Things That Liberate

Things That Liberate:
An Australian Feminist *Wunderkammer*

Edited by

Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson

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WORKING WITH FEMINIST THINGS: THE *WUNDERKAMMER* AS FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

ALISON BARTLETT
AND MARGARET HENDERSON

> Artifacts are tools as well as signals, signs, and symbols. Their use and functions are multiple and intertwined. Much of their meaning is subliminal and unconscious. Some authors have talked about reading objects as texts, but objects must also be read as myths and as poetry.
>
> —W David Kingery 1996, p. 1

This is a book of things—specifically feminist things that signify the liberatory project of the Australian women's movement from the 1970s onward.

As well as achieving fundamental social change, the Australian women's movement prompted a 'cultural renaissance' (Magarey 2004, p. 236) and yet feminist culture—including its own material culture—is often overlooked in accounts of the women's movement. This collection pays tribute to the transformational ideas, creative ingenuity and material handiwork that are remainders and reminders of the way 'things' are fundamental to feminism as a movement of social change. Material culture can be defined as 'the things we make, appropriate and use' which Tim Dant argues 'are a manifestation of social forms while also shaping them' (1999, p. 12). Objects, because of their ability to function as myth and poetry as well as historical text, noted by W David Kingery, provide another language of feminism, another way to construct the feminist past. Feminist things resonate with practical and aesthetic issues, condense and spark memories, evoke time and place, and thus historical and personal narratives coalesce around them. In this collection we attend to some of these things and the ways in which they embody, represent, memorialise and evoke women's liberation in various forms. Consider, for example, a few of our favourite feminist things:

> Zelda D'Aprano's padlock…
> Merle Thornton and Ro Bognor's chains…
> The black armbands printed with 'In memory of all women raped in all wars', worn by the SWARC (Sydney Women Against Rape Collective) members at an ANZAC Day march…
> The Berlei Bra billboard complete with feminist graffiti, and Magistrate Pat O'Shane's ruling on the case against the feminists…
> The eggs thrown at the anti-abortion activist and academic, Hiram Caton, on the University of Queensland campus…
> An elegant doily with 'Fuck Patriarchy' delicately crocheted into its pattern…
> Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey's last chiko roll before deciding to pick up the surfboard and learning to surf…

What stories these objects could tell, with even the most ephemeral (the eggs) or the indigestible and fictional (the chiko roll) providing the stuff of historical symbolism, events and understanding. This is how we conceived the present volume.

Australian second wave feminism has understood itself as a movement worthy of self-reflection, archiving and narrativising from very early on. The dedicated archives of feminist texts, documents and ephemera in almost every capital city as well as private collections are testimony to this, although these are mainly text-focused, not always catalogued, and often difficult to access (see Bartlett, Dever & Henderson 2007). Histories, analyses and memoirs of the second wave began to be published from the 1990s, mainly by high profile public figures as personal histories (see McCarthy 2000; Ryan 1999; Summers 1999), or scholarly assessments (Curthoys 1988; Kaplan 1996; Lake 1999). These tend to concentrate on metropolitan locations, liberal agendas, or high-profile professional women to the exclusion of grassroots participants (for exceptions see D'Aprano 1977; Taylor 2009; Bulbeck 1997). While these are important accounts of a major social movement, Julie Stephens notes a degree of fixity and 'unitary cultural scripts' in these accounts (2010, p. 81, p. 86). Margaret Henderson argues elsewhere that such histories are confined by their chosen mode of representation—that is, by the conventions of genre and writing registers (2006). But how else can the women's movement be documented if not through textual genres of history, analysis or memoir? How can the past be remembered as multivalent, contradictory and contentious? Can the passionate emotions and conflicts be taken into account, as well as the idealism, creativity and revolution at the level of everyday life? What other languages and evidence can be employed to construct a feminist past, to secure its place in Australian social history so that its ideals are neither forgotten nor subsumed into popular measures of

success or failure? Stephens looks to oral histories as a much 'more multifaceted and ambivalent dialogue about the women's movement' (2010, p. 81); we decided to turn our attention to material culture.

The value of feminist objects is not a new idea, and we pay respect to the collectors, curators and custodians of feminist objects in their private museums, where things that liberate may be adorning mantelpieces, walls or bookcases, preserved in archival quality boxes or collecting dust at the back of the garage and gradually disintegrating, as becomes ephemera. There are institutions both large and small, funded and unfunded, who are keepers of feminist objects, like the state-of-the-art Melbourne University Archives which hosts the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive, or the locked basement of Murdoch University library, or the volunteer-run Jessie Street National Women's Library that currently occupies part of a local council building in Sydney's Ultimo. Other sites like the Women's Studies Resource Centre in Adelaide have had support withdrawn and their treasures scattered, while activists we came across were gradually dispensing with their past at garage sales and in charity bins. Likewise, this volume features plenty of remembered objects no longer extant.

While objects are capable of carrying historical narratives and processes, their meanings are neither fixed nor stable. In this volume it's often the remaking of meaning and context that renders an object feminist. Suzanne Bellamy, a contributor to this volume and a veteran collector and maker of feminist objects, has thought about not only the potential for feminist objects to constitute historical narratives but also to become museum curiosities. In the mid-1990s she began touring an art performance/installation called *The Lost Culture of Women's Liberation: Pre-Dynastic Phase 1969–1974*, exploring and satirising the practices of archaeology, history and museums from a feminist perspective. Situated as an archaeological dig at an inner-city feminist house five hundred years into the future and then staged as a museum display, the show addresses the diminution of feminist social memory and the ways in which objects are made strange when devoid of political context and personal meaning. For example, a speculum is displayed side-on as if beaked, and captioned: 'unidentified ritual object related to bird cult or bird feeder', while high-heeled shoes are identified as rejected 'fetish objects' whose 'uncertain function' may be related to hole punching (Bellamy n.d.). These objects, iconic and hence legible to the women's movement, shift in meaning through their placement in a non-feminist future and frame of reference. Bellamy's museum suggests that a feminist narrative can be easily lost within the conventional modes of historical practice and representation—concerns

that this collection takes into account. Yet the instability of an object's meaning is also the point at which it can be radically remade into a feminist object, as evidenced in this volume. Bellamy also broaches the issue of how to represent apparently abstract concepts like collectivity, resistance, and humour, materially. Working with things thus opens a range of new aesthetic and political possibilities and questions—one of the reasons why we conceptualised this volume as a *wunderkammer*: a room of feminist wonders.

Materialising a Feminist Past

Our first attempt at using objects to forge a new language of the feminist past was in 2009 when we undertook a consultancy with the National Museum of Australia (NMA). Named *The Australian Feminist Memory Project: Cultures of Activism 1970–1990*, it involved researching and compiling a list of artefacts to recommend as the basis for a feminist collection at the nation's premier museum of social history. This project highlighted for our respondents and for us the power of objects to evoke memories and emotions in ways quite different to other 'historical' narratives of the Australian women's movement (see Bartlett & Henderson 2013). As Sherry Turkle reminds us, 'material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity' (2007, p. 6). On numerous occasions during discussions with potential donors the objects called forth not only memories but detailed intellectual analyses of feminist politics and strong emotions, including grief, pride, sardonic humour, and joy. This phenomenon seemed to be evidence of memorabilia's function as 'a mnemonic bridge…a remarkably vivid, quasi-tangible contact with the past' (Zerubavel 2003, p. 44). Unfortunately the items remain uncollected due to budgetary constraints.

This collection of essays, therefore, is another way to incorporate feminist material culture into the historical registers of Australian feminism—a supplement. Although we use words to make feminist objects tangible, the essays are more than a secondary or inferior form of something prior. Jacques Derrida notes that the supplement does two contradictory things: 'The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus…But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace' (1976, pp. 144–45). Our collection is therefore a reminder of the impossibility of any collection taking precedence, or even satisfactorily representing the whole story of the Australian women's movement—there will always be another addition. Secondly, our use of words to make feminist objects tangible, as substitutes, makes apparent the tenuousness of the opposition between text

and object. The objects and memories here are necessarily mediated and hence constructed by language, and by time. As Bellamy's *Lost Culture* makes clear, things can never speak for themselves outside of a particular context.

The scholarly field of 'new materialism' is another context for this book, concerned as it is with the material conditions of knowledge construction. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, for example, challenge the accepted Cartesian maxim that the mind is the sole locus of thinking, or even that thinking is restricted to human activity, to propose that materiality should be considered 'knowing' (2010, p. 1). Feminism has been engaged in this project for some time, particularly focusing on the materiality of the body and corporeal knowledge, but extending this analytical perspective to a wider range of objects means that Daniel Miller can suggest that 'objects construct subjects' (2010, p. 11). We might therefore understand the objects in this volume to be active in constituting feminist subjects, both in the past and in the present. In addition to this new field of intellectual enquiry, this collection is embedded in ideas of the past that find associations between material and discursive collections. In early modern understandings of 'curiosity', for example, Neil Kenny reminds us that 'curiosity…entailed either collecting or narrating', including the collecting of discursive objects like recipes, facts and anecdotes which, he points out, are themselves material in their print and paper (2006, p. 44). In this sense, we can consider our volume as a curiosity that begets feminist times as well as subjects.

This volume, then, is timely in a number of ways. The *wunderkammer* is being constructed when a generation of second wave feminists is retiring from public life, when activists (and their objects) are ageing, and in a time of a renewed interest in materiality. Alan McKee's collection *Beautiful Things in Popular Culture* and Turkle's *Evocative Objects*, for instance, were both published in 2007 and use material objects to think through questions of identity, aesthetics and politics, and to offer social commentary. Miller argues that 'the consequences of our materiality and of material culture [offer] a more profound understanding of what we ourselves are' (2010, p. 5), and Jane Bennett suggests that matter is 'vibrant': that it has a 'liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the thing formerly known as an object' (2010, p. xvi) to the extent that it can be considered to have a kind of agency which she calls 'thing power' (2010, p. 4). In this collection, things become agentic in materialising feminist stories, subjects and pasts, even when they are no longer extant.

Our Feminist *Wunderkammer*

In planning this collection we were confronted with a number of issues, the first one concerning inclusion and representation. How can the production of a feminist past take into account the issues raised, particularly by black feminists, about whose past gets constructed by whom, when such a project depends on voluntary labour? How do we cajole activists into contributing when writing may not seem to be an act of change—or even reward, as it is for academics? These questions of position and privilege remain largely rhetorical, and yet the range of responses we received does expand the possibilities for feminist historiography. Secondly, this volume required critical reflection on how to arrange the collection as one restaging of a feminist past. Additionally, given that a significant number of existing feminist historical representations and languages seem to tame and limit the feminist past, how do we preserve—or rekindle—the radical valences of the feminist object while also making them legible to contemporary readers? What we were looking for was a methodology for a set of things that was creative, shocking, weird and mundane, that could satisfactorily hold the tension of stories of rape and suicide alongside fashion and rock and roll, written in a range of forms—from poetry to memoir, to scholarly styles (and sometimes all at once). Perhaps our problem was similar to the one confronted by the art historian and curator of surrealism who wishes to respect the intrinsic nature of that movement: 'For it is not knowledge that needs to be transmitted, but an *experience*' (Vincent Gille, cited in Dettmers 2008, p. 38).

Given the impossibility of our project to be comprehensive or even representative, how did the selection process work? Our method for calling for contributions built on the goodwill of networks we established during the museum project, using email and discussion lists as well as commissions and was, to a degree, arbitrary—leaving the collection to be determined to some extent by the contributors. We framed the invitation to contribute around identifying some of the 'things' that were important to the second wave Australian women's movement, asking what happened to the overalls, rosters, speculums, yoghurt makers, posters, theatre props, banners, calendars and graffiti? How can these be made vibrant and meaningful to future generations of readers, researchers and thinkers? What other objects should be included? And what memories and emotions are triggered by these feminist objects? In this way, we hoped to prompt contributors to create 'feminist memory' through thinking about the personal meaning of particular objects, and also to engage with museum

and archaeological practice, and particularly the concept of 'object biography' that, as the term suggests, focuses on the 'life' of the object (see Caple 2006; Gosden & Marshall 1999). Accordingly, we suggested that contributors write on the construction, production, circulation and uses of the object, first encounters, and people and places it may have passed through. This seemed like a good idea at the beginning of the project, but contributors found their own manifold ways of calling up memories through narrative. While we were conscious of including objects and contributors from a range of geographies and generations, which might as a collective enterprise suggest the breadth and depth of feminist cultural enterprise, in the end our selections were largely based on the strength of the writing, suggesting another kind of association between materiality and narrative intersecting with the expectations of the publishing industry.

Our solution as to how to collect, arrange (and read) the collection appeared to lie in the direction suggested by Walter Benjamin and his historical materialist poetics of history based on rupture: that the historical continuum did not need to be added to—to make a more complete, a more accurate account—but rather, to be blown apart (1973, p.247). And as part of this reworking of historicity, the seamless historical narrative is replaced by the image and by the principle of 'literary montage': 'to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event' (Benjamin 1999, pp. 460–61). Moreover, these images have a particular role in connecting the past to the present context of their reception:

> It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation…For 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 'bildlich'. (Benjamin 1999, p. 463)

As Vivian Sobchack explains,

> Benjamin suggests that to understand the past in its relation to the present, historians would do better to use 'a visual, not a linear logic'—with 'concepts…imagistically constructed, according to the cognitive principles of montage.' Montage generates intellectual and critical meaning by the juxtaposition and collision—not continuity—of abstracted images. (Sobchack 1997, p. 13)

The salience of Benjamin's approach for feminism is evidenced by Griselda Pollock's experimental practice of 'the virtual feminist museum' whereby art objects are grouped in startlingly unusual ways, so that 'it counters the narratives of heroic, nationalist and formalist art history to discover other meanings…in conversations framed by feminist analysis and theory' (Pollock 2007, p. 11). Fragments, montage and juxtaposition thus promise a critical and creative mode of representing and encountering the feminist past, and one ideally suited to feminist objects, in themselves visual icons and fragments of the feminist past.

We wanted, however, to communicate the *wonder* of the new that was the women's movement, as well as the shock. How was it, in such a masculine settler-invader nation like Australia, that a women's movement grew so rapidly and in so many directions, and achieved so much in a relatively short space of time? How did the movement, far from the centres of Western radicalism (whether New Left or the women's movement), attempt to question and overturn the foundations of a society—the family, marriage, motherhood, sexuality, violence, the education system, notions of work, parliamentary democracy, the arts, militarism, and the operations of language? In retrospect, it appears a wondrous creature, and its material culture inspires wonder in us. But how to 'store' and arrange them on the page so as to somehow preserve their three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional medium? What kind of textual museum could hold them along the lines suggested by Benjamin?

Our search to reveal and produce wonder led us not into the future suggested by a virtual museum but rather to the *wunderkammer* of the past, that cabinet of curiosities or room of wonders dating from the early modern period, and a forerunner to the modern museum. With its encyclopaedic impulse, idiosyncratic or, for some, non-existent classificatory system, and emphasis on inspiring wonder in the viewer (and wonder as a mode of instruction/knowledge) as well as its historical mission of displaying the new world (Dettmers 2008, p. 41), the *wunderkammer* seems the ideal model to house our objects that liberate. The *wunderkammer*'s anarchic and encyclopaedic drive allows a random sort of inclusivity that produces a marvellous sense of the breadth of feminist activism. Our collection's somewhat arbitrary nature, reliant on serendipity (the unexpected as well as the plan), showing the 'new world' of the women's movement, and not seeking complete representation of it, are marks of the *wunderkammer*. Furthermore, as a pre-scientific mode of arrangement this model enables the objects to spark off each other, allowing them, like their Baroque predecessor, 'to communicate with one another, thus making their hidden interrelations visible' (Westerhoff 2001,

p. 645). It may enable the reader to see things anew—or at least to inspire curiosity, and hence to resist conventional feminist historical narratives of 'progress, loss, and return' (Hemmings 2011, p. 3). In effect, a feminist *wunderkammer* can make the taken-for-granted strange, the mundane exotic and the incomprehensible wondrous. And indeed we hope that our *wunderkammer* can fulfil one of its traditional purposes as a theatre of memory: displaying objects to the spectator 'that triggered acts of memory leading to knowledge' (Arnold 2006, p. 194).[1] By using the *wunderkammer* as trope and as practice, feminist times are not only made accessible but possibly 'liberated' from the conventions of more established narrative genres.

The objects in this collection are in no particular sequence beyond the alphabetical, which itself seems a rather random mode of organising. Mark A Meadow reminds us that the early *wunderkammern* of renaissance Europe were the prerogative of princes and merchants (2002, p. 184). They 'had little interest in order and categorisation. Their chief concern was showing off the richness and diversity of the "new" universe', as well as their power (Dettmers 2008, p. 41). The serendipity of juxtaposition between the perverse and the marvellous, the sacred and the profane, generated its own commentary for the viewers, until the display of objects was ushered into the Enlightenment project of proto-scientific rationalism. Categorisation led to the science of classification—taxonomy—but also congealed the way collections (of things and knowledge) were organised, and viewers were given a much more directed range of interpretations (Dettmers 2008, p. 44). In our collection—hingeing on language and an encyclopaedic impulse—what classificatory principle could be more suitable than one based on the alphabet? It means readers can choose any letter as an entry point and, as with the Baroque *wunderkammer* whereby '[t]he viewer was compelled to fill in the gaps through imaginative projection' (Stafford 1994, p. 240), we hope this arrangement of chapters sparks novel connections and imaginative projections.

In the midst of apparent randomness, however, the volume as a whole does generate some identifiable tropes, or clusters of imagery and concerns. There is a strong concern in these essays of spreading the feminist message. For Martha Ansara, film is the medium; for Gail Green, the badge allows the mass production of feminist political messages; and for Jane Armstrong it's women's music. Jean Taylor finds that the labour-intensive but liberating machine of the gestetner is a watershed in the reproduction of feminist news and information, similar to Suzanne Bellamy's feminist newspaper *MeJane*. Pearlie McNeil literally takes to the road with her kombi-load of feminist books, meeting hostility along

the way, while for Deni Fuller, the women's symbol is the ur-signifier of liberation: 'We cheered it, gathered around it and beneath it and behind it to sing, to talk, to dance, to march and to take back the night' (Fuller, this volume).

A related theme is the importance of artistic practice, and the ways in which these practices become feminist through their modes of production, content, circulation and (often) collectivity. Lawrence's tapestries are professionally designed around feminist ideas of historiography and woven by a community of women (including passers-by) at a public site in the city. The political controversies generated by the tapestries as decoration and memorialisation on the walls of the South Australian Parliament House are a sign of the ongoing dissonance of feminist art. This reworking of women's traditional decorative arts into political forms also features in Silver Moon's banner of a woman boltcutting through a fence at Greenham Common women's peace camp in Berkshire, England, which is sent to its sister camp in the central Australian desert at Pine Gap. The banner visually mirrors the political action (women boltcutting military fences), which are then turned into feminist objets d'art when 'little and big pieces of fence started to decorate cars and ears and clothes and walls at home' (Moon, this volume). Kathleen Mary Fallon recalls the aesthetic philosophies that went into creating the unmistakably feminist covers of her two little books, as if the visual image and frame might match the transgressive nature of the contents. When asked to write about her chosen object, Ania Walwicz responded with a poem, an ambiguous and playful statement on feminist writing: 'i drink ink again now but not the same not the same way not like then or than or that it all seems different now justify me then margin then place me then place me in a book now' (Walwicz, this volume).

Sexuality is perhaps an expected feature, especially the relearning and politicising of women's sexuality. Adrienne Sallay illicitly buys books from the Feminist Bookshop for the library she works in at a Catholic girls' school; Megan Le Masurier reads Germaine Greer at a friend's house; and Susanne Gannon finds a wealth of information in her university orientation week sample bag. Tampons, sea sponges, blood, milk and pubic hair: corporeal details abound in the remaking of lives in the feminist project. Sallay details discoveries at consciousness raising sessions, and Enza Gandolfo reminds us of the ongoing politics of body hair. Anna Szorenyi's housemate promises to practice 'engulfing' if she ever slept with a man again, and Le Masurier decides the vaginal orgasm is not just myth. Marguerite Johnson and Leni Johnson choose toys that affirm them as lesbian, while Fallon's 'leso-radical' shock tactics aim to

horrify patriarchy by glueing pubic hair onto the spines of her hand-made book covers, so that 'it wouldn't fall into the wrong hands!' (Fallon, this volume). Unexpected connections also happen between chapters when Le Masurier reads that sexuality is not merely a function of meat, and then Bronwyn Winter's sister writes a placard proclaiming 'women are not meat', also a feature of food politics that appears in Alexandra Winter's essay. The renewed interest in the materiality and practices of the body also include negotiating body hair (Gandolfo) and clothing in signifying a liberated, feminist identity. This is evident where Lekkie Hopkins discusses counterculture dress codes signaled by overalls, Sara Dowse reflects on the wardrobe tactics required by the femocrat, and Alison Bartlett bares all to reveal the story behind the mythologising of bras that has marked modern feminism.

As we hoped, the object biographies include moments and places of feminist times**.** Taylor's gestetner marks the establishment of Women's Liberation House in Melbourne up to the eventual end of an era in feminist organising when the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives are deposited in the more salubrious confines of the University of Melbourne (sans gestetner). Bartlett details the sounds and images of her first 'big city' Reclaim the Night march. The women's movement's focus on peace activism—such as the Cockburn Sound peace camp—is figured in Green's chronicle of activist badges, as well as in the fence fragments linking the Pine Gap and Greenham Common peace camps (Moon). Essays move from consciousness raising sessions in inner Sydney (Sallay) to the feminist lesbian community in London (Fallon), to the community radio scene in Perth (Armstrong).

Shared houses are particularly evocative throughout the collection. Szorenyi remembers the 'house as a feminist object' where feminist knowledge, stories, things and lives coalesce under a poster for the Squatter's Union she inherited from a previous generation. Fallon describes the London squat she occupied as thrilling but cockroach infested, and Alexandra Winter recounts the rigors of the shared house cooking roster. Houses are also places of danger, as Fuller remembers hers in returning nightmares of sexual abuse, but also transformation. Entangling the relations between public and private, Jean Taylor's house becomes an archive, while Kay Lawrence shifts our attention to parliament house as a controversial place for feminist objects.

Many of the chapters situate themselves in that aforementioned feminist 'cultural renaissance': in feminist writing, filmmaking, experimental poetry, the women's health movement, media, community art, music and radio. There is a sense of 'before feminism', in how it was to grow up as a

girl before ‘girls can do anything’, as the ubiquitous slogan instructed: of the limitations and boredom (Johnson and Johnson, Bronwyn Winter, Gannon, Henderson), as well as female vulnerability and the threat of male violence (McNeil, Szorenyi, Fuller, Fallon, Bronwyn Winter). And there is an even stronger sense of the ‘during feminism’ phase: that anything is possible, as in Fuller’s defeat of the prowling lion, Moon’s gatecrashing the Military-Industrial Complex, Fallon’s corporeal approach to book design and production, Ansara’s training as cinematographer, and Henderson’s punk poet.

A major factor that drew us as editors to develop this project was the experience of witnessing the affects surrounding feminist objects and feminist remembrance during the museum project, and the capacity of things to carry these emotional reminders decades later. Implicit in material culture, then, is an emotional dimension, invoked, for instance, by a poem, a poster or a placard. Even if these things are not physically present, having perhaps disappeared or disintegrated over the years, their potential as affective objects remains but is also remade through re-membrance and over time. Essays here cover a gamut of emotional registers: of joy, pride, solidarity, resistance and creativity, to anger, grief, fear, bitterness, recantation and hostility. Many essays feature two dimensions of feeling: the emotions engendered by the object in past time and those arising during the time of reflection. So we find that while some contributors reaffirm their experiences of liberation, others recant and ridicule the ideas of an earlier self. The costs of activism emerge in a number of essays as burnout and grief, while others are measured and serious, avoiding the emotional in the urge to document: to provide an authoritative historical narrative.

Counterbalancing these serious or darker undercurrents is the prevalence of humour—often ironic—as an aspect of feminist times and things. Sometimes humour permeates a chapter, as in Fallon’s caustic wit regarding ideological righteousness or in Walwicz’s avant-garde wryness: ‘now i pipi bluestockings i dora explorer i biggles now just the same as it was as once was no different now…’ (Walwicz, this volume). In others, the humour breaks out intermittently, for example, in Bellamy’s anecdote about activists repeatedly giving the same false name when being arrested, and in Moon’s acerbic asides regarding Greenham Common: ‘we had had many discussions about the meaning of non-violent direct action and for some the shift from symbolic action to action where we were directly disabling military hardware was difficult. (For me it was easy. I loved destroying military gear)’ (Moon, this volume). Perhaps such humour can be linked to a feminist irony that results from holding an oppositional

ideological analysis: the world says and does one thing as you see it saying and doing another. Humour thus becomes a response to this dissonance (and a coping mechanism). Its inclusion in so many of the essays here not only adds to the pleasures of reading but makes manifest the wit and rebelliousness of the times.

The range of emotions is paralleled by the mode and styles of essays in the collection. Our expectations of receiving conventional memoirs was way too conservative for this demographic. Instead, the collection is indexical of second wave feminist approaches to writing. There is social realist narrative; the carefully researched historical essay; fictional autobiography; intensely personal memories and moments of confessional and of epiphany; and essays that move easily between the academic and the personal, the everyday and the bigger picture of social change. For some contributors, poetic interludes in the narrative flow are intrinsic to the combination of reflection and historical documentation. A few essays borrow from satire to chronicle ideological excess, and others use experimental forms or language like the fragment in Henderson, and the flowing chain of signifiers in Walwicz. Collectively, they tell of adventures in feminist lives, where the objects act as markers of struggle, rebellion, transformation, exhilarating moments of freedom or insight, failure, painful loss, and feminist time passing. What is also striking is the soundtrack that accompanies many chapters, either through refrain or song lists, effectively extending the drama of these object lives to almost filmic dimensions.

If objects such as these can be said to constitute a feminist material culture, they are vitalised here not only as tools and artefacts but also as the stuff of myth and poetry, as our epigraph from Kingery suggests (1996, p. 1). In being displayed as an imagined feminist *wunderkammer*, we trust that these stories of 'things that liberate' spark wonder and curiosity for readers, and provide another way of thinking and feeling about the past of the Australian women's movement.

Notes

1. See Frances A Yates, *The Art of Memory*, for a full discussion of the theatre of memory idea, including its Renaissance instigator, Giulio Camillo, who literally built a theatre in which to display objects and images to the audience.

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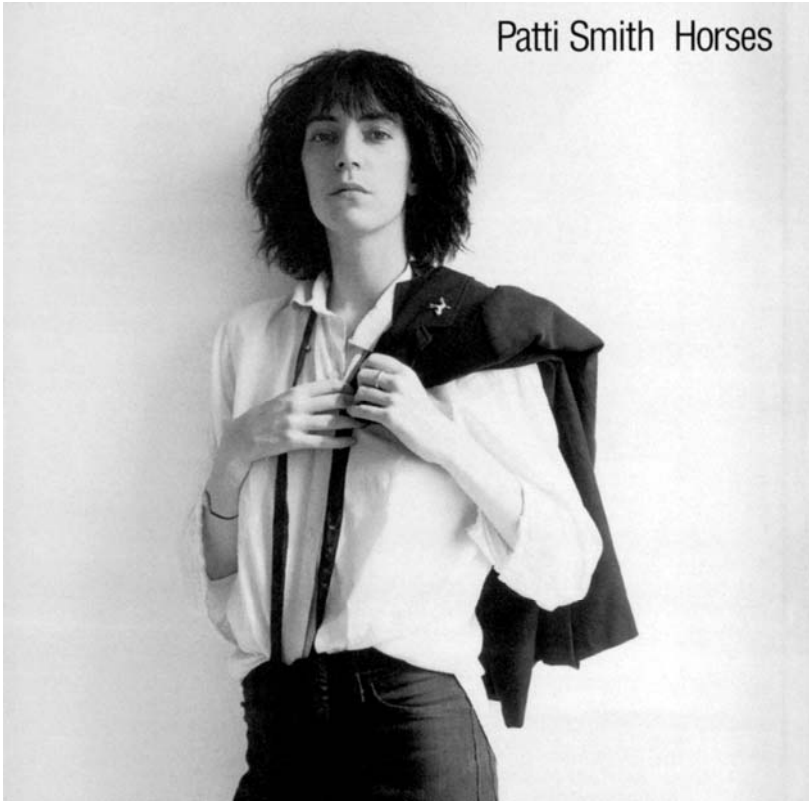
THE *WUNDERKAMMER*



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