have for many years argued that the current disciplinary formation, Art History, cannot survive the impact of feminist questioning: a position that Linda Nochlin herself proposed in her foundational essay on the necessity for a paradigm shift towards an enlarged interdisciplinary practice in 1971.⁴ Many art historians stop reading at that point, instead of hearing the call to reshape the processes, theories and methods through which we confront the historical and ideological complexity of the histories of artistic and cultural practices awaiting our refined, retuned and self-critical practices of situated analysis and reading. Feminism's challenge does not end art historical work; it calls for methods and practices that go beyond what Art History in its post-Cold War formations sanctions. Paradigm shifts occur in all academic practices when the terms of analysis are no longer adequate to what needs to be explained. Feminism breached the paradigm of masculinist formalism or connoisseurship, of esoteric iconography, calling for new social historical studies, introducing semiotics and playing with psychoanalytical understandings of both human subjectivity and aesthetics.

Academics are trained, especially in the historical fields, in the obligation to know their period, to take on board the historical necessity of what actually happens, including its intellectual trends and prevailing ideas. But the reification of uncomfortable questions about class, race, gender and sexuality, and issues and themes signified by words ending in '-ity' such as sexuality,

spatiality, visuality, coloniality and so forth – as THEORY, in the singular, as a thing that you can choose not to DO reveals a failure. It reveals an ideological predisposition to that failure, the failure to accept the pressure of recent intellectual-political history which has been so creative and emancipatory in the depth and breadth of its rethinking of the very matters that artistic practice and its histories concerns: desire, embodiment, difference, representation, signification.

Art history has a history. It is not as monolithic as the authorized version today tries to claim in order to outlaw any changes to theories or methods for analysis. There are different resources lodged within that history. One can, for instance, as I have recently begun, resume a dialogue with the early twentieth-century German-Jewish art historian Aby Warburg who was interested in a psychological history of the image quite different from Panofsky's now canonized iconographical approach. His arguments have recently been revisited as a promising partner for feminist practices.⁵ One can resume Riegl's analysis of *Kunstwollen*, the way in which one can read the dispersion of certain patterns of forms and signs across a culture's many practices without regard to a hierarchy of objects as indexes of historical process and cultural states which is in turn radically opposed to his contemporary Wölfflin's formulaic and reductive formalism based on a theory of transhistorical stylistic oppositions. It is interesting to note that Walter Benjamin studied with both these art historians and thought the latter insensitive to art while Riegl's work on late Roman art provided him with the method and direction for his own research that would become the Arcades project for studying the formal and informal cultural signs of the nineteenth-century metropolis.

That history of the study of the visual arts, however, includes the enormous intellectual creativity and diversity that emerged in the 1970s and has been systematically consolidated by the maturing of our early feminist scholarship into considered

researches and deepened reflections tested out on an expanding archive of practices, images, cultures. I have been working for over thirty years on both developing new systems for the analysis of the visual arts and understanding the complexity of what it is to read artistic practices within cultural, historical, semiotic and psychoanalytical frameworks. Each step of the way depends upon a breadth of 'conversations' with the parallel revolutions in literary theory and criticism, postcolonial theory, historiography, philosophy, psychoanalytical theory, as well as ever more effective excavations of archives through which to consider gender and sexual difference in history, culture and art.

The significance of this intellectual project is proven, however, by the severity of the reaction against it: either outright amnesia or reductive caricature. Each feminist scholar is labelled and remembered only for the first intervention that gave rise to the label, as if feminist interventions were a one-off statement rather than a lifelong scholarly project, and remained no further developed than our first often crude if energetic declarations of the agenda. Thus as I go around the world lecturing, the mainstream of my discipline greets me as the author of *Old Mistresses*, a book written in 1978 and published in 1981. It formed, however significant it was, a preliminary mapping of a certain set of problems that only long-term work could develop and shift. *Vision and Difference* was written over the 1980s as a series of case studies but the two books alone sum up, for most, the range and the limits of my feminist reputation.

At a conference in 2002 accompanying the first ever major exhibition on the work of the seventeenth-century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi and her father, Orazio, an artist who has offered a very fascinating archive for feminist investigation, the debate rarely departed from the usual range of curatorial, connoisseurial, formal and iconographic investigations into attribution and quality. Only a moment was spared for what was, however, neatly repackaged for this audience as the

'gender-based' readings typical, apparently, of feminists in the 1970s. This curious phrasing appeared to disqualify them as only 'interpretations' rather than the solid business of establishing who painted which pictures and who (father or daughter, man or woman) is the better artist: the latter question being such a silly one. 'Gender-based readings' means limiting the artist to what is projected onto her as her female gender from which derive (circumscribed) meanings in the artwork. It also implies that the art historian expresses her own gender interests to concentrate on the art's revelation of gender concerns that confirm a merely partial point of entry. Thus 'gender-based' doubles the insignificance of the exercise for it is both the gender of the reader, a woman wanting to pose woman-questions, and the gender of the artist that disqualify the readings from having any general purpose. The desire to wish away the ethical burden of difference by appealing to some myth of 'the general' is back with us despite all the work on gender, postcoloniality and sexuality.

At another conference on the work of Eva Hesse in 2002, an art historian declared himself relieved that, at last, all 'this gender business' had been put behind us. His remark was made, however, because he was troubled by the new attempt to focus on Eva Hesse's Jewish heritage as a possible source of meanings or tropes within her work. Another speaker agreed: could we not just treat Eva Hesse as an artist in general? The angry reply from the feminist in the audience posed this question: Who comes 'in general'? We don't, none of us. Has not thirty years of post-colonial, feminist and anti-racism scholarship taught us definitively that we all come embodied, located, classed, gendered, linguistically and ideologically captured by terms that cause us to be represented and represent ourselves in differences? The most fundamental challenge of which feminist questioning was and is a part, is that posed to the false universalization of a positivist Eurocentric, masculine and often Christian subject

position which mistakes itself for humanity in general. Feminist interventions take part in the profound attempt to shift the very bases of our thought and knowledge systems towards not merely a polite acknowledgement but a deep, self-transforming and culturally shifting recognition of the power politics of Eurocentric, phallogentric, heteronormative universalization by which anyone other than the white, straight, European Christian is an other. In Bettina Aptheker's terms, we have to 'pivot the centre'; we have to imagine the worlds we inhabit from perspectives in which some people are centred and some are decentred in a perpetual movement of shifted centres of experience and unequal relations to power, language and self-definition.⁶

Thus the reduction of feminist theoretical and methodological interventions into the practice of the study of art as a whole to the caricature of some 'gender-based readings', which usually are misread as some kind of iconographical practice, reading signs in paintings as signs of the gender of the artist (which in itself takes no note of debates about intentionality, expression, subjectivity, ideology, semiotics, to name but a few things), *fails entirely to grasp the deeper criticality of feminist practices*, their breadth of relations to other theoretical questionings and research in the arts and humanities, and more importantly the level of difference feminist work makes.

Feminist interventions in arts' and cultures' histories are not some nice, optional or avoidable add-on. They are a redefinition of the objects we are studying, and the theories and methods with which we are doing it so that the making and reading of artistic/cultural practices can take their place in the enlarged sphere of arts and humanities. Art History confines art to the limited sphere of the museum and collector, and any suggestion that we dare to confront the idealized masculine self, the artist-hero at its core, with the ordinariness of class, cultural and other difference, or sexuality, is perceived by the curators of art's purity as a kind of contamination, soiling its transcendent

beauty with the messy business of life. Again the social or political is presented as intrinsically external to the reified realm of art, rather than the rich source of its complexity and social effectivity.

This was perhaps the real line of demarcation in the last part of the twentieth century: art history in tow to the museum through which the spectacle of art became a site of corporate and blockbuster entertainment. As a result, museums and art galleries are raising funds for rebuilding and repackaging as significant elements of civic and national tourist strategies. Art is now a profitable part of the oddly named heritage and leisure industry. It is not because of a desire to destroy the specialness of artistic practices and meanings that feminists allied themselves with structuralists, post-structuralists and psychoanalytical thinkers. Indeed, following the thought of Julia Kristeva, it is in the name precisely of thought, of the value of independent intellectual analysis that defies, hopelessly but relentlessly, the commodification of all our attempts at resistance to the logic of early, middle or late capitalism that now reigns unopposed in the Western world. Critical thought can also take place in and through art; it needs to be encountered and read through an equally expansive and serious engagement with critical thinking. This is vital to acknowledge that art is no mere passive repository of the viewer's fantasies. In its difference, artistic practice has always been a mode of thought while touching upon those elements of human subjectivity that subtend the purely intellectual or communicative.

Since writing *Vision and Difference*, I have attempted to develop further the models of critical thinking in and reposition studies of the visual arts through a number of new, feminist concepts which reveal the slow and painful work that was necessary to intervene and redefine a project for the study of artistic practices in all their complexity. This has involved changes or reorientations from rigorously social studies to a current interest

in psychoanalysis and aesthetics, to trauma and affectivity.⁷ Moving from a Marxist and Foucauldian intercalation of women, art and ideology onto 'feminist interventions in art's histories', together with a new generation of younger women scholars in the 1990s, I developed the model of 'generations and geographies in the visual arts'. This suggests that any study of an art work or its maker needs to be complexly configured through the double axis of history and socio-cultural location, of genealogical time and socially determined semiotic space whose double axes pass through and define the practice which itself creatively refashions its own conditions of existence. Thus any artist is both working from a location that places her/his work in relation to a historical genealogy and a contemporary geopolitical-cultural situation. This automatically produces a pivoted international perspective on the way in which geographical and historical particularity of work by artists must be studied so that there is no single centre against which the artist's historical and geographical particularity can be othered. Each artist works in a singularity of history and location from which, however, something is being said that may have meaning for all of us beyond its point of production and precisely because of its situated articulation as a singular subject position.

In the mid-1990s I worked with the model of 'killing men and dying women' in relation to a moment of high modernism and post-war gender politics. Jackson Pollock and Marilyn Monroe were the twinned icons of this moment against which I wanted to puzzle out the practices of women strung out between incomparable ideologies of artistic masculinity and commodified, blonded femininity. The puns within the present participles used in the phrase address the question of how some remarkable women created their art within a field in which they were as much a part of the whole as they were rendered invisible and insignificant in its critical self-accounting. Artists like Lee Krasner wanted to work with the greatest artists of that

moment. She wanted to make her own mark in relation to that overall artistic ambition of 'new American painting' but by means of her singularity (generation and geography), which may have included some unpredictable element of her experience of a historically and culturally specific immigrant Jewish-American femininity that was never either a prison-house of meaning nor an obligatory referent. Re-reading women's active work with the poetics of high-modernist American painting allowed me to wonder: How do/did women deal with ambition, rivalry, desire for greatness, relations to fathers, mothers, fellow artists, history? Why was that moment of that kind of painting hospitable to an ambition and creativity that the critical discourse of the time simply could not, or would not register at all? These are open questions with no predetermined answers because they allow women the dynamic space of creativity, opening histories of key moments of modernism to the productivity of the creative act that itself unleashed possibilities for women who shared in its project.

Revisiting my opening feminist gambit, *Old Mistresses*, the book of my maturity, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999) took on the canon to ask the feminist questions: What holds it in place? Why has it not yielded except cosmetically to any feminist or other kinds of critique? These seemed important questions to pose. The canon, I argued, is held in place not by prejudice or ignorance (the evidence is overwhelming for women's role in culture), but by a deeper psycho-fantasmatic structure of masculine desire and narcissism. The stories our culture tells us of great men, be they philosophers or artists, form faces of the same story of the Hero who confirms masculine narcissism and omnipotence in an archaic formulation that Freud saw as the basis of religion. We must pass intellectually out of this childhood and be able to study art and artists in a non-mythical way. Only then will it be imaginable to acknowledge the diversity of cultures and desire knowledge of

different constituencies, for the artist will be 'someone like us' and not the mythical hero who screens masculine father-worship and endorses masculine narcissism. Hence the work of feminist interventions becomes that of *differencing* the canon, not reifying the difference of women as the other gender, but allowing a desire for difference, different self-knowledges – to animate and transform our readings of art, readings that again acknowledge who is reading, what s/he wants, and where 'I' too must be differenced, that is transformed by the encounter with that in which I am not centred. In the book, I attempted to reconsider feminist fantasies of the woman artist as heroine, while also reading for the Other, following Gayatri Spivak's injunction to ask at all times: how does the other woman see me? Thus feminist work cannot be allowed its own complacencies of hegemonic classed, raced and sexual positions. It must examine its own political unconscious, over-determined in the historian's or critic's generational and geographical positioning, and actively work for differencing on many registers. Instead of a known story of art, we create an open book awaiting its many enriching and transforming readings.

My current work involves a project called *Towards the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*. This takes the museum as the privileged site of public education on art and of the symbolic representation and the favoured narratives of culture. To change perceptions and desires, we must offer differencing stories, more stories that aim to resist all ghettoization, separation and categorization. In this virtual (non-institutionalized) feminist space, culture is treated not as priceless treasure or commodity, but as a laboratory in which creative artists explore in as yet unknown worlds and work at the edge of new possibilities. Thus we have first to read the museum for the foreclosed and unacknowledged meanings that have been left unharvested in their works, unread because of the limiting frames through which the museum obliges us not to see or not to recognize.

The Virtual Feminist Museum is not cybernetic but it is as yet unrealizable in the present relations of museums, capital and power. It works through reading a desire for difference instead of identity: national, cultural or gendered. It is open to finding traces of scandalous and revolutionary breaches of official stories while offering stories we have not yet learned to read.

The concept of the feminist desire for difference, however, makes no theoretical sense at all, in psychoanalytical terms. What can be feminist desire? It is not an attribute of women and is not categorical. The neologism suggests a critical epistemophilia, a desire for knowledge about dimensions and possibilities that the monism of phallogocentric culture and thought has systematically foreclosed and now actively opposes in its pressure to be allowed to emerge. Far from shipping us back to the closed category of gender, a real engagement with the creative inscriptions into the texts of culture by artists working from the space of unwritten but not unwritable difference and dissidence opens up the dialectic of the human subject who is never entirely defined by sexuality or gender, nor, in Merleau-Ponty's words, ever entirely beyond it either. This insight seems timely to escape the dangers of both feminist positivism and postmodern indifference. The covenant between feminist attentiveness to the repressed and now increasingly refused question of sexual difference and those theoretical, philosophical and critical traditions of contemporary thought, can and has produced enabling theorizations, strategies and policy shifts. Ours is a moment of historical possibility in which questions about the phobic intolerance of difference, be that sexual, ethnic, cultural, are urgent in the context of continued violence against women as well as genocidal and ethnic conflict.

We should dismiss outright those who seek to close the file on feminism's historical contribution to thinking about the social, the linguistic, and psychic foundations for this phobia and its acting out of a terrifying violence with which the twenty-first

century has opened. Equally it is vital to take seriously the aesthetic (not as beauty alone but as affectivity) so deeply linked with the very processes of sexual difference, as a creative laboratory for what might one day become a social strategy or new way of thinking.

I have spent thirty years or more thinking about feminist questions and art. Over twenty books and hundreds of articles bear witness to the sustained and long-term project involved in a feminist intervention. My work has been enabled, since the 1990s, by contact with generations of women art students on our unique programme of dedicated studies in feminist theory and the visual arts at the University of Leeds. This programme has now produced its own generations of doctoral students, taking their place in the academic and artistic field, building with care and precision on the general foundations that my generation of feminist scholars awkwardly hacked out from the bankrupt legacy into which we first noisily intervened. Refusing to be captured within or policed by a disciplinary space that would not legitimate the necessary questions or resources, I have always imagined and taught feminism as a politically invented signifying space from which to forge links with different sites of socio-political analysis and cultural/symbolic practices. Engaging in cultural studies has made a huge difference and much of my work could well be read as a dialogue with cultural studies insisting on the place of aesthetic practices in the visual arts in that field alongside literature and philosophy on the one hand, and cinema and visual culture on the other. *Differencing the Canon* and *Vision and Difference* should be considered as hybrid products of both cultural studies and feminist interventions in art's histories precisely because of the need to rewrite or even disrupt the maps of knowledge. We inherit a university curriculum and disciplinary organization from the nineteenth-century German model, expanded with its own culture wars in the early twentieth century. The 1960s/1970s were decades of a new set

of culture wars in which the pressure of what needed to be thought and studied breached the disciplinary walls and created interdisciplinary initiatives in which scholars with different resources and shared questions found new resources from across the whole system.

The publisher's listing on the back of books of possible sites for the sale or promotion of our writings is revealing: for *Vision and Difference* this might include feminism, art history, women's studies, cultural studies, psychoanalytical studies, gender studies and so forth. More than any one of these already interdisciplinary sub-groups, there is now a need for what I call a transdisciplinary initiative, and the umbrella under which I am now working in my several intellectual personae is cultural analysis, theory and history.

This brings me back to this book. It contains a series of interlinked case studies (themselves exemplary of the new model of non-linear study of histories of art) which track my thinking on general methodological issues from the early 1970s (Chapter 2) to the late 1980s (Chapter 1). It includes two essays on nineteenth-century art – a much-republished intervention in the social history of a canonical moment of Parisian modernism (Chapter 3) and a psychoanalytical reading of a non-canonical movement, British Pre-Raphaelitism (Chapter 6). It contains what I think is a highly significant analysis of the discursive formation of nineteenth-century tropes of the artist that involved the mythical occlusion of the feminine, a case study written jointly with Deborah Cherry about Elizabeth Siddall (Chapter 4). It attempts to draw relations between domains of visual representation, regimes of representation and historical moments that defy art history's confines of period, movement, style and moment (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Finally, there is an engagement with the artistic practices of the moment in which I was writing these essays (Chapter 7), with artists whose own critical and theoretical interventions were as much a resource for

rethinking art's histories as they were themselves the object of my own art history of the present.

Art History does not do the present. It cannot tell for itself what is good and worthwhile. It tends to await the judgement of history so as not to get things wrong. As feminists, we could not afford to do that nor would we want to, if only because of the absolute need of contemporary artists who are women to find appropriate critical and art historical responses to their current interventions in practice. If the study of art's pasts cannot enable you to engage with the projects and practices of living culture, I do not think much of the exercise. If the encounter with the projects and practices of contemporary artists is not allowed to challenge and reshape the terms of the study of past art, I don't think there is much credibility in our discipline. Working on Mary Kelly was necessary to thinking about Mary Cassatt and vice versa. That time-reversing relation, that creative anachronism, that Freudian sense of belatedness and deferral, marks the difference of feminist work in historiographical and analytical terms.

Of all the essays in this book, 'Modernity and the spaces of femininity' has had the most purchase and been most widely read and reprinted. It offered a feminist way into the burgeoning debates in the social histories of art. Perhaps, also, because it is about impressionism, the most popular and most misunderstood movement of Western modern art, it attracted readers. Yet I still do not really see in the use of this article in art history the real impact of what I take to be its most important argument, which was not about a social iconography of modernity, but about the relations between art making and art viewing that depended on space, or to be precise the interface of three spaces. Here we see the difference between space as a category of art historical analysis and spatiality as a larger cultural construct incorporating the play between social, imagined and represented spaces. In reading the work of Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, I

argued that three spatial registers were in constant play: the space of representation, for instance, the city with its public/private, domestic/commodified divisions. Then there is the represented space of the painting and its accommodation of social space through pictorial means on a flat rectangle, and this opens onto the specificities of the artists' practices of representation and fashioning of distinctive means to engage with the social spaces of lived relations of class and gender. Finally, I indicated the importance of the space from which the representation is made, which is both the working space of the artist, the studio and its social and psychic relations and the social space of the artist in her social, gendered, sexual and psychic specificity: her generation and geography, as it were. To pick up the historical meanings of a work requires us to move through all three. To be able to understand the specificity of a feminine (classed and raced) position is not to attribute a gendered perspective to the artist because she was a woman, but to read the painting from the simultaneously social, representational and psychic spatialities out of which it was fashioned as painting, itself a mediator between its conditions to production and existence and our encounter with it, beyond that limit of a moment in time, which the painting nonetheless carries. To read for the feminine positioning is to read the painting from a spatiality which the painting as painting itself encoded – but can never determine. Thus there was no reductive argument, that women make women's paintings. There was a psycho-historical proposition of how we might re-enter circuits of meaning and positional difference through the mediation of artistic practices as creative and productive sites of inscription.

Despite the force of our arguments, I also often wonder why subsequent books on Elizabeth Siddall and Rossetti have never felt it necessary to acknowledge fully the arguments Deborah Cherry and I put forward about the historical person of Elizabeth Siddall. The corrected spelling of this working-class woman's

name is put to one side by those who continue to use the spelling Siddal – in deference to the bourgeois men whose literary executors worked to ‘frame’ her and obscure her life and work.

I suspect ‘Modernity and the spaces of femininity’ is popular because it uses certain kinds of social theory and visual analysis which are much more assimilable than the other chapters that are more ardent in their Marxism and more arcane in their use of psychoanalysis. This is the crime. Not only to use either but to suggest that one could use both Marxist historical materialism and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis. It has been a project of my work not to be trapped by one theoretical model but to hold the line that both issues of social relations of power – class and gender – and issues of psychic formation and cultural inscription have to be addressed. It is not either social or psychic, public or private, historical or semiotic. These insights I owe to the artists and cultural movements of the 1970s that I address in the last chapter, which is my own attempt to revisit the site of my own political and intellectual formation and to understand its key debates and central projects. The pages of the film journal *Screen* in the 1970s track a significant cultural history of engagements with socialist strands of avant-gardism, structuralist Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Combined with readings of Foucault and Derrida, that was the milieu in which I began to fashion a feminist intervention in art’s histories. I learned from Mary Kelly and Marie Yates, from Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Stephen Heath, Victor Burgin, Jacqueline Rose and many others, the possibilities of politically sensitive thought and analysis that opened up the world of later twentieth-century intellectual culture to someone stifled by the disciplinary narrowness of the discourse that pretended it had the exclusive right to pontificate on the nature of art and its singular history.

This book is a document of my intellectual adventures in that wonderland of radical culture in the 1970s and 1980s. It is

informed and transformed by collective work, collaborations, and by encounters with artists, film-makers, and thinkers of all kinds. That series of encounters enabled a breadth of resourcing, a daring of interpretation and an intensity of commitment above all to making a difference. The reappearance of the book now beyond the frame of its own beginnings in a historical moment allows the texts to float more freely into a new generation's field of vision where it once again desires to make a difference. I can only hope that the recirculation of the texts Routledge had the courage to publish then as classics of our intellectual revolution find new readers, open to and desiring the continuing importance of this project of making a difference to thought, to art, to culture and to society, and doing it joyously, and at times, angrily with all sorts of women in mind.

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