Feminisms is Still Our Name

Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices

Edited by

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and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe

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This publication has its origin in the conference *Feminisms, Historiography and Curatorial Practices* held in 2008 at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which we initiated and co-organized with Anna Lundström. As key note speakers at the conference Baert, Jablonskiene, Jones, Kelly, and Pollock intellectually inspired us–which have been crucial for formulating the concept of this book–and there was a pronounced interest that their much appreciated lectures were to be published. They have all rewritten their lectures into the present thought-provoking essays.

We would also like to especially thank Anna Lundström for working so hard together with us when preparing for and accomplishing the conference. The conference was facilitated thanks to the generous financial and administrative support provided by Moderna Museet. We particularly wish to thank John-Peter Nilsson and Catrin Lundqvist for the successful co-operation; John-Peter for immediately supporting the idea and Catrin for being truly efficient in the planning of all parts of the event. Financial support was also given by The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

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—Jessica Sjöhom Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden
Stockholm June 2010

PREFACE

MALIN HEDLIN HAYDEN
AND JESSICA SJÖHOLM SKRUBBE

"Power is not solely about dominance and
hegemony, but also about challenge,
impeachment, and resistance..."[1]

At the heart of our understanding of *feminism/-s*, be it in singular or plural form, is a political imperative, an ideological critique that performative feminisms cannot undertake without still claiming that name.[2] In much of art historical research–and exhibitions–in Sweden (and elsewhere) today, that is informed (or sometimes only labelled) by explicitly feminist theory, or the broader field of gender theories, we see that an understanding of art production by female artists remains occupied with an idea of these artists and their works as representing an alternative. Not just any alternative, but an alternative to art production by male artists. We want to question the very idea of the *alternativeness* imbued in art historical practices, scholarly or curatorial, and initiate a discussion which does not focus explicitly on sex categories but also on the power structures, ideologies, and practices that still claim to be performative feminisms.

In recent times, the political stance, in the form of outspoken activism or other radical forms, seems to be on the cusp of becoming outmoded within academic and, particularly, curatorial practices. The most conspicuous feminist theme circulating in exhibition practices today, involves constant discussions of identities.[3] Often we have the intrusive feeling that something highly relevant to our own understanding of feminisms is lacking, is being replaced by something that merely skims the theoretical fields of feminisms where we find ourselves at home, so to speak. Moreover, it is by now imperative to scrutinize the history of feminist critique within art history and curatorial practices. We believe that the recent interest in historiography within the discipline of art history has not (yet) succeeded in including feminist art history and feminist curatorial practices in its scope. Despite the fact that feminism seems to be well established within both fields, we still lack vital and challenging discussions

regarding theoretical and methodological issues. By publishing this anthology, we would like to emphasize and to some degree meet the urgent need both for a critical historiography and for re-vitalizations of feminist practices within written as well as visual narratives of modern and contemporary art.

A radical change in how we tell stories and present facts, visually or linguistically: is that even possible anymore, without simply (re)turning to a historical position of feminisms that was charged with and defined by political and critical stance? A detour to the feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s sometimes seems to be the one necessary route to take in order to reclaim versions of feminisms that depart from political, critical, ideological, and activist commitments and aims. Do women artists and art by women still need to be defined and employed as a mode of challenge, on the very basis of them being *alternative*? What, more precisely, is so alternative in being a "woman" who produces art objects and texts on art? Doesn't a so-called alternative also have to adopt "the normative"? What else is an alternative, if not a deviation from the main route? Paradoxically, the normative position and understanding of art production by women is to support narratives of art by acting as an alternative. Pursuing the contextual space of the/an alternative, one also keeps (re-)framing the prevalent trajectory in art historical practices: namely a sex-biased structure. Even if academia in general by now has recognized both feminist studies and women's studies (which are not necessarily synonyms), this recognition has not radically changed the ideologies and aesthetic frames of art history. And, even less so–it seems to us–within exhibition practices. These are the reasons that we believe it is not only possible but in fact crucial to continue to ask for radical and feminist changes within current art historical narratives and curatorial practices.

There may be power in positions of the challenge, and in resistance. More specifically, if that is possible to map or grasp, where is the transformative power of contemporary feminisms? Practices that assume the name of feminisms but do not call for a change, even a modest one, are hard to understand as anything else but vague versions of feminism. And vague feminisms are what we see, too often, when walking through museums and art galleries (but perhaps we are only walking through the "wrong" places?).

If one understands feminisms as a political movement, and as such performed in all thinkable fields of life and society, then, as all movements necessarily have to re-define their goals, means, ideology *et cetera*, so too, do feminisms. As discourses are constantly in flux, those making, and partially producing, discourses have to repeatedly rethink "it" and respond

to changes. One aspect that we still find highly relevant to rethink, that we actually would like to elide, is the sex-biased premise. Whereas this bias is losing ground within academia, thanks to the advance of gender studies and studies in masculinities and queer theories, thinking in and acting by way of dichotomies is still widely practiced in the curatorial fields of knowledge production. Not surprisingly, we see a gap here.

Initiating and co-organizing the conference *Feminisms, Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, situated at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm in 2008, was for us a possibility to create a space and situations for addressing this assumed gap.[4] At one of the adjoining workshops, it was suggested that one strategy to surpass the gender-biased system of the art world would be to refuse to answer questions or react to statements that involve dichotomy.[5] It turned out, then and there, to be a real challenge to leave dichotomies behind–since language and thinking is so embedded with them. It appears that would demand an entirely new way of thinking (and while attempting this we noticed that a sense of paranoia was luring behind every utterance).

In recent years, several exhibitions and conferences explicitly addressing feminisms have been produced, which several of the essays in this book specifically address. Various aspects of current feminisms and their relationships and intersections within both academia and curatorial practices are reflected upon. Furthermore, some of the essays discuss how to define and whether to maintain the notion of *feminism*, as it has become plural.

Departing from her own concept *the political primal scene*, inherently posing the question "where did I come from?", Mary Kelly explores a deferred feminist political origin that returns as a sense of a gap–or loss–in the present. With references to Freud and Lacan, her essay "On Fidelity: Art, Politics, Passion and Event" reflects on the feminist heritage of the 1960s and 70s and how it returns to younger generations of feminists by way of symbolic connections preceding the performative imperative of the present. Kelly suggests that the heritage operates as an archive from which to get certain answers to the "where did I come from?". The past thereby becomes mappable, not unlike the identity process of becoming a self before oneself, hence a tool for navigation in historical socio-political events such as second wave feminisms. Past events are revisited by those who were not actually there, like an imaginary topography of the past where the imprints of those who came before can never exactly correspond to the steps taken by those walking now.

Amelia Jones's essay "The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970/2009" reconsiders the status of feminism in relation to a number of recent exhibitions showing past feminist art. Operating through a historical method itself informed through feminist discourse (looking forward, backward, and at feminist "presents" as if from the impossible vantage point of a void or central core), Jones complicates the possibility of understanding feminist art in toto. From this deliberately compromised point of view, she explores possible explanations for this renewed interest in feminism, then looks back at past feminist art histories, and finally poses a critique of contemporary feminist art and curatorial practices that fail to acknowledge the complexities of past feminisms. She notes that the label feminism is often now situated in relation to a field of artistic practices that have often lost their connection to histories of feminist art and debate–and therefore show a lack of knowledge of the political achievements that made their practices possible in the first place. Wary of the risk of exhausting the political imperative that Jones holds as crucial to the very understanding of any feminist practice, and of the current course of institutionalization of a version of feminism that has lost contact with the highly activist feminisms of the 1970s, Jones argues for the necessity of a new political turn elucidated by her concept *parafeminism*, which sustains a connection to past feminisms while renewing the imperative to understand the complexities of gender and sexual identification in the twenty-first century.

In "Women Artists versus Feminist Artists: Definitions by Ideology, Rhetoric or Mere Habit?" Malin Hedlin Hayden argues for a more nuanced employment of these notions as they are often used as synonymous but are advocated as notions distinct from one another. Departing from the 2007 exhibition *Global feminisms* as a case study, Hayden discusses the implications for a feminism that too strongly operates with art by women artists and/or feminist artists as intertwined sets of categories. A suggestion is that the arguable tradition of grouping women artists, initially successfully employed as strategic essentialism to change the very premises for a history of art, now rather maintains the sex-bias as an impulse that too often restricts the art production of women into one grouped voice.

In "Centripetal Discourse and Heteroglot Feminisms" Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe discusses the recent process where feminisms in art are institutionalized and secured with a position in general Art History while at the same time efforts are being made to deconstruct the established canon of feminist art. She gives special attention to the narrative structures in comprehensive survey texts, which form a specific and authoritative

discourse. Sjöholm Skrubbe focuses on the conflict between the authoritative discourse of canonical art history and the heteroglot languages of feminisms in art. She discusses how feminist scholars have adopted and adjusted to phallocentric norms and values in the writing of the history of feminist art, and she argues that a deconstruction and historiographical revision of the canonical story of feminist art need to defy the normative and single-voiced Anglo-American discourse on feminisms in art.

In "Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive" Griselda Pollock stresses the importance of a feminist cultural analysis of the conditions for feminism in the current era of liquid modernity. She warns that feminism can be killed in retrospect by being confined to a certain time and place in the processes of current musealizations and exhibitions on feminism as an art movement. Feminism, however, must be grasped as an interruption and as a continuing and self-transformative work, rather than as a finished project. Pollock argues that the issue of feminist practice is one of reading for inscriptions in, of, and from the psycho-symbolic position defined as "the feminine", i.e. a reading for the shifting of meanings rather than the affirmation of pre-configured identities. Challenging recent tendencies among curators and art historians to fall back on reductive iconographical analysis of works and to conform to modernist formalist narratives, Pollock emphasizes the urgency of actually employing feminist theory in order to make different models of reading possible. Her concept *the virtual feminist museum* offers a space of encounter enlivened by the perpetual virtuality of feminism–virtuality understood as latency, potentiality, becoming–and hence the possibility of feminism as the future.

In the 1990s the art scenes in the Baltic states were in a transition period. The Soviet occupation, now in the recent past, opened up opportunities for exchanges of various kinds with art scenes of the West. In "'Just an Artist?' An Imaginary Exhibition Project" Lolita Jablonskiene outlines the reception and the formations of intellectual discourses of postmodern (art) theories in the new geo-political situation of the Baltic. Feminisms entered as an option amongst many others, but more specifically it evolved to form a dichotomy with the notion of the new avant-garde. Furthermore, when juxtaposed to post-colonial theories, Western feminisms and their universalizing claims were problematic alternatives and entered the intellectual debates with (occasional) suspicion. As feminisms still have no strong (outspoken) position in either artistic or curatorial practices (even though practice is different in the three Baltic nations), Jablonskiene discusses what an explicitly feminist show of contemporary artists would need to deal with.

Rethinking feminist theory and implications in curatorial practices of the last decades, Renee Baert maps feminist exhibitions along several axes. Her introduction reviews divergent contexts of presentation of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* as a historiographical sample for analysis of changes and re-readings of issues and priorities of feminism in the (American-Canadian) art world. She recognizes exhibitions as "generative sites" – their ripple effects extending to open further debates, redefinitions, engagements. In recent years the interest in the discursive and critical dimensions of curating has accelerated rapidly. In "Of other sites" Baert thinks through curating as a dialogical practice: "exhibitions talk to other exhibitions." The main body of the essay raises the question of the 'local' or situated exhibition practices vis a vis historiographies of feminist art; Baert proceeds through a reading of three models of exhibition practice that reconfigure the sites and modalities of feminist curating and public intervention.

English language editing by Pamela Marston

Notes

[1] Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari, *Intersektionalitet: kritiska reflektioner över (o)jämlikhetens landskap* (Malmö: Liber, 2005), 129.

[2] The title of the book is a paraphrase of *Am I that name? Feminism and the Category of 'women' in History* by Denise Riley.

[3] Questions of identities are of course not apolitical per se. But nor are they automatically expressions of feminism/feminist practices solely on the ground of the sex of the doer/maker.

[4] We initiated the conference together with Anna Lundström. The event was co-organized with Moderna Museet.

[5] This was suggested at the workshop led by Lolita Jablonskiene, and further discussed at a session involving all the participants of the conference.

CHAPTER ONE

ON FIDELITY: ART, POLITICS, PASSION AND EVENT

MARY KELLY

Artists generally think of themselves first of all as practitioners and then, perhaps reluctantly, as educators. But, over the years, I have found the two practices more deeply imbricated than I could ever have imagined, not by an institutional imperative, but as a consequence of lived experience. Let me start with an anecdote concerning the recent anti-war protests at the university where I teach. While crossing the campus, I encountered a sprawling slogan on the pristine wall of a newly renovated building which read: stop the war, have sex! For those of us who are old enough to remember the original—make love, not war, it would appear that the unimpeded bliss of our sexual revolution in the sixties looks decidedly more mundane to this generation through the keyhole of the present.

Those who were born around 1968 have a peculiar fascination with its significance. I would describe this, not as nostalgia, but rather, as a form of intuitive knowledge forged from the words, gestures or silences of familial interactions and decoded as parental desire. Insofar as it concerns the mystery of conception in the social and historical sense, I have come to call this psychic disposition *the political primal scene*.

Although, Freud cautions us against digressions that foster the "phylogenetic heresy", he finds it reasonable to suggest that after analysis has thoroughly excavated the psychic strata acquired by the individual, traces of what has been inherited are visible in the form of symbolic connections that reach beyond the analysand's experience. The primal phantasies–scenes of observing parental intercourse, being seduced in childhood and threatened with castration, are exemplary in this regard because they are both prehistoric or pregiven and contingent. The primal scene, in particular, displays its somatic meaning in the anal-sadistic stage, but reveals its structure in the child's question: where did I come from?

The answer invades the child from the adult world as an already given schema in which Oedipal identification mediates love relationships and desire subordinates satisfaction to the conditions of phantasy. Hence, the libidinal charge of an infantile sexual experience remains shrouded, and the adult is subject to "retrospective phantasying", as Freud calls it, long after the event. In the meantime, he notes that a child catches hold of the phylogenetic experience to "fill in the gaps" in his own, replacing occurrences in his own life with those of his ancestors.[1]

In another way, this fills in the gap between Freud's image of the analyst as archeologist excavating the unconscious strata of events in chronological time and his invocation of a linguist deciphering hieroglyphics according to the logic of determining absences and simultaneity in time. His description of the psychical apparatus as a series of inscriptions is reiterated in Lacan's now well-known assertion that the unconscious is structured like a language. And, if the symbolic order precedes the subject's entry into it, then the unconscious is already outside the limits of a singular subjectivity. Before you were born your parents desired a child, or perhaps not. They wanted a boy or a girl. They gave you a name and the rest is history, that is, the history of the unconscious as the effects of the speech of the Other on the subject. At this point, we are returned to the exogenous import of the primal scene understood as the child's traumatic encounter with the enigma of parental desire. According to Lacan:

> In the intervals of the discourse of the Other, there emerges in the experience of the child something that is radically mappable, namely, *He is saying this to me, but what does he want?...* The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks in the discourse of the Other and all the child's *whys* reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things as a testing of the adult, *Why are you telling me this?*[2]

Since the process of symbolization circles around a void, the subject fills it with symptoms that form an archive of unconscious transmissions. I would like to propose that buried in that archive there is something that makes the socio-political as well as sexual interrogation of the enigma mappable. Here, I am thinking not only of the girl who complains that her father wanted a boy, or the young man who insists that his paternal grandmother never held him because his mother was Polish, but also, of a student who told me, "I'm a flower child, so I've been a feminist since I was born," and another who said, "I *wish* my parents had been part of the student movement." It appears that identity is shaped by filling in the gaps in what our parents say with the imagined failures and aspirations of our ancestors.

Fig. 1-1 and 1-2. Mary Kelly, stills from *WLM Demo Remix*, 2005. 90 second black and white film loop. Dimensions varaible. Collection, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw. Courtesy of the artist.

The question of origins, or where we come from, includes not only the family saga, but also the grand narrative of social change, and for both, the answer revolves around something missing; a lack in the past that makes a claim on the present and the future.

Possibly, this is what Walter Benjamin means when he refers to "a secret agreement between past generations and the present one." But his thesis, which goes beyond the psychoanalytic scenario of repetition and failure, introduces the idea of redemption, or ethical possibility, and he links it, famously, to the dialectical image:

> While the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature, but figural. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic–images. The image that is read–which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability–bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.[3]

In part, I believe what he is proposing here concerns the archive of symptoms as a collective formation, one which becomes legible in objects or images when they register a moment of crisis. This, I would also suggest is what broadly defines a generation, not in the anthropological sense, but its historical meaning. For instance, for my generation, the political primal scene would be World War II and for the current generation the "events of 1968." The political primal scene, perceived as a violent act, induces a certain amnesia, but the memory trace remains, and later, it may be revised and endowed with psychical affect through the coincidence of predisposition and historical accident.

For example, the failure of our parents to prevent the holocaust was inscribed in the shame we felt during the Vietnam War. This in turn, imbued the current protest against the war in Iraq with the psychic aura of deferred action. However, ethical possibility, in my view, entails a disruption of the unconscious order; a break or new way of thinking that shatters the compulsion to repeat. This possibility, I think, is the compelling absence in the oppositional politics of our time. With reference to '68 and after, students, now, most often say, "I missed a moment clarity…of decisive action…of collective aims". Is this imagined plenitude the secret agreement between our generation and theirs? And are they really saying, "Why did you fail us?"

The legacy of '68 includes the rise of feminism, more accurately the second wave, and the formation of a movement in England in 1969. For me, this took on the significance of an "event" in Alain Badiou's sense of

the term, although his emphasis is certainly more heroic than mine. Something breaks with the ordinary, he argues, and instigates a truth procedure; not a search for objective truths, but a much less logical process of "holding true" to the consequences of the event. In that process, there is the possibility that a new way of thinking will emerge.[4] Although an event has no specific content and he names art, science and love as well as politics in the fields of truth, perhaps, the emergence of psychoanalysis in the field of politics could be considered as an instance of the kind of enquiry that proceeds by exposing the absences in the established particularities of the known. In the women's movement, we used to talk about reading between the lines of the *German Ideology* and finding Freud there. Filling in the gaps in a theoretical enigma was propelled by fidelity to the event, and infused with a passion to make sexuality pass into the discourse of radical politics that prevailed in the sixties.

At the same time, the feminist enquiry informed by psychoanalysis became an integral part of my practice as an artist. In the context of conceptualism's resistance to a theory of subjectivity, I argued that if medium comprised not only a physical support, but also a technical one with a set of procedures or rules, then in my case, the rules were generated by a method of free association in which material indexicality was the privileged means of translating psychical affect into form.

Above all, for a generation of artists who witnessed the events of May '68 as participants, or simply by coincidence, the slogans emblazoned on the startled monuments of Paris have left a trace in the archive of unconscious transmissions that reappear in the present as the lost object. I am thinking, in particular, of "No right to speak without *les enquetes*," that is, the interrogations. (I admit, interrogation has acquired a sinister reputation and is badly in need of redemption.) Remember, for instance, conceptualism's two paradigms of interrogation: first, with respect to the object and then, the interrogation itself. Also, consider the far-reaching consequences of these paradigms in the discourse of the university; notably, with regard to art, the concept of research as practice, which implies the production of new knowledge, not as an end, but as a means or, more exactly, an encounter with the question.

My encounter with, rather than answer to, the question is, primarily, figural, in Benjamim's sense, that is, an image, although I cannot claim the result is dialectical. Here, I want to return to *Love Songs*, the project-based work, which began in 2005 and culminated in the four-part installation at *Documenta 12* in 2007.[5] I worked with a group of younger women on restaging images from my archive, which included a *Life Magazine* photo

Fig. 1-3. Mary Kelly, *Sisterhood is POW*, 2005. 36 units laser cut cast acrylic linear strip lighting, wood support. 24 units 38.1x50.8 cm each, 12 units 60.9 each, 219.5 overall. Courtesy of Postmaster Gallery, New York.

of the Women's Liberation demonstration in New York City in 1970 and a press shot of the Flashing Nipple Street Theatre published in the weekly, *7Days*, in 1971. Then, there is an archive of anecdotal statements that I used to form the elevation of *Multi-Story House*. But, all touch on the symptomatic archive, that is, a subjective investment in the image and a particular narrative of its relevance. I am more interested in restaging these events as performative markers of the past reappearing in the present. In this sense, restaging exposes my own as well as the performers' imaginary stake in the legacy of sexual politics by asking what is left after the specific demands of the moment have faded and what, if anything, is passed on from one generation to the next.[6]

I follow certain procedures in the restaging that support this process. First, casting: this involves a discursive as well as site-specific relationship with the participants who are generally not actors or performers, but share an interest in the history and community addressed by the event. Secondly, the set-up: this is not only a physical location, but also an emotional point that exists in the space between the original archival image and its technical reproduction. Thirdly, directed interaction: there are instructions for the photo shoots or live actions, but they are subject to interpretation by

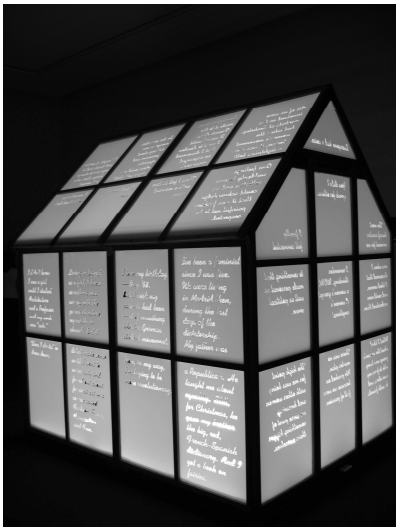

Fig. 1-4 and 1-5. Mary Kelly and Ray Barrie, *Multi-Story House*, 2007. Wooden frame, cast acrylic panels, plate glass floor, flourescent light. 244 x 183 x 244cm. Courtesy of the artists.

the participants. Finally, material translation: this concerns the potential of light, as a medium, to register the psychic as well as phenomenological effects of the interaction in the final form of the work.

In concluding, I want to say that in their persistent curiosity about where they came from, this generation of women excavated strata of my own practice that concern, not the method informed by psychoanalysis, but the etiology of the enquiry itself. Here, all roads lead back to *les enquetes* because, at one level, this process exposed the gaps in our narrative of political origin and at another, it addressed the urgency of "a project." Certainly, a project that is historically determined and transformative requires more than the reinvention of an imagined moment of clarity, yet, I would say that for many students, this aspiration sustains a medial, ethical and dialogical engagement with their practice–scholarly, curatorial or artistic, at a time when the boundaries between the institutions of education and those of the entertainment industry have been obscured. The exhibition as a system of meaning, once aimed at educating the "good citizen" has been replaced by the aim of entertaining him. Often, the museum replicates cinematic space in the guise of installations or alternatively, promotes the architecture itself as spectacle. Increasingly, the art fair displaces the biennial and the collector's influence out bids that of the critic. Perhaps, these observations signal a wider crisis. While the desire for a project, in terms of in its unconscious meaning, resides neither in a scenario of failure nor in fulfillment, but in the gap where the question of origins is posed, its political significance accrues in the trajectory of another query: how to rescue the utopian legacy of entitlement in the form of global civil society rather than one of control. I see a certain resistance to the later in the current preoccupation with social movements of the sixties and especially, with feminism of the early seventies. This was evidenced in the incredible *Year of Sisterhood** that took place in Sweden, August 2003-July 2004.

Fig. 1-6 and 1-7. Mary Kelly, *Flashing Nipple Remix*, 2005. Courtesy of Postmaster Gallery, New York.

Notes

[1] Sigmund Freud, "Fresh material from the primal period–solution", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955-91, vol. XVII), 97.
[2] Jacques Lacan, "The Subject and the Other: Alienation", *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 214.
[3] Walter Benjamin, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress", *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 463.
[4] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London, UK: Verso, 2001), 43.
[5] There were four works included in the *Love Songs* installation at the Neue Gallerie, *Documenta XII*, Kassel, 2007.
[6] *Flashing Nipple Remix*, a series of black and white transparencies in light boxes, records choreographic improvisations based on a press photo of the street theater performers at the 1971 Miss World protest in London. *WLM Demo Remix*, a 90 second film loop, uses a slow dissolve to bridge past and present representations of the 1970 Women's Liberation demonstration, marking the 50th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, in New York City. *Sisterhood is POW*, a linear narrative illuminated by strip lighting, replays recollections of a participant in the Miss World protest. *Multi-Story House*, an intergenerational dialogue, is articulated in the form of laser cut acrylic panels, framed by a three dimensional structure and illuminated from the inside by linear fluorescent lighting beneath a glass floor.
The *Happening*, although it is thematically related to the *Love Songs* installation, was developed as a site-specific collaboration with the organizers of *Documenta 12*. Based on the Flashing Nipple Street Theatre's intervention at the 1971 Miss World protest outside the Albert Hall, and informally restaged at the Bergpark during the opening, the *Happening* was a directed interaction, rather than a performance, consisting of a set of instructions interpreted by the participants.

* *Systerskapets år*, 2005, (*Year of Sisterhood)* is a 9 hours long documentary on the feminist movement in Sweden by artists Sonia Hedstrand and Åsa Elzén. Editor's note.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RETURN OF FEMINISM(S) AND THE VISUAL ARTS, 1970/2009

AMELIA JONES

Guerrilla Girl "Kathe Köllwitz" has recently noted, "[t]here is a real acknowledgement among artists, academics, and students that feminism changed art. But it has taken a long time for curators at these institutions to get there. The question is, what is the feminist future? Where do we go from here?"[1] Köllwitz's observation points to the fact that feminism has returned with a vengeance to the art world, and I want to know why. From 2005 through 2008 a range of events and exhibitions addressing the history and present of feminist art have occurred in venues across Europe and North America and countless articles in the popular and art press and special issues of art magazines on feminism have been published.[2] Academic feminist art history and theory have also been actively revived as crucial discourses, signaled by a range of major conferences that have addressed feminist art histories and theories in South Africa, Los Angeles, New York, and in Stockholm.[3]

After decades of studied neglect on the part of galleries, museums, and the art market in general, all of this renewed interest in feminist art–both historical and contemporary–makes me nervous and to some extent this article reflects my unease. Among other things, I'm very worried about *what kinds* of feminist art are being marketed and what kinds are being left out–surely it's no accident, for example, that the messy activism-driven feminist practices tend to be left out of these exhibitions as these are not as "exhibition friendly," not as easily marketable, as certain varieties of photographic or object-based practices. As Catriona Moore noted in 1994 in relation to histories of feminist art,

> [a]rt markets, museums and publishers have already had a field day with art from the 1960s and now a cleaned-up 1970s, blithely representing the past according to the streamlined contours of the present…[T]he mainstream

> may welcome certain strands of feminist art (suitably formalized work from the 1980s and 1990s concerned with sexuality, language and aesthetics) in order to better define and exclude the margin (formally transgressive "1970s-style" explorations into women's paid and unpaid work, sexuality, women's traditional arts and work in the community).[4]

Moore goes on to note that feminism has a highly contested relationship to history just as "women's domestic and familial experience" have tended to be "at odds with the demand for progression, growth, development" within Enlightenment models of temporality.[5] Taking Moore's caveat about feminism and history into account and in order to address the complexities of the history of feminist art, this necessarily schematic examination of the "return of feminist art" is structured in three parts, corresponding to the present, the past, and the future–all of which are unknowable, but in different ways. First, in a rumination on what passes for the "present," I pose more fully the question of why this resurgence of interest in feminism on the part of the international art world has occurred–although here and in subsequent sections I will have an inevitably strong US/UK bias, as that is where my core knowledge of feminist art histories is sited.[6] The following two sections then stretch in two temporal directions, exploring, respectively, the *past*–returning to the rise of the feminist art movement in the 1970s to explore again, in relation to what is being said and made *now* under the name of feminism; and the future or *futures* of what at least used to be called feminism.

Viewing history from the present but acknowledging the inevitable partiality of such a (re)construction of its past and future is to acknowledge my position, as "historian," at the "center" of this narrative in the "present", looking back and forward to the future; and, by so acknowledging my position, paradoxically at the same time to decenter myself as the art historian who can provide a full account, offering the "true" version of feminist art. This I hope will serve to emphasize the important point that feminism in a general sense is nothing if not precisely about the dislocation of epistemological structures of knowledge in Euro-American culture.

Metaphorically, then, I want to occupy a kind of "void" here even as I compose a particular view of this history. A void that relates to the very central core images that, at the beginnings of the feminist art movement, were constructed as reflecting an essential aspect of female experience in the world. [7] I am willfully adopting this "essentializing" mode of feminist thinking about visual practice, but refusing its attachment to "presence," in