

# Opened, Closed and Opening: Reflections on Feminist Pedagogy in a UK University

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In 1992, I proposed to my Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds a dedicated Master's Programme in *Feminism and the Visual Arts* (known affectionately as MAFEM). No one in the Department said a word. No one queried the idea. The proposal went through and the programme began the following academic session.

In 2003, the same Department (now a School) abolished the programme. No one (in the School) said a word.<sup>1</sup> The only dedicated graduate programme in art, art history and fine art with feminism in its title, taught in the UK, simply disappeared without a single voice raised amongst my colleagues in its defence.

In 1992, no one said a word because it would have been politically problematic at that date to challenge the introduction of an academic course on feminism. Feminism was clearly a recognized, developing, relevant and important dimension of the expanding study of art's many histories. Feminism was part of the intellectual landscape; it warranted, and gained, respect. Furthermore, a scholar was proposing this graduate programme with an already long-established reputation for theoretical, methodological and substantive

research in feminist studies in the visual arts. There was clearly an academic case for the graduate programme and a "*market*".

In 2003, the silence was different. It indicated that no one felt the need or desire to defend the programme continuing. No voice was raised to insist that feminist study in and of itself needed to be named and visible as a specialty of the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies. No one considered feminism an area that should be maintained on academic grounds. No one queried what it meant to erase the specialty of a distinguished feminist scholar internationally known for this arena of research, and to withdraw the School from its considerable international reputation for feminist studies. How the politics of the academy have changed!

One argument for closing the course was that there was no longer a "*market*" for named master's programmes in general or one in feminist studies in particular. Who wanted to be branded for life as someone who had studied feminism? What kinds of jobs would this overt identification with a "*defunct*" political project secure? Were museums or dealers

or universities recruiting people with this specialty? Surely the decent cover of a generic *MA in History of Art* would be better for all (even if the programme as I shall discuss below aimed precisely not to be “*in*” the history of art).

My own explanation was different. It was clear that during the 1990s, there were people teaching in art schools and universities who, when noticing a student’s interests in things feminist, would recommend the student to think about graduate studies at the Leeds programme in Feminism and the Visual Arts. The advisors were still part of an intellectual, cultural and political world in which feminism had a respected place. By the turn of twenty-first century, it seems, those teaching and advising in universities no longer knew of, or no longer recognized, feminism. Interested students were no longer being given advice or even information that such a possibility of further study in feminism was possible. Applications to MAFEM began to fall from the former double figures but this took place also at the point when recruitment to all graduate programmes was adversely effected by the growing difficulties of funding and rising student debt. Those who did find the programme via the Internet did it on their own, often saying to me when they came to Leeds that had others known that such a programme existed, they would surely have applied as well. Squeezed internally and externally, this momentary decade of feminist studies in the visual arts was over and few voices were raised in its defence. Only two years ago (2007) the last undergraduate programme in Women’s Studies in Britain also closed down. Is the feminist intervention in education over in Britain?

I am, therefore, delighted to have been asked to think about feminism and the curriculum and feminist pedagogy for this special issue. Without its formal name, it still continues in my university. But it is personalized: my thing. I am allowed to do it. Many students still come to Leeds specifically to engage with feminist theory or studies in art and art history. They come from many countries. Internationally, feminist studies in art/art history remain a significant area. The modules that form the dismembered remnants of the MAFEM programme are still taught by me, attracting fine artists, cultural studies, museum studies, gender studies and art history students. One module is locked into an MA in Gender and Culture run by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies. But taking one module here and there, the students never get the full effect of the moving through the previously coherent, triangulated programme built on its three foundations: theory, history and practice. I know that when

I retire, the subject area, the field, the possibility of even this degree of casual specialization will disappear and the water will wash over this space for feminist experiments in the study of feminist thought, art and history.

The positive aspect is that the legacy of this space of possibility is now dispersed, thankfully into all the places and spaces where former members of the MAFEM project are now teaching or creating, in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, India, Europe, the US and Canada. Other places and other groupings take the project in new directions. New generations will be responsible for finding this past and reconfiguring it for the present and future. But I do feel deeply troubled, personally discouraged and seriously afraid. There are still feminists teaching art and art history across the world. My project was not merely to inflect the field with the question of gender or sexual difference. It was to make feminism as a project, as a cultural revolution, as a historical moment of both artistic/cultural and intellectual transformation visible within its own elaboration, history, debates and character as an event that should now require deep serious study of its vast and varied resources, meanings and substance.

The ways in which individually and collectively the attempt to situate feminist projects, thought and practice in the university system has been treated is problematic. Is it the power of the art historical hegemony contesting the real novelty and potency of the challenge that feminism poses? I think so, and so recording this episode in the history of feminist pedagogy and curricular innovation will be an important document precisely as new generations of feminist thinkers emerge and need to understand their own prehistory.

### Starting out

I arrived at the University of Leeds in 1977 when discontent with art history had already engaged me in social historical and feminist research. I had published two articles on women and art in *Spare Rib*, with clear feminist intent. I was then working with Roszika Parker on the book that would finally appear in 1981 as *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. That project had emerged out of the Women’s Art History Collective, founded in 1973 as an informal grouping of artists and would-be art historians and journalists, attached to the women’s workshop of the Artists’ Union. We developed and then offered to art colleges and adult education a preliminary feminist art education programme in the absence of any such thing in the formal curriculum. It took courage as we were inexperienced and mostly students

or artists facing the menacing array of older men in leather jackets who dominated the art school scene with a specific kind of old fashioned sexism that of course our analysis directly challenged. Experimenting with presenting our material collaboratively as a group to counter typical forms of academic individualism, we identified three topics: images of women, the language and discourse of art history and criticism with their stereotypes and omissions, and a recovered, reconceived history of women as artists. How would this movement-inspired extramural initiative translate into academic studies at university level?

In 1977, I was also (and still am) a social historian of art, equally engaged with critiquing the norms of then current art history in terms of capitalist social relations. I was working on a doctorate on Vincent van Gogh and his concepts of the modern, daring to speak about class as well as gender and race in relation to this icon of modern art. On arrival at Leeds I was encouraged to introduce feminist perspectives into a new critical space being opened up by T.J.Clark. *Theories and Institutions* was a final year course (later a module) that I was asked to teach. I used this space to challenge ideas about the autonomy of art and the ideal gender of the artist, and to introduce the fragments of a social and feminist as well as anti-racist critique (the latter cogently demanded by Sutapa Biswas who was a student during the 1980s). These challenges generated equal degrees of hostility and excitement amongst the students in 1977. Jackie Fleming, the now renowned feminist cartoonist was on that course. I offered students the option of making work as well as writing about work. She made a brilliant series of cartoons in response about a young woman negotiating the varying systems of representation of womanhood from advertising to high art. Other women students felt threatened or alienated from their identification with modernism and the artist when confronted with the ideas of Berger, Benjamin, Godard, Nochlin, Burgin, and Mulvey to name a few. Rethinking art, even with this brilliant array of intellectual material, was often experienced as aggressively anti-art. This was part of the culture wars for sure.

Feminist perspectives informed my lectures on Van Gogh (gender and artistic identity, gender and representation, sexuality, prostitution, the maternal etc) and as I prepared to teach a course on Art and Visual Culture in the United States in the 1950s I had to begin from scratch to research artists such as Louise Nevelson, Lee Krasner or Helen Frankenthaler, and to insist that at least one session was dedicated to women as artists in this critical decade, even while the

concurrent film studies programme more easily facilitated a feminist analysis of culture since that was more advanced, consolidated and documented. It was in 1977 that Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin produced the first massive survey *Women Artists 1550-1950* in Los Angeles and the Brooklyn Museum.

This was the problem; women or gender issues were always an add-on. On the MA in Social History of Art (begun in 1978), there was a space for a session on feminism, but this hardly dented the powerful hegemony of materialist analysis. With the emergence of Cultural Studies and its MA in 1986, questions of sexual difference and psychoanalytically informed cultural theory were legitimated but again feminism or rather gender could always be subordinated as a 'special' along with race which was emerging through postcolonial thinking to a more central position. A way around this was to formulate modules that focused, for instance, on subjectivity and social process because while I was seeking to keep the space open for feminist studies of art and culture, I did not want to isolate gender from the warp and weft of social complexity in which other axes of power and conditions of subjectivity were in play.

Already in the 1980s, feminist students joined the MA in the Social History of Art with feminist research questions firmly on their minds and the space was both used by and informed by their interests leading to work on women artists and their histories as well as feminist interrogations and re-readings of work by men. It was clear that there were bifurcations within the pedagogical team of the Social History of Art, where the feminist instructor would engage across the board of social-historical methodologies; but the Marxists and others did not address feminism at all. Feminism remained for feminists alone; yet feminists also recognized other theoretical and art historical problematics. Sometimes students found themselves making difficult choices, risking being labeled as the follower of one or the other, torn between loyalties and possibilities. Queer students, however, found feminist spaces alone hospitable to their researches and identities and many clearly understood the larger implications of feminist challenges to the patriarchal, phallogocentric and heteronormative. Feminism was a resource not just an identification.

It was not for this reason alone that I made the decision in the early 1990s that the time had come for a dedicated graduate programme of feminist studies in the visual arts. By that moment, the complexity and density of the feminist

theoretical revolution across the arts, social sciences and humanities was so considerable, that the usual one-off seminar was woefully inadequate to grasp the shape of the ever expanding field and the variety of debates and theories in relation to postcolonial issues and international elaborations. The different philosophical and theoretical strands, the growing bodies of artistic practices, the critical debates between positions and approaches and the implications of geopolitical differences – all these needed careful, historically situated and interdisciplinary explorations.

Furthermore, by the early 1990s, there were students interested in feminist studies in the visual arts. This meant not only the study of women but attention to gender and sexual difference in the arts. It also implied a novel or at least critically conscious feminist remodelling of pedagogy. Students wanted a way of studying as women and men that enacted other feminist challenges to institutions of knowledge, learning processes, forms of exchange between teacher and student, student and student and modes of study and presentation. MAFEM was an innovation at many levels. Firstly it transgressed disciplinary borders: it brought together artists, art historians and those who would be critical writers and curators. Triangulating theory, history and practice, students on MAFEM might enter from fine art, art history or other disciplines. They would study theory in the presence of practice, history in the presence of theory and practice and practice in the presence of theory and history. Outcomes included art works and exhibitions as well as theses, and in many cases the curatorial and art history students worked on the exhibitions of the artists or even made work to participate. These shows were in public spaces such as Leeds City Art Gallery, or the gallery of Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Leeds Art Gallery. Defying the often antagonistic divisions between studio and seminar room, working to enact performatively the interdisciplinary without in any sense eroding the distinctive demands and technicalities of each area of practice, the project made a novel space within the university system for demonstrating the radical nature of feminist work inspired by Adrienne Rich's idea of a 'woman-centered university'.<sup>2</sup> This involved thinking through the social, economic, intellectual, hierarchical and institutional sexism that inhibited the access of all women to formal education. Class was a major issue in this project because in spite of sharing a gender, women are divided by other axes of power and difference that profoundly determine the manner in which

experience and social living are understood. One of the first exhibitions created by the first MAFEM cohort, all women from working class backgrounds, was a circle of cast heads placed on pedestals over whose mouths and eyes different kinds of blinders or gags had been placed, while out of one mouth poured a scroll on which was imprinted a collage of theoretical texts. Placed in the central court of the university, the installation powerfully evoked the complex relations of confidence and silencing that had been at play in the seminar during its first year of operation. The making of the art work brought into visibility the pain, rage and choked feelings of women intimidated by the social presence of privileged students who so freely inhabited the spaces of intellectual speech.

At the end of the first year of the programme, I invited Frances Rifkin to assist me as the unexamined potency of class had menaced the fragile emergence of a feminist space for learning. Frances Rifkin introduced to us the work of Augusto Boal, a colleague of Brazilian pedagogical radical Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Boal wrote the *Theatre of the Oppressed* as a parallel to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.<sup>3</sup> Freire remains a fundamental point of reference for a feminist pedagogical project in locating the learning process in the life-worlds of the learners as opposed to that of those who would educate, instruct and thus incorporate the other into the dominant political and social order and in contrasting education as the practice of freedom to its conventional, banking function of filling up the student with knowledge aimed at integration into the existing logics and systems. Boal argues that the socio-political power of a society inhabits every cell, inflects every relationship and is also performed and reiterated in the exchanges which take place in society's formal sites. Thus far from being an ivory tower removed from the real world, the classroom and the university as a whole itself embodies and rehearses the realities and relations of the social order. It is formally inhospitable to its social minorities even when they form the actual majorities. My feminist pedagogy, drawing from Rich and from Freire, also drew from the writings of black feminists, notably bell hooks and Elsa Barkley Brown. bell hooks emphasises how teaching is 'a revolutionary activity',<sup>4</sup> when she writes,

**Feminist education – the feminist classroom – is and should be a place where there is a sense of struggle, where there is a visible acknowledgement of the union of theory and practice, where we work together as teachers and students to overcome the estrangement and alienation that have become so much the norm in the contemporary university.**<sup>5</sup>

Given that difference in society enters into the ethics and politics of the classroom, Elsa Barkley Brown, reflecting on her experience of teaching African American history in the United States academy, argues that the challenge for critical pedagogy is both to centre oneself in the experience of the lives of those about whom we are teaching and to challenge the power of normative thinking for which those lives are “*other*”, different, non-normative. She draws on Bettina Aptheker’s concept of ‘**pivoting the center**’ (sic). No one has to imagine they can understand the experience of another; but they can learn to ‘**validate it, judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or the need to adopt the framework as their own.**’<sup>6</sup> Thus Elsa Barkley Brown is not talking about decentring, but pivoting the centres, allowing there to be many centres of experience, creating a patchwork of realities rather than hierarchies and norms.

Thus learning from the real pain and conflict that emerged in the first year of the programme because I had not fully attended to class vulnerabilities and power, I realized that in introducing feminism into the curriculum, I would have to engage the students fully in the nature of the challenge that feminism, when informed by an extended understanding of how race, class and sexuality constantly inflected any instance of gender posed at the level of the embodied and subjective process of entering the institution and learning together.

To this end, I worked towards the idea of creating a safe space to learn. Engaging with the kinds of issues feminism poses both theoretically and existentially required responsibility on my part because of the reality of what feminism itself asks us to address in both ourselves and the world. Thus following the classic feminist recognition of ‘**speaking**’ for oneself, and learning through attention to the everyday, the lived and the hitherto unspoken, I asked the students each year to begin with a story: how did each person arrive here and now? Inspired by ‘*Historia*’, part III of Mary Kelly’s installation *Interim* (1990), which traces the entry of women into feminism since 1968 through individual stories that reveals its many points of access and changing priorities, I asked them: How did they learn about feminism? What brought them to this moment? Some responded with ease, writing stories or making art works, doing performances or bringing in objects, relaxed by being able to make their stories available to others in their own terms. Others found the very concept tasteless and soppy. They had come to engage with tough theory and felt that this request exhibited the worst kind of feminist sentimentality. A few, never having

been asked to integrate intellectual and personal elements of their lives, were simply rendered silent, unable to speak other than in the combative ways learned as the articulate feminist challenger in the patriarchal classroom. The hesitant tended to be middle-class, successful already in the existing models of education and modes of patriarchal ventriloquism. But in time, participating in the process revealed something else: that the feminist questioning of the hierarchies of knowledge, the divisions between public and private spheres, the asymmetrical valuing of formal and informal knowledges was fundamental, necessary and ultimately emancipatory. It enabled the union of theory and practice. Furthermore, this initiating story process made palpable, sometimes in blushing stutters, in constricted throats, in embarrassed participation in uncomfortably novel procedures, the otherwise theoretically formulated propositions about women being silenced, othered in discourse and exiled from language. Since much of the subsequent study was going to explore, practically, theoretically or art historically the questions of women and (self)representation, the voice and the feminine, this starting point of women students being asked to experience how difficult it is to tell their own stories, to write, to speak, to represent in the first person, a situated, classed, gendered, ethnically specific, sexually oriented first person, was already an experiment that made vivid the otherwise abstracted and theoretically distanced analysis of the disjunctures or creative possibilities of women speaking as women of things patriarchal cultures disowned, erased, ignored, devalued or simply failed to know. By the time the students came to the second module on feminism, art and history or the third module on contemporary art, their understanding of texts by Cixous or Irigaray or the artists themselves was ‘*real*’.

Thus introducing feminism into a curriculum implies a much deeper confrontation with the very structures, protocols and habits of the academy. If these are not questioned, feminism ceases to have feminist effects on either the institution or its participating subjects. It cannot simply be a new academic topic assimilated to existing models of learning or teaching. The creation of a safe space for learning does not domesticate the seminar space; it does not reproduce a kind of mothering. It is undertaken precisely as a political recognition of how power operates at a capillary level, at work endlessly in our exchanges, destroying the very possibility for the kinds of rigorous intellectual or artistic transformations ambitious students rightly seek. Made aware

of the work of creating a safe space for learning, a space safe enough for new vulnerabilities, as difficult and novel theoretical challenges are confronted, the students also learned to reorient themselves as a group facilitated by me, rather than as students being taught by an expert. I could share the longer journey I had undertaken, functioning as guide across the endlessly shifting map of feminist theoretical and aesthetic interventions. But they formed their own study groups, independently working with each other, the better to use the seminar time with me and the better to change its dynamics between them. The effect was, for me, a little frightening since it was clear that what I had set in motion would have real repercussions for my own “*comfort zones*”. I was taken by this process beyond myself, required to work in new ways, and I was pushed beyond my own intellectual limits precisely by the brilliance, energy and collaborative as well as competitive excitements this new process released. It became a joint project whose outcomes none could have anticipated.

Based on this slim sketch of a tripartite programme – Feminism and Culture: Theoretical Perspectives; Feminism, Art & History; Feminist Criticism and Contemporary Practice in the Visual Arts – MAFEM became a zone for clarifying the contemporary project. In this process, I was collating a vast amount of feminist theoretical work, art historical and aesthetic practice into a provisional intelligibility. I was not establishing a new canon or an alternative story of art. The work was and still is exploratory, involving ethical responsibility to a past we are still trying to fathom. I absolutely refused to participate in the kind academic carving up that has now acquired the hegemony: i.e. that there were positivists and post-structuralists, essentialists and constructionists, first generation and second generation, Americans and Europeans. Instead I plotted out a landscape through which the students could travel, resting at points which seemed most relevant or interesting to them individually so that we travelled through a field of debates, focusing on developing questions rather than fixed positions. Conveying the dynamic of evolving feminist thought and practice, and the constant work of self-criticism and provocation was essential so that the students were not made to feel they were learning about a given entity; rather they were entering into a still lively and in fact hardly yet sketched out space of intellectual and artistic creativity to which they would keep adding their own chapters or works of arts.

This refusal to teach the fixed scenario of opposing factions was also motivated by the need to present feminism itself as an agonistic field, riven at times painfully by real conflicts of power and differential vulnerability. Class, race, sexuality in the metropolis(es) was also being altered by postcolonial critiques that demanded other kinds of ‘*pivoting*’ around the centre. With MAFEM students who formed the earliest cohorts we evolved a model for work: richly theorized, solidly historicized case studies that attended to the singularity and specificity of each artist’s practice. In 1992, I coined the phrase ‘*generations and geographies*’ as part of a critique of American-based formulations of the history of feminist art history and criticism that had appeared in the *Art Bulletin*.<sup>7</sup> It then transformed into a telling concept for seeking to produce international, postcolonial feminist readings in art. The idea is that all art works are singular and are produced at the intersection of a double axis. ‘*Generation*’ allowed for thinking about both the familial and the historical conditions of a practice or work, while ‘*geography*’ evoked the geo-political axis, the spatial, the local, but also the mobile. This concept became the title for a collection of papers based on the MA theses of two cohorts of the programme.<sup>8</sup> Inviting several better known and already established scholars to participate (and organizing a conference), I was able to attract a publisher so that these emerging feminist writers could get work published and visibly contribute to a particular modelling of this feminist project across theory, history and practice, that was international in range, and postcolonial in political awareness. The book itself would demonstrate the collaborative project across its own generations and geographies as well as a practical politics of how to challenge certain hierarchies of visibility and recognition. This is a practice I have long continued as a principle enabling emerging scholars to publish and to co-edit volumes.<sup>9</sup>

MAFEM students went onto doctoral research at Leeds and elsewhere. Many of its students are now professors or lecturers of art history or fine art, each developing their own singular mode of maintaining feminist critical practice in relation to the changing political, cultural and intellectual climate of international art making and art history under globalizing capitalism and liquid modern times.

### Issues for the Present

In 2003, the silence surrounding the abolition of the MAFEM programme at Leeds indicated the rapidity with which feminism had lost its place in the academic world. I

was unprepared for the lack of voices raised to defend the programme's existence or the ease with which an academic lifetime's work was erased from the visible field of graduate study. While post-colonial critique and queer theory remain legitimated and desirably in job adverts for university posts in art history, feminist studies do not. If there were already a feminist scholar in post, why would the institution expand beyond this one position in a department? Another reading of the situation is that feminism has shifted form and exists as an informing perspective at play within but not shaping the engagements with the changing fields of art historical and visual cultural studies. Despite knowing this to be the case, I remain suspicious of this development because it means that feminism is left standing still as an intellectual project, and that although a certain sense of it, following whatever tendency or theoretical perspective, is retained, feminism remains static as a perspective and as a continuing project of substantive research as well as theoretical innovation. Integration is good; but is there not still a dynamic field that has its own intellectual and art historical histories which are still evolving?

The experience I have had is that whatever I am doing as a feminist thinker and scholar now is a result of pedagogical practice: through my engagement with others in a learning process I have acquired some accumulated knowledge but this is always developing. Great feminist thinkers and artists do not stand still; they ask new questions, look for new resources, alter the landscape as they respond to the forces in contemporary society that demand new analysis and rethinking. Many of those who were first brushed with second wave feminism as a social and a theoretical movement in the early 1970s are now in their sixties and seventies. But they have worked all these decades, deepening as well as evolving their feminist thought and practice. Feminism is still in the process of "*becoming*" while its profoundly rich archive of research and thought offers much to reconsider and build upon. The recent spate of historicizing exhibitions risk containing feminist interventions in art inside closed chronological brackets; they risk burying these interventions in a musealized past, confining them to a past historical period, even though the artists selected for such historical retrospective shows are still surprising us with new work, and are still growing still in depth and relevance as contributions to contemporary art and to feminism?

In my own case, I feel that teaching and working in a challenging environment with critically engaged others are

vital elements for sustaining the dynamic of feminist research. I still recall the intense shock I experienced in 1999 when I delivered a series of lectures on my then current conceptualization: *Differencing the Canon* to an audience at a research institute in Vienna only to meet with the quiet indifference of the young scholars, turning away with embarrassment from my concerns which they regarded as anachronistic. Feminism, misunderstood as the promotion of the interests of metropolitan women, seemed irrelevant to them; the young women felt they had it all now and the young men felt no compulsion to know anything about feminist thought and art. Well beyond any residual concern for the billions of women worldwide who remain in enforced illiteracy, or for those whose genitals are surgically mutilated, or for those forced into marriages and domestic servitude, or for those trafficked for sex, in this view, feminism as a mode of interrogating power relations, hierarchies, safety, violence, abuse, economics, politics, thought or culture, remained invisible, unheard, unimagined. It was not part of their intellectual or theoretical landscape.

I hope that my work continues to evolve: it does so through generating concepts, each generated to assist in a double project. One aspect is the critique and deconstruction of the dominant modes of knowledge and forms of understanding of art represented by institutionalized art history. The second aspect is the creation of interventions through which other modes of thinking about, analyzing and understanding the making of art '**in, of and from the feminine**' might arise. *Old Mistresses*, a concept taken on from the title of Broun's and Gabhart's founding exhibition in 1972 on women artists of the past, referenced the sexual dissymmetry of language that revealed the political and phallic unconscious of Art History.<sup>10</sup> *Vision and Difference* explored what Jacqueline Rose named '**sexuality in the field of vision**'.<sup>11</sup> *Framing Feminism* questioned the lack of histories of feminist work in Britain and performed an archiving of contemporary feminist projects. *Gender and the Colour of Art History* exposed a deep racism in art historical discourse and practice. *Generations and Geographies* proposed a method for doing international, postcolonial, queer feminist art history and criticism. *Differencing the Canon*, which played on Derridian *différance*, was linked with the concept of *feminist desire*, a neologism for wanting different histories, histories of difference. Then came the concept of the *virtual feminist museum*, which acknowledged both the exclusion of women

whose names they have never encountered, the sense that art can be read in ways which acknowledge the violence, desire, power or difference they sense but have been taught to ignore: all this continues to draw students to want to study feminist theory and art history.

At Leeds I find myself with many feminist colleagues, who are engaging with questions of sexual and other differences in medieval art, art from South East Asia, Jewish art and throughout cultural theory and studies. But I suppose I remain the only one who identifies my overall academic and personal project as the elaboration of a continuing feminist intervention into art history sustained by theory, practice and history, that focuses on what women do as artists, what it means to remember what they have done, record and analyze what they are doing, and make that activity become part of an inclusive revisioning of art's histories.

My final reference point then is the first year BA teaching for which I am responsible for a core module that questions 'the story of art'. Here I am able performatively to enact the model of an "inclusive" history of art, not adding women on in special segments but trying to show students what a history of art looks like when we start from the premise that women and men, of all nationalities, sexualities and social positions made the art we are studying and that gender is always-already an issue in work by men as much as by women. The tension thus remains between the dedicated space for learning the complex history of feminist thought and practice and the integration of a feminist insistence on the presence and the differences between women in the histories of art we research and teach. At different levels and in different ways, I continuously move between these two modes while feminist desire motivates it all. The effectiveness as always depends upon the manner in which I have been able to learn and formulate resonates with the students, meets their burgeoning awareness, furnishes materials for them to think through from within their lives and experiences. But it is clear that feminist pedagogy now and in the future must meet their academic expectations while shifting their notions of how learning and life, reflection and experience, knowledge and understanding interface.

### Notes

1. The wider feminist community shared my concern and expressed considerable support
2. Adrienne Rich 'Towards a Woman-Centred University' in *On Lies*,

artists and feminist perspectives from the actual museum, while borrowing its space of encounter to propose the continuing virtuality of feminism, feminism to come, becoming-feminist as a genuine creativity and differencing still, always at work.

Sharing with others the sense that beyond the utopian energy of the new social movements that animated the later twentieth century lay the pressure of that century's terrible catastrophes, my work has also focused on trauma and its aesthetic encryption or transformation. New kinds of artwork, new sites of investigation, new communities to engage with, new theories to study and explicate maintain the impetus and the sense that there is still so much to do. We have barely begun with the outline of possible work and with the formulation of methods for our historical memory and future projects. This has given rise to a new project: IFF – the *Institute for Feminist Futures* which I wish to launch precisely because the spaces within the academy are being closed down prematurely. We still have so much to do and we shall do it ourselves through international networking and cooperation.

Thus I conclude with Mary Kelly who suggested that

the work of fidelity to the event that was feminism circa 1968 is still to come as new generations remake its unfinished project. As the graduate programme was closed down – although the elements are still taught a little irregularly – I initiated with a new colleague, a feminist medievalist, an undergraduate module named *Old Mistresses: Gender, Art and Power*. I felt the need to begin again at ground level by returning to the first concept with which I worked as each new generation of art and art history students clearly need to be introduced to the fundamentals of gender analysis of art/art history as well as to learn that there have been women artists in the past. Much to my amazement this module recruits about 60 students a year and generates a cohort for a specialist third level class on femininity, modernity and representation and spawns many dissertations. Students of diverse backgrounds clearly find through this sometimes theoretically tough but also richly art historical module a topic or approach about which they want to do more. Feminism is vividly there as they use the archive of feminist writing and art practice to explore the challenges they concretely experience as young women in a world of eroticizing and degrading imaging of women, in which political self-emanicipation is mistaken for self-sexualization. The founding texts, encountered for the first time, the discovery of works by artists who are women

*Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London: Virago Press, 1984) pp. 125-156

3. Augusto Boal *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Continuum Books, 1970)

4. bell hooks 'Toward a revolutionary feminist pedagogy' in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist/Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) pp.49-54

5. *ibid* p.51

6. Elsa Barkley Brown 'African-American Women's Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women's History' Micheline R. Malson et al. (eds.) *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 10. Betting Aptheker *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness and the Meaning of Daily Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989)

7. Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Matthews 'The Feminist Critique of Art and Art History' *Art Bulletin* 69:3 (1987) pp. 326-57; Griselda Pollock 'Generations and Geographies: The Politics of Theory and the Histories of Art' *Genders* 17 (1993) pp. 97-120 given as a lecture in 1992 at the University of Southern California

8. Griselda Pollock (ed.) *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London; Routledge, 1996)

9. I have worked with Alison Rowley (we have done performative works together, organized panels and written collaborative pieces using the dialogical format), Vanessa Corby, Victoria Anderson, Victoria Turvey Sauron, Young-Paik Park-Chun, Chen Hsiang-Chun (Elsa) as well as many others

10. Ann Gabbart and Elizabeth Broun *Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past* (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1972)

11. Jacqueline Rose *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986)

### Flaudette May Datuin, University of the Philippines

In the early 1990s, I initiated a course entitled 'Gender Issues in the Arts', which is now a popular elective course open to majors in our art history program, as well as to students in other disciplines. The course is useful because it allows teacher and students to study feminist frames and case studies in more depth. However, there is now a direction towards making gender more organic to all our courses, instead of in separate academic "ghetto," where all we have to do is "add women and stir." In all our courses, we strive to put forward a notion of the aesthetic as a multi-dimensional encounter, inseparable from everyday life, and one that does not hinge on a specific mode of formal or codified art. In other words, our discussions depart from the conventional 'auteur' centered, formalist, linear and wall-bound – and therefore sterile- expositions about the arts.

This refunctioning of the aesthetic necessitates a rethinking of the process of "looking," which one does, not from a disembodied seeing eye, but a seeing, thinking and feeling body – one that is racially defined, classed and sexed. This stress on the body is a key contribution of feminism, and it is a key term that triggers a rethinking of parameters, not just in the humanities, but in allied fields, as well. The centrality of the body as object of

study and as contested ground of competing discourses remind students of the inextricable connection between our minds and bodies, our sexes and our genders, as well as the fluid and ever-changing social positions we occupy as social subjects.

Such a stance compels students to lock horns with the interface between social personhood and personal politics. In the long haul, they are made to realize that feminist theory and women's struggle, while relatively autonomous, is also primarily connected and integral to collective movements for social change. In other words, the feminist slogan 'The personal is political' has a more inclusive and encompassing resonance, as it becomes a critique, not just of patriarchy, but of the prevailing socio-economic structure. To critique patriarchy is to critique social and political inequality; to come to terms with political and social inequality is to address personal oppression politically. To address the political in the context of personal struggle is to aspire to transform the world totally – that at the end of the day, is the contribution of feminist pedagogy in the context of a refashioned and functioning humanities.

## Notes from the Front Line

### Rebecca Jenniso, Kyoto Seika University

As I try to imagine where a young woman student (at my University in Japan) might encounter a discussion of feminist art, there are several things that occur to me. First, like the UK, she might (or might not) hear it mentioned in several lectures on the history of art. She would be much more likely to encounter the word “gender” than the word “feminism” (now, seen as a bit too “scary”) and more likely in a sociology or education course than in an art history class. I think she would find that several lecturers in a few of her courses would refer in some depth to the work of well-known women artists like Yanagi Miwa and Mori Mari, and perhaps a few of the important exhibitions, such as Kasahara Michiko’s groundbreaking *Gender Beyond Memory* (Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 1996). She may also hear more discussion of sexuality and “queer” issues in some courses than she would have ten or fifteen years ago.

It is hard to believe that I first taught a course on women and the arts here more than twenty-five years ago. Like many of my generation, the discussion began in coffee shops or seminars outside of the institution, as we began to critically question the “canon” of art history, finding affirmation and inspiration in the wave of feminist criticism emerging in literary and art history studies. In the mid-1980s, I offered a course on women artists to a handful of students, but found it hard to sustain because of the dearth of materials in Japanese. But by the early 1990s, thanks to the inspiring accomplishments of friends and colleagues such as Hagiwara Hiroko, we were able to offer a course on women and the arts using the Japanese translation of Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock’s *Old Mistresses*. For eight years we were able to teach an exciting and innovative course in which women artists, composers, film-makers, scholars and curators spoke to over one hundred students about the diverse ways in which they raised questions about their field and evolved innovative practices and strategies. My colleague Matsuno Miki and I were so often intrigued to discover unexpected and intriguing intersections in the lectures of our guests; as the course progressed, more of the guests were speaking about the historical and contemporary context of Japan and East Asia, as they raised new questions about multi-layered histories of diverse women. I wonder whether the young woman taking a course today would be able to imagine that sense of excitement and discovery.

At the time, I think we imagined that this course might become part of the curriculum, and that we might go on to explore other feminist work in emerging areas in popular culture and film. But the course was cut in another round of curriculum reform, perhaps (ironically) intended to introduce “higher global standards” through a curriculum more in line with established disciplines, and classroom results more “quantifiable”.

Several years later, we were able to publish a number of the lectures from the course in a book [Miki Soko and Rebecca Jennison (eds.) *Hyogen suru onnatachi (Women and the Arts)* (Tokyo: Daisan shokan, 2009)], which I hope – like a message in a bottle – will reach some of those women students interested in discussions of women in the arts with a feminist perspective. And at the same time, there are new areas of discussion emerging, that also began in locations *outside* academic institutions. A new graduate program headed by Takemiya Keiko and Jaqueline Berndt focussing on manga, a field in which women – particularly as Manga artists – are playing a vitally important role was started this year. My hope is that this may create another opening where feminist questions might be raised and discussed.