

Griselda Pollock
Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories*

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Is adding women to art history the same as producing feminist art history?¹ Demanding that women be considered, not only changes what is studied and what becomes relevant to investigate, but it challenges the existing disciplines politically. Women have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structural sexism of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy. What we learn about the world and its peoples is ideologically patterned in conformity with the social order within which it is produced. Women's studies are not just about women- but about the social systems and ideological schemas which sustain the domination of men over women within the other mutually inflecting regimes of power in the world, namely those of class and those of race.²

Feminist art history, however, began inside art history. The first question was »Have there been women artists?« We initially thought about women artists in terms of art history's typical procedures and protocols- studies of artists (the monograph), collections of works to make an *œuvre* (catalogues raisonnées), questions of style and iconography, membership of movements and artists' groups, and of course the question of quality. It soon became clear that this would be a straitjacket in which our studies of women artists would reproduce and secure the normative status of men artists and men's art whose superiority was unquestioned in its disguise as Art and the Artist. As early as 1971 Linda Nochlin warned us against getting into a no-win game trying to name female Michelangelos. The criteria of greatness was already male defined. The question »Why are there no Great Women Artists?« simply would not be answered to anything but women's disadvantage if we remained tied to the categories of art history. These specified in advance the kind of answers such a question would merit. Women were not historically significant artists (they could never deny their existence once we began to unearth the evidence again) because they did not have the innate nugget of genius (the phallus) which is the natural property of men. So she wrote: »A Feminist critique of the discipline is needed which can pierce cultural-ideological limitations, to reveal biases and inadequacies *not merely in regard to the question of women artists, but in the formulation of the crucial questions of the discipline as a whole*. Thus the so-called woman question far from being a peripheral sub-issue, can become a catalyst, a potent intellectual instrument, probing the most basic and »natural« assumptions, providing a paradigm for other kinds of internal questioning, and providing links with paradigms established by radical approaches in other fields.«³

In effect Linda Nochlin called for a paradigm shift. The notion of a paradigm has become quite popular amongst social historians of art who borrow from Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in order to articulate the crisis in art history which overturned its existing certainties and conventions in the early 1970s.⁴ A paradigm defines the objectives shared within a scientific community, what it aims to research and explain, its procedures and its boundaries. It is the disciplinary matrix. A paradigm shift occurs when the dominant mode of investigation and explanation is found to be unable satisfactorily to explain the phenomenon which is that science's or discipline's job to analyse. In dealing with the study of the history of nineteenth and twentieth century art the dominant paradigm has been identified

1 Freely paraphrased from Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Placing Women's History in History*, *New Left Review*, 1982, no. 133, p. 6.

2 For the founding analysis in this area which has much to teach feminist studies while demanding feminist studies comprehend deconstructions of imperialist discourse and practice see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978.

3 Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* in ed. Elizabeth Baker and Thomas B. Hess, *Art and Sexual Politics*, London Collier Macmillan 1973, p. 2. See also the article in which she poses the corollary question, *Why have there been Great Male ones?*, *The De-Politicisation of Courbet...*, October, 1982 no 22.

4 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1962.

as modernist art history. It is not so much that it is defective but that it can be shown to work ideologically to constrain what can and cannot be discussed in relation to the creation and reception of art. Indeed modernist art history shares with other established modes of art history certain key conceptions about creativity and the suprasocial qualities of the aesthetic realm.⁵ Indicative of the potency of the ideology is the fact that when, in 1974 the social historian of art T.J. Clark in an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* threw down the gauntlet from a marxist position he still entitled the essay »on the Conditions of Artistic Creation«. ⁶

Within a few years the term »production« would have been inevitable and »consumption« has come to replace »reception«. ⁷ This reflects the dissemination from the social history of art of categories of analysis derived from Karl Marx's *Grundrisse*. The introduction to this text which only became known in the mid 1950s has been a central resource for rethinking a social analysis of culture. In the opening section Marx tries to think about how he can conceptualize the totality of social forces each of which has its own distinctive conditions of existence and effects yet none the less relies on others in the whole. His objective is political economy and so he analyzes the relations between production, consumption, distribution and exchange breaking down the separateness of each activity so that he can comprehend each as a distinct moment within a differentiated and structural totality. Each is mediated by the other moments, i.e. cannot exist or complete its purpose without the others in a system in which production has priority as it sets all in motion. Yet each also has its own specificity, its own distinctiveness within this non-organic totality. Marx gives the example of art in order to explain how the production of an object generates and conditions its consumption and vice versa: »Production not only supplies a material for a need, but also supplies a need for the material. As soon as consumption emerges from its initial natural state of crudity and immediacy... it becomes itself mediated as a drive by the object. The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art – like every other product – creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption 1. by creating the material for it; 2. by determining the manner of consumption; 3. by creating the products initially posited as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer's inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need.« ⁸

This formulation banishes the typical art historical narrative of a gifted individual creating out of his (sic) personal necessity a discrete work of art which then goes out from its private place of creation into a world where it will be admired and cherished by art lovers expressing a human capacity for valuing beautiful objects. The discipline of art history like literary criticism works to naturalise these assumptions. What we are taught is how to appreciate the greatness of the artist and quality of art objects.

This ideology is contested by the argument that we should be studying the totality of social relations which form the conditions of the production and consumption of objects designated in that process as art. Writing of the shift in a related discipline of literary criticism, Raymond Williams has observed: »What seems to me very striking is that nearly all forms of contemporary critical theory are theories of *consumption*. That is to say, that they are concerned with understanding an

5 For a classic statement see Mark Roskill, *What is Art History?* London, Thames and Hudson, 1976.

6 T.J. Clark, *On the Conditions of Artistic Creation*, *Times Literary Supplement* 24 May 1974, p. 561-3.

7 For example see the title and the currency thereby afforded to *The Social Production of Art*, Janet Wolff, London, Macmillan Press, 1981.

8 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1857-8) translated Martin Nicolaus, London Penguin Books, 1973, p. 92.

object in such a way that it can be profitably and correctly consumed.«⁹ The alternative approach is not to treat the work of art as object but to consider art as *practice*. Williams advocates analysing first the nature and then the *conditions of a practice*. Thus we will address the general conditions of social production and consumption prevailing in a particular society which ultimately determine the conditions of a specific form of social activity and production, cultural practice. But then since all the component activities of social formation are practices we can move with considerable sophistication from the crude marxist formulation of all cultural practices being dependent upon and reducible to economic practices (the famous base/superstructure-idea) towards an conception of a complex social totality with many interrelating practices constitutive of and ultimately determined within the matrix of that social formation, which Marx formulated as the mode of production. Raymond Williams in another essay made the case: »The fatally wrong approach, to any such study, is from the assumption of separate orders, as when we ordinarily assume that political institutions and conventions are of a different and separate order from artistic institutions and conventions. Politics and art, together with science, religion, family life and the other categories we speak of as absolutes, belong in a whole world of active and interactive relationships... If we begin from the whole texture, we can go on to study particular activities, and their bearings on other kinds. Yet we begin, normally, from the categories themselves, and this has led again and again to a very damaging suppression of relationships.«¹⁰

Williams is formulating here one of the major arguments about method propounded by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, where Marx asked himself where to begin his analysis. It is easy to start with what seems a self evident category, such as »population« in Marx's case, or »art« in ours. But the category does not make sense without understanding of its components. So what method should be followed? »Thus if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination move analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imaginary concrete to ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the population again, but this time not as a chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations.«¹¹

If we were to take art as our starting point, it would be a chaotic conception, an unwieldy blanket term for a diversified range of complex social, economic and ideological practices and factors. Thus we might break it down to production, criticism, patronage, stylistic influences, iconographic sources, exhibitions, trade, training, publishing, sign systems, publics, etc. There are many art history books which leave the issue in that fragmented way and put it together as a whole only by compiling chapters which deal with these components separately. But this is to leave the issue at the analytical level of the thin abstractions – i.e. elements abstracted from their concrete interactions. So we retrace the steps attempting to see art as a *social practice*, as a totality of many relations and determinations, i.e. pressures and limits.

Shifting the paradigm of art history involves therefore much more than adding new materials – women and their history – to existing categories and methods. It has led to wholly new ways of conceptualizing what it is we study and how we do it. One of the related disciplines in which radical new approaches were on offer was the social history of art. The theoretical and methodological debates of marxist historiography are extremely pertinent and necessary for producing a feminist paradigm for the study of what it is proper to rename as cultural production.

9 Raymond Williams, *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory*, in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London Verso Books, 1980, p. 46.

10 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (1961), London Pelican Books, 1965, ed. 1980, p. 55-6.

11 Marx, *op. cit.* p. 100.

While it is important to challenge the paternal authority of Marxism under whose rubric sexual deviations are virtually natural and inevitable and fall beneath its theoretical view, it is equally important to take advantage of the theoretical and historiographical revolution which the marxist tradition represents. A feminist historical materialism does not merely substitute gender for class but deciphers the intricate interdependence of class and gender as well as race in all forms of historical practice. None the less there is a strategic priority in insisting upon recognition of gender power and of sexuality as historical forces of significance as great as any of the other matrices privileged in Marxism or other forms of social history or cultural analysis.

There were, however, other new models developing in corresponding disciplines such as literary studies and film theory to name but the most influential. Initially the immediate concern was to develop new ways of analysing texts. The notion of a beautiful object or fine book expressing the genius of the author/artist and through him (sic) the highest aspirations of human culture was displaced by a stress on the productive activity of texts- scenes of work, writing or sign making, and of reading, viewing. How is the historical and social at work in the production and consumption of texts? What are texts doing socially?

Cultural practices were defined as signifying systems, as practices of *representation*, sites not for the production of beautiful things evoking beautiful feelings. They produce meanings and positions from which those meanings are consumed. Representation needs to be defined in several ways. As representation the term stresses that images and texts are not mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their sources. Representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence.¹² Representation can also be understood as ›articulating‹ in a visible or socially palpable form social processes which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation. In the first sense representation of trees, persons, places is understood to be ordered according to the conventions and codes of practices of representation, painting, photography, literature and so forth. In the second sense, which involves the first inevitably, representation articulates – puts into words, visualizes, puts together – social practices and forces which are not, like trees, there to be seen but which we theoretically know to condition our existence. In one of the classic texts enunciating this phenomenon, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, (1852) Karl Marx repeatedly relies on the metaphor of the stage to explain the manner in which the fundamental and economic transformations of French society were played out in the political arena 1848-51, a political level which functioned as a representation but then actively effected the conditions of economic and social development in France subsequently. Cultural practice as a site of such representation has been analysed in terms derived from Marx's initial insights about the relation between the political and economic levels.¹³ Finally representation involves a third inflection, for it signifies something represented to, addressed to a reader/viewer/consumer.

Theories of representation have been elaborated in relation to Marxist debates about ideology. Ideology does not merely refer to a collection of ideas or belief. It is defined as a systematic ordering of a hierarchy of meanings and a setting in place of positions for the assimilation of those meanings. It refers to material practices embodied in concrete social institutions by which the social systems, their conflicts and contradictions are negotiated in terms of the struggles within social forma-

12 R. Barthes, *The Rhetoric of the Image*, in ed. S. Heath, *Image- Music- Text*, London, Fontana 1977. This remains a classic example of this practice of analysis.

13 K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, (1852) in K. Marx und F. Engels, *Selected Works on One Volume*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1970. For discussion see also S. Hall, *The »Political« and the »Economic« in Marx's Theory of Classes*, in ed. A. Hunt *Class and Class Structure*, London, Lawrence Wishart, 1977.

tions between the dominant and the dominated, the exploiting and the exploited. In ideology cultural practices are at once the means by which we make sense of the social process in which we are caught up and indeed produced. But it is a site of struggle and confusion, for the character of the knowledges produced are ideological, partial, conditioned by social place and power.

Understanding of what specific artistic practices are doing, their meanings and social effects demands therefore a dual approach. Firstly the practice must be located as part of the social struggles between classes, races, genders articulating with other sites of representation. But secondly we must analyse what any specific practice is doing, what meanings is being produced and how and for whom. Semiotic analysis has provided necessary tools for systematic description of how images or languages or other sign systems, (fashion, eating, travel etc) produce meanings and positions for the consumption of meanings. Mere formal analysis of sign systems, however, can easily loose contact with the sociality of a practice. Semiotic analysis approached through developments in theories of ideology and informed by analyses of the production and sexing of subjectivities in psychoanalysis provided new ways to understand the role of cultural activities in the making of meanings, but more importantly in the making of social subjects. The impact of these procedures on the study of cultural practices entirely displaces pure stylistic or iconographic treatments of isolated groups of objects. Cultural practices do a job which has a major social significance in the articulation of meanings about the world in the negotiation of social conflicts, in the production of social subjects.

As critical as these »radical approaches in other fields« was the massive expansion of feminist studies attendant on the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960s. Women's studies emerged in almost all academic disciplines challenging the »politics of knowledge«. ¹⁴ But what is the object of women's studies? Writing women back does indeed cause the disciplines to be reformulated but it can leave the disciplinary boundaries in tact. The very divisions of knowledge into segregated compartments have political effects. Social and feminist studies of cultural practices in the visual arts are commonly ejected from art history by being labelled a sociological approach as if reference to social conditions and ideological determinations are introducing foreign concerns into the discrete realm of art. But if we aim to erode the false divisions what is the unifying framework for the analysis of women?

In their introduction to the anthology *Women and Society*, the collective responsible for the »Women in Society« course at Cambridge University in the 1970s questioned the possibility of even taking the term women for granted: »At first sight, it might seem as if concepts like male/female, man/woman, individual/family, are so selfevident that they need no »decoding«, but can simply be traced through various historical or social changes. These changes would, for example, give a seventeenth century English woman a different social identity from a low-caste Indian woman today, or would ascribe different functions to the family in industrial and pre-industrial societies. But the problem with both these examples is that they leave the alleged subject of these changes (woman, the family) with an apparently coherent identity which is shuffled from century to century or from society to society as if it was something that already existed independent of particular circumstances. One purpose of this book, and of our course as it has gradually evolved, is to question that coherency: to show that it is constructed out of social givens which can themselves be subjected to similar questioning. This book, therefore, concen-

14 Ed. Dale Spender, *Men's Studies Modified. The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines*, Oxford, The Pergamon Press, 1981.

trates on themes that return to the social rather than to the individual sphere, *emphasising the social construction of sexual difference.*»¹⁵ (my italics).

At a conference the artist Mary Kelly was asked to talk to the question ›What is feminist art?‹ She redirected the question to ask ›What is the problematic for feminist artistic practice?‹¹⁶ The problematic for feminist analyses of visual culture as part of a broader feminist enterprise could be defined in terms offered above, the social construction of sexual difference. But it would need to be complemented by analysis of the psychic construction of sexual difference which is the site for the inscription into individuals through familial social relations of the socially determined distinction which privileges sex as a criterion of power.

We do need to point out the discrimination against women and redress their omission. But this can easily become a negative enterprise with limited objectives, namely correction and improvement. In art history we have documented women's artistic activity and repeatedly exposed the prejudice which refused to acknowledge women's participation in culture.¹⁷ But has it had any real effect? Courses on women and art are occasionally allowed in marginal spaces which do not replace the dominant paradigm. But even then there is cause for alarm. For instance in my institution on a four year degree scheme students are exposed to feminist critiques of art history and a course on contemporary feminist artists for a period of twenty weeks, one two-term course. None the less the question was raised by an external assessor as to whether there was not too much feminism in this course. Indeed we should be deeply concerned about bias but no one seems unduly concerned about the massive masculinism of all the rest of our courses. The anxiety reflects something greater at stake than talking about women. Feminist interventions demand recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction.

So long as we discuss women, the family, crafts or whatever else we have done as feminists we endorse the social givenness of woman, the family, the separate sphere. Once we insist that sexual difference is *produced* through an inconnecting series of social practices and institutions of which families, education, art studios, galleries and magazines are part, then the hierarchies which sustain masculine dominance come under scrutiny and stress. Then what we are studying in analysing the visual arts is one instance of this production of difference which must of necessity be considered in a double frame: a) the specificity of its effects as a particular practice with its own materials, resources, conditions, constituencies, modes of training, competence, expertise, forms of consumption and related discourses, as well as its own codes and rhetorics; b) the interdependence for its intelligibility and meaning with a range of other discourses and social practices. For example the visitor to the Royal Academy in London in the mid-nineteenth century carried with her a load of ideological baggage composed of the illustrated papers, novels, periodical magazines, books on childcare, sermons, etiquette manuals, medical conversations etc. addressed to and consumed in distinctive ways by women of the bourgeoisie hailed through these representations as a lady. They are not all saying the same thing – the crude dominant ideology thesis. Each distinctively articulates the pressing questions about definitions of masculinity and femininity in terms of an imperialist capitalist system, in ways determined by its institutional site, producers and publics. But in the interconnections, repetitions and resemblances a prevailing regime of truth is generated providing a large framework of intelligibility within

15 The Cambridge Women's Studies Group, *Women in Society. Interdisciplinary Essays*, London Virago 1981, p. 3.

16 Mary Kelly, *On Sexual Politics and Art*, in ed. Brandon Taylor *Art and Politics*, Winchester School of Art, 1980 reprinted in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism, Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85*, London, Pandora Press, 1987.

17 The list of publications is now substantial. For a list and further discussion of the feminine stereotype see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981; London, Pandora Press 1986.

which certain kinds of understanding are preferred and others rendered unthinkable. Thus a painting of a woman having chosen a sexual partner outside marriage will be read as a fallen woman, a disordering force in the social fabric, an embodiment of mayhem, a contaminating threat to the purity of a lady's womanhood, an animalised and coarsened creature closer to the physicality of the working class populations and to the sexual promiscuity of »primitive« peoples etc. etc.

But will it be read differently if the viewer is a woman or a man? Will the representation be different if the producer is a woman or a man? One of the primary responsibilities of a feminist intervention must be the study of women as producers. But we have problematised the category »women« to make its historical construction the very object of our analysis. Thus we proceed not from the assumption of a given essence of woman outside of or partially immune to social conditions. Instead we have to analyse the dialectical relation between being a person positioned as in the feminine within historically varying social orders and the historically specific ways in which we always exceed our placements. To be a producer of art in bourgeois society in late nineteenth century Paris was in some sense a transgression of the definition of the feminine, itself classloaded term. Women were meant to be mothers and domestic angels who did not work and certainly did not earn money. Yet the same social system which produced this ideology of domesticity embraced and made vivid by millions of women, also generated the feminist revolt with a different set of definitions of women's possibilities and ambitions. Yet these were argued for and lived out within the boundaries established by the dominant ideologies of femininity. But in that subtle negotiation of what is thinkable or beyond the limits, the dominant definitions and the social practices through which they are produced and articulated are modified – sometimes radically as at moments of maximum collective political struggle by women or less overtly as part of the constant negotiations of contradictions to which all social systems are subject. In those spaces where difference is most insistently produced, it is possible to outline in larger characters the differential conditions of women's artistic practice in such a way that its delineation radically transforms the existing accounts of the phenomenon.

A particularly fruitful resource for contemporary cultural studies has been »discourse analysis«, particularly modelled on the writings of the French historian Michel Foucault. Foucault provided an anatomy of what he called the human sciences. Those bodies of knowledge and ways of writing which took as their object – and in fact produced as a category for analysis – Man. He introduced the notion of discursive formations to deal with the systematic interconnections between an array of related statements which define a field of knowledge, its possibilities and its occlusions. Thus on the agenda for analysis is not just the history of art, i.e. the art of the past, but also art history, the discursive formation which invented that entity to study it.

Of course there has been art before art history catalogued it. But art history as a organised discipline defined what it is and how it can be spoken of. In writing *Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) Rozsika Parker and I formulated the issue thus: »To discover the history of women and art is in part to account for the way art history is written. To expose its underlying values, its assumptions, its silences and its prejudices is also to understand that the way women artists are recorded is crucial to the definition of art and artist in our society.«¹⁸

Art history itself is to be understood as a series of representational practices which actively produce definitions of sexual difference and contribute to the pre-

18 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses, Women Art and Ideology*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, reprinted Pandora Press, 1986, p. 3.

sent configuration of sexual politics and power relations. Art History is not just indifferent to women; it is a masculinist discourse, party to the social construction of sexual difference. As an ideological discourse it is composed of procedures and techniques by which a specific representation of art is manufactured. That representation is secured around the primary figure of the artist as individual creator. No doubt theories of the social production of art combined with the structuralist assassination of the author would also lead to a denunciation of the archaic individualism at the heart of art historical discourse. But it is only feminists who have nothing to lose with the desecration of Genius. The individualism of which the artist is a prime symbol is gender exclusive.¹⁹ The artist is one major articulation of the contradictory nature of bourgeois ideals of masculinity.²⁰ The figure remains firmly entrenched in marxist art history witness the work of T.J. Clark, the Modern Art and Modernism course at the Open University and even Louis Althusser on Cremonini.²¹ It has become imperative to deconstruct the ideological manufacture of this privileged masculine individual in art historical discourse.

Complementing the task of deconstruction, is feminist rewriting of the history of art in terms which firmly locate gender relations as a determining factor in cultural production and in signification. This involves feminist readings, a term borrowed from literary and film theory. Feminist readings involve texts often produced by men and with no conscious feminist concern or design which are susceptible to new understanding through feminist perceptions. Psychoanalysis has been a major force in European and British feminist studies despite widespread feminist suspicion of the sexist applications of Freudian theory in this century. As Juliet Mitchell commented in her important book challenging feminist critiques, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Freudian theory offers not a patriarchal society but a description of one which we can use to understand its functionings. In her introduction she referred to the Parisian feminist group »Psychanalyse et Politique« and explained their interest in psychoanalysis.

»Influenced, but critically, by the particular interpretation of Freud offered by Jacques Lacan, »Psychanalyse et Politique« would use psychoanalysis for an understanding of the operations of the unconscious... Their concern is to analyse how men and women live as *men and women* within the material conditions of their existence – both general and specific. They argue that psychoanalysis gives us the concepts with which we can comprehend how ideology functions; closely connected with this, it further offers analysis of the place and meaning of sexuality and gender differences within society. So where Marxist theory explains the historical and economic situation, psychoanalysis, in conjunction with notions of ideology already gained in dialectical materialism, is the way of understanding ideology and sexuality.«²²

Foucault has provided a social account of the discursive construction of sexuality and he argued that in some critical sense »sexuality« is fundamentally bourgeois in origin. »It was in the great middle classes that sexuality albeit in a morally restricted and sharply defined form, first became of major ideological significance.«²³ Foucault identifies psychoanalysis as itself a product of the will to know, the construction and subjection of the sexualised body of the bourgeoisie.²⁴ The deployment of psychoanalytical theory by contemporary feminists is not a flight from historical analysis into some universalistic theory. Rooted historically on the mode of analysis (and a technique for relieving the extreme effects) of the social relations, practices and institutions which produced and regulated bourgeois sexual-

19 Griselda Pollock, *Art, Art. School and Culture – Individualism after the death of the artist*, *Block*, 1985/6 no 11 and *Exposure (USA)* 1986 vol 24 no 3.

20 For fuller discussion of this point see Griselda Pollock, *The History and Position of the Contemporary Woman Artist, Aspects*, 1984, no 28.

21 The point was made in a seminar by Adrian Rivkin at the University of Leeds in 1985. See also Simon Watney, *Modernist Studies: The Class of '83, Art History*, 1984, vol 7, no. 1. On Althusser see Louis Althusser, *Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract, and A Letter on Art... in Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, *New Left Books*, 1971.

22 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, London, Allen Lane, 1974, p xxii.

23 The quotation is from Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, London Longman, 1981, p. 33. Foucault elaborates the case in *The History of Sexuality (La Volonté de Savoir 1976)*, London, Allen Lane, 1978, p. 127. »We must say that there is a bourgeois sexuality, and that there are class sexualities. Or rather, that sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and that, in its successive shifts and transpositions, it induces class specific effects.«

24 Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

lity, psychoanalysis makes its revelation of the making of sexual difference. Foucault speaks of class sexualities but these fundamentally involved gendered sexualities. The making of masculine and feminine subjects crucially involved the manufacture and regulation of sexualities, radically different and hardly complementary let alone compatible, between those designated men and women. But these terms were ideological abstractions compared to the careful distinctions maintained between ladies and women in class terms, and gentlemen and working class men. The social definition of class and of gender were intimately connected. But the issue of sexuality and its constant anxieties pressed with major ideological significance on the bourgeoisie.

For through psychoanalytical theory we can recognise the specificity of visual performance and address. The construction of sexuality and its underpinning sexual difference is profoundly implicated in looking and »the scopic field«. Visual representation is a privileged site (forgive the Freudian pun).

There are significant continuities between feminist art practice and feminist art history for those dividing walls which normally segregate artmaking from art criticism and art history are eroded by the larger community to which we belong as feminists, the women's movement. We are our own conversational community developing our paradigms of practice in constant interaction and supportive commentary. The political point of feminist art history must be to change the present by means of how we re-represent the past. That means we must refuse the art historian's permitted ignorance of living artists and contribute to the present day struggles of living producers.

If modernist art history supplies the paradigm which feminist art history of the modern period must contest, modernist criticism and modernist practice are the targets of contemporary practice. Modernist thought has been defined as functioning on three basic tenets: the specificity of aesthetic experience; the self sufficiency of the visual; the teleological evolution of art autonomous from any other social causation or pressure.²⁵ Modernist protocols prescribe what is validated as »modern art«, i.e. what is relevant, progressing and in the lead. Art which engages with the social world is political, sociological, narrative, demeaning the proper concerns of the artist with the nature of the medium or with human experience embodied in painted or hewn gestures. Feminist artistic practices and texts have intervened in alliance with other radical groups to disrupt the hegemony of modernist theories and practices even now still active in art education in the so called post modernist culture. They have done this not merely to make a place for women artists within the art world's parameters. The point is to mount a sustained and far reaching political critique of contemporary representational systems which have an overdetermined effect in the social production of sexual difference and its related gender hierarchy. But equally importantly they are discovering ways to address women as subjects not masquerading as the feminine objects of masculine desire and fantasy and hatred.

Feminism-as-a-theory represents a diversified field of theorisations of at times considerable complexity. Their production and articulations is, however, qualified at all times by the political responsibility of working for the liberation of women.

What has art history to do with this struggle? A remote and limited discipline for the preservation of and research into objects and cultures of limited if not esoteric interest, art history might seem simply irrelevant. But art has become a growing part of big business, a major component of the leisure industry, a site of corporate

25 Charles Harrison, Introduction; Modernism Problems and Methods, Units 1-2, Modern Art and Modernism, The Open University Press, 1983, p. 5.

investment. Take for instance the exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1984, *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Sponsored by a multinational whose interests not only involved mineral, banking and property concerns, but publishing houses, zoos, waxworks as well as newspapers and magazines. What were they supporting – an exhibition which presented to the public, men looking at beautiful women as the natural order of making beautiful things? Reviewing the exhibition Deborah Cherry and I concluded: »High Culture plays a specifiable part in the reproduction of women's oppression, in the circulation of relative values and meanings for the ideological constructs of masculinity and femininity. Representing creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring masculine gaze, High Culture systematically denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meanings. Indeed High Culture is decisively positioned against feminism. Not only does it exclude the knowledge of women artists produced within feminism, but it works in a phallogocentric signifying system in which ›woman‹ is a sign within discourses on masculinity. The knowledge and significations produced by such events as *The Pre-Raphaelites* are intimately connected with the workings of patriarchal power in our society.«²⁶

There are many who see art history as a defunct and irrelevant disciplinary boundary. The study of cultural production has bled so widely and changed so radically from an object to a discourse and practice orientation that there is a complete communication breakdown between art historians working still within the normative discipline and those who are contesting the paradigm. We are witnessing a paradigm shift which will rewrite all cultural history. For these reasons I suggest that we no longer think of a feminist art history but a »feminist intervention« in art's histories. Where we are coming from is not some other fledgling discipline or interdisciplinary formation. It is from the women's movement made real and concrete in all the variety of practices in which women are actively engaged to change the world. This is no »new art history« aiming to make improvements, bring it up to date, season the old with current intellectual fashions or theory soup. The feminist problematic in this particular field of the social is shaped by the terrain – visual representations and their practices – on which we struggle. But it is ultimately defined within that collective critique of social, economic and ideological power which is the women's movement.

26 Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, *Patriarchal Power and the PreRaphaelites*, *Art History*, 1984 vol 7 no 4, p. 494.