Unexpected Turns:
The Aesthetic, the Pathetic and the Adversarial in the Long Durée of Art’s Histories

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Part I

In the autumn of 2011 I had the privilege of being a Getty Visiting Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The JNU’s graduate programme is surprisingly one of the very few in art history in the whole of India. There are less than three departments or schools for the study of art history in India despite the wealth of cultural heritage to be studied. The Getty is supporting their endeavours to develop the field by enabling the JNU to invite Western art historians who can share with the JNU graduates specific research interests and scholarly methodologies being developed currently in Europe and the Americas. I was invited as a ‘Western feminist art historian’ to elaborate on gender in the history of art as it has been studied in the West. Their expectations of me were based on those of my publications that had initially contributed to the establishment of the very possibility of a ‘feminist intervention in art’s histories’ — a formulation I prefer to the simple addition of feminist as an adjectival qualifier of a singular entity ‘Art History’.

Thus, when I proposed a series of lectures and seminars about trauma and aesthetic transformation, my hosts were frankly surprised. What could explain the trajectory from feminism, understood as research into art made by women and a critique of structural disciplinary sexism that had ‘disappeared’ women artists from the art historical record, to a preoccupation with trauma and historical catastrophe or indeed with aesthetics? What explains the pathetic and aesthetic turn?

Surely feminist art history was allied to a materialist social history of art, focussing on terms such as ideology, representation, discourse, power, and social formation. Aesthetics has been considered either part of a rejected philosophical, hence ahistorical and asocial model or it is associated with quality judgements, formal appraisals and individual responses to art objects indifferent to the mess of politics and social struggle. What truck could feminists have with aesthetics beyond the already long since doomed notion that women artists exhibited a collectively female or feminine aesthetic sensibility?


2 The notion of a specific feminine aesthetic sensibility or forms was mooted by Lucy Lippard, From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women and Art, New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1976. Since the 1980s there has
In the Spring of 2001 the Clark Art Institute organized a tri-focused conference *Art History, Aesthetics and Visual Studies*. Rembrandt’s etching of *Three Trees* (1645) provided an image for the organizers’ sense of three distinct postures in a single landscape, although the sublimated reference to the three crosses of the Crucifixion introduced unacknowledged problems to this image. I imagined that the invited speakers were being distributed to represent these three positions. Speaking from a feminist ‘perspective’, I was supposedly aligned by the organizers with Visual Studies, hence anti-art history and certainly anti-aesthetic. But they had not kept up with my actual work and were thus perplexed when I gave a paper about the ‘Aesthetics of Difference’ drawing heavily on psychoanalytical theories of the coincidence of the aesthetic and theories of sexual difference. As the introduction to my paper, and inspired by a lecture at the Getty by Paul Barolsky, I analyzed a story Vasari tells about Leonard da Vinci. His father has a farmworker who buys a shield and wants it carved. Ser Piero knows just the man for the job. Leonardo agrees and begins to collect a vast array of insect and creepy crawlies from which he hopes to derive a truly horrifying image of the Medusa—what else would go on a shield? But he takes too long and Ser Piero buys a readymade for his worker. But eventually Leonardo invites his father back to see the original shield. In a darkened room, propped so as to hide its supports, the painted shield awaits the unsuspecting Ser Piero who, on entering the room gasps in horror and faints into his son’s hands, before realizing that he has not looked on death, but only an image. The tale exemplifies perfectly what Lacan defines as *fascinum*: ‘the evil eye is the *fascinum*, it is that which has the power of arresting movement and, literally killing life… the anti-life, anti-movement function of this terminal point is the *fascinum*, and it is precisely one of the dimensions in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly’. Against this deadliness that menaces via the gaze split from the eye and hence vision, the painter Bracha Ettinger defines an aesthetic dimension, discovered specifically through the temporality and durations of both painting and looking at paintings. This she names *fascinance*, an extension of her theory of a Matrixial gaze, a creative, durational, co-affecting and transformational mode of aesthetic sense-knowing that is not purely scopic, that means, not just vision, but the affect and desire-laden aesthetic field charged up from infancy’s investment of sight with


many levels not of anxiety and dread (Freud/Lacan) but of voluptuous intensities and yearnings for connectivity. Ettinger writes:

Fascinance is an aesthetic event that operates in the prolongation and delaying of the time of the encounter-event [in the making and in the viewing] and allows a working-through of Matrixial differentiating-injointness and co-poiesis. Fascinance can take place only in a borderlinking within a real, traumatic or phantasmatic, compassionate hospitality. Fascinance might turn into fascinum when castration, separation, weaning, or splitting abruptly intervenes.5

This is perhaps an unrecognizable concept of art’s potentiality lodged in an unfamiliar and distractingly specialist psychoanalytical vocabulary. I do not introduce it to advocate normative adoption of psychoanalytical aesthetics. Rather it indicates that different lines of research focus on different problematics, at once opening up old questions to new ways of thinking and identifying new questions and problematics that necessitate theoretical innovation of terms to take us towards such hitherto unrecognized problematics. Thus the question of the intimacy between psychological human becoming, subjectivity, sexual difference and the aesthetic as form of sense-affective-sub-knowledge is a field hardly imagined in classical philosophical aesthetics, Freudian or Kleinian psychoanalytical aesthetics, and even feminist aesthetics. This field is not a new one in the sense of coming after and displacing former dominant or popular approaches. It is opened up by those who choose to investigate it, offered then to the theoretical and historiographical landscape of art practice, theory and history, in order to take its place as part of that landscape. Thus the metaphor of space is more hospitable to specialized and diverse lines of enquiry than the linear model implied in the notion of ‘After the New art History’ and the competition for what’s next. Bracha Ettinger also writes:

Wit(h)nessing requires your borderlinking and your participating in a time-space-encounter-event. In that sense, art as transcryptum is the space of a potential future offered always in a certain now. ‘Offered’ does not mean that the opportunity is going to be taken, or that there can be a pre-scription concerning what would create it. Art offers an occurrence. You might not enter at all this time-space, or the artwork might not offer it to you. But also: if you enter, and if it offers, you will discover in yourself a potentiality for resistance that is only born in such a borderspace-bordertime to begin with. If such resistance also develops from the proto-ethical into the ethical space that enters the public domain, it transgresses all prescribed political agendas and at the same time it can produce transformations in the existing political sphere.6

5 Bracha Ettinger, ‘Fascinance and the Girl to m/Other Matrixial Feminine Difference’ in Psychoanalysis and the Image; Transdisciplinary Perspectives edited by Griselda Pollock, Boston and Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2006, 61.

6 Bracha L. Ettinger, ‘Fragilization and Resistance’, In Tero Nauha, Tero and AkseliVirtanen, (eds), Bracha L. Ettinger: Fragilization and Resistance, Helsinki:
Is the turn to the pathetic and the aesthetic a turn away from the political or a path towards it but coming from another direction? Ettinger’s proposition does not oppose aesthetics to politics, or subordinate the former to the latter, but asks if the aesthetical domain has within it some useful knowledge or even subjective dispositions that being proto-ethical, foster inclinations towards respect, care and compassion for the other, which can subsequently enter into and transform another sphere of public debate and action. When the entry is made from this direction the translated aesthetical/proto-ethical-ethical trajectory transgresses existing political agendas and even concepts of the agonistically political with potentials that can produce transformations in this sphere in the form of reorientations, new attunements and above all new ways of imagining and releasing other forms of desire or yearning for connectivity and for the life of the other.

You might then call this an unexpected turn, turning the usual direction of politics to art into reverse while proposing a different ground, the aesthetic, for understanding what art offers to the world into which it intervenes like a Trojan horse from margins of consciousness and even the unconscious from beyond the boundaries of our sense of the time of human life: pre-natality and post-life. Let me explain.

**The Long Journey**

To me the journey that puzzled both the colleagues at the JNU and the Clark has an inner logic. At the same time what appears as unexpected turns registers firstly, the prolonged engagement necessary to work through a project such as the encounter of feminist through and art/art history and secondly, an equally necessary responsiveness to shifts in the larger historical and cultural context in which we work as scholars. I can look back over the journey from my initiation into art history in 1969 to my presentation of the themes of a forthcoming book on trauma and the aesthetic and plot out a pattern that involves both continuities and shifts of direction, all nonetheless consistent with the unfolding elaboration of what I named in 1988 ‘feminist interventions in the histories of art’. Why?

The project is very long-term and extremely challenging. I have recently defined feminism as a virtuality in philosophical terms. Whatever it might be, or whatever its effects are, are not yet realized. Far from being over, feminism is in state of becoming without a known destiny or end. Elements have been actualized in several moments (the vote, access to education, some amelioration of inequality, new intellectual projects etc., changes in sexual attitudes and rights) and in contingent and variable forms so far. But that does not exhaust feminism as a struggle for decency, dignity, safety, and an end to sexual violence and violation. Originating long before Modernity, a feminist challenge to the long durée of phallocentric symbolic and social organization became, however, a critical dimension of and in Modernity because of the historical coincidence between a politics of revolutionary challenge to previous modes of theocratic and aristocratic
authority under the banner of ‘rights’ and the contradictions that emerged in the subsequent bourgeois order that proclaimed freedom but made gender itself a major axis of exclusion. Side by side with enslaved people and emergent working classes, women emerged for the first time in history as a political collectivity redefining their relation to the state and society through the concept of inherent rights: at first exclusively named the Rights of Man. Man’s claim to false universality was immediately challenged by Women – hitherto a relatively insignificant category of the political or social, giving birth as it were to a distinctively modern debate that still rages about the socio-political and economic significance of gender and the cultural valency of sexual difference, the former referring to social formations of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ and the latter to symbolic and imaginative figurations of masculine and feminine psycho-linguistic positions. Shorthanded as ‘the Woman Question’, gender has been played out in varying ways throughout Modernity, becoming one of its key signifiers.

Thus it is historically inaccurate to locate a feminist moment only as a politically active flare-up in the 1970s-80s, a moment which can be thankfully confined to the past. Doing so allows some to believe that we can now be post-feminist and get on with something else. What I am proposing by insisting on the long durée of what Julia Kristeva names the monumental time of the psychosocial relations of reproduction, hence sex, gender, and sexuality, enables us to locate self-conscious and collective feminist questioning in the linear time of political and economic shifts such as Modernity and, like modern dreams of full democracy itself, to recognize it as still very unfinished business.7 As such, without limiting essentializing definition, the feminist project as the historical and political face of this deep monumental time of sex and gender is constantly changing, adjusting to the transformations of its own socio-political and symbolic ground, to new configurations responding to the very changes its various moments of actualization have themselves generated. For instance, the initially necessary protest against gross sexism of absolute exclusion of women generated a mode of protest and a political egalitarian rectification that was polemical and abrasive, energetic and exploratory. That protest belonged to a moment of many new social movements motivated by the resistance to total exclusion or tokenism on grounds of race and sexuality as well. In the wake of even limited success, for the resistance remains powerful, the challenges change, the possibilities for different enquiries and practices emerge. Attuned to the deep, structural and mythic potency of gender and sexual difference in societies and their cultural imaginaries, and to the shifting articulations of its urgencies and its troubling of power and identities, feminist interventions morph constantly into new forms. Rather than a linear history of beginnings, fadings and endings, I think we better understand the phenomenon through the image of a landscape, with many different features, diverse settlements, reworked connections, new highways and recovered byways, and shifting geologies.

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7 Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’ [1979], in Toril Moi (ed.), The Kristeva Reader, Oxford: Blackwell’s, 1986, 187-213. In other words, we confront two temporal dimensions: the time of linear history, cursive time (as Nietzsche called it), and the time of another history, thus another time, monumental time (again according to Nietzsche), which englobes these supra-national, socio-cultural ensembles within even larger entities.’ 189.
as well as refashioned surfaces. Climate changes and weather variations inflect a landscape sometimes moved by seismic shifts or unexpected disasters.

The historic significance of the struggle for women’s rights results not only in extended citizenship politically but in the access of women, in numbers, to higher education, and thence to their working as scholars ‘in their own name’, on the question of gender and knowledge, and on the enquiry through all the disciplines of the academy into forgotten histories and inscriptions as well as into new scientific studies of every kind. Never before in history have women qua women thought, written, researched and questioned. This itself changes the landscape into one unimagined by early suffrage campaigners and quite different from what activists promote as priority. Thinking ‘as a feminist’ is different from campaigning for a specific social change. It changes ‘the distribution of the sensible’: what can be seen, said, thought, written and done.  

What happened when this historic feminist impulse and academic adventure encountered Art History (the discipline and the domain) around 1970 was at once symptomatic of world-historic change and locally significant. Art History performs both an academic function as an historical discipline and a public function as the conserver and interpreter of symbolically significant and influential cultural memory. Part of nation building and national cultural definition, art as it is represented through its curatorial and academic institutions has profound effects.

Being questioned in New Delhi as to why a Western feminist turns up to lecture on trauma and aesthetic transformation rather than gender in art or the politics of gender in art history forced me articulate my understanding of what it means to participate in a long-term project that necessarily unfolds in ways unpredicted by its first moves. If Old Mistresses (1981), my first book, co-authored with Rozsika Parker, participated in a Foucault-type of discourse analysis of art historical writing and language, a second book moved onto Vision and Difference (1988) a more thematic set of questions about reading art for inscriptions of difference. Shifting the problematic from art to vision, visuality and the scopic field marked a reformulation of ways of working with the practices Art History renders into series of authored objects filiated down stylistic and period-based histories. Gender or sexual difference never function nakedly; they are implicated in other axes of differentiation and power we name class and race. Thus engaging with questions of internal agonistic tensions between ‘women’ whose initial collectivity could not be unproblematically sustained, opened on questions of how a postcolonial, international and queer feminist project might write itself: Gender and the Colour of Art History (1993) explored the racist sub-text in both art practices and art writing; Generations and Geographies (1996) emerged as a concept through which to attend to the double axis on which artistic practices attain their specificity: one axis is temporal—familial-historical—and the other is spatial—geopolitical. These moves relentlessly sought to move beyond any essentializing of difference in art. This then brought me back to questions of how such insights work not only in

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specialist studies of art made by women, but art by men as well, since all subjects are formed on both axes and through psycho-symbolic formations of class and race-inflected sexual difference. Hence *Differencing the Canon* (1999) became a working concept, freely translating Derridian *différance* to move beyond fixed notions of difference from or between entities, not only enabling the elaboration of feminist readings of art from all times and places but forcing into view the subject who undertakes such readings, formed not only as a certain kind of political subject, a feminist, but also dealing with what psychoanalysis teaches us `speaks us`: desire. Having to account for my own desires, a desire for difference, while being also subject to occlusions, identifications, blind spots and antagonisms took the project into both epistemology and psychoanalysis. Time and space are central to the art historical imaginary that narrates a history of art through time but divides it up spatially into regions and nations. Time and space join the archive—the museum as a temporalizing and spatializing apparatus for conserving but also meeting with art—in the next incarnation of my project as the *virtual feminist museum*.  

This concept returned to the point of my beginning with what was or was not in the cultural archive, in its books, but most concretely in its museums. Museums preserve and present art past and present, shaping cultural memory while limiting or inspiring the creative work of new generations according to what is offered—or not—to them. If the museum forms and performs the canon, differencing must also work here. Yet its institutional foundations, corporate and national-cultural, now heritage and tourism, have not been made the museum hospitable to the challenges of most of the new social movements. Still institutionally failing to address racism, sexism or homophobia even while making certain token gestures in acquisitions and temporary exhibitions, the museum has been very slow to take on any feminist challenge. Only in 2009, after almost forty years since the initial protests against gross disproportions of men and women shown in major museums, did the Centre Pompidou in Paris do the daring thing and devote all of its galleries for art since 1970 to be populated exclusively by work by artists who are women: *Elles@Pompidou*. To do so, however, it had to acknowledge the institution’s long-term failure to collect the key works by women in the last half-century. Considerable numbers of the works in show were donated or acquired in the preceding few years before the show opened and during its run. No other modern art museum has made such a gesture. The Museum of Modern Art in New York received a donation from Sarah Peters creating *The Modern Women’s Fund* in order to raise the issues and produce a major catalogue of work by women in the modern era. Special small exhibitions accompanied its publication. The Moderna Museet in Stockholm had to launch a major fund raising programme in 2007 to rectify their severe gender imbalance. Welcome as such minimal but

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significant gestures are, these institutions, forty years on, have only just cottoned onto rectification of gross inequality. They have not, perhaps cannot, begin to take on board the transformation of ways of seeing art or presenting what it does that are fundamental to the feminist critique performed in art as much as in art historical writing.

Thus my virtual feminist museum becomes a necessity for two reasons. The first is to elaborate the virtuality of feminism, its endless becoming, its future, unexhausted and as yet not fully known potentiality for radical and deep structural changes. The second is to offer examples of feminist ways of thinking about and presenting something other than art history’s conventional modes of ‘art’ and ‘the artist’ while engaging deeply with what Bracha Ettinger calls ‘artworking’. Clearly inspired by Aby Warburg’s legacy and his unfinished and perplexing project in his *Mnemosyne Bilder Atlas*, the Virtual Feminist Museum is not an agenda but a method for exploring other sets or series of images and objects and other modes of relating them. Hence the scenario of Sigmund Freud’s practice of psychoanalysis amidst his collection of antiquities that function as ‘signs’ and psycho-cultural mnemonics also offers another source of inspiration. Both allow for a dynamic around the idea of encounter: encounters between objects classified and separated otherwise by conventions of art history (period, medium, nation, artist, style etc.) and encounters between viewers/readers and the assemblage created by other logics of association, the new text woven out of the encounters between images/objects. The Virtual Feminist Museum mimics the many rooms and different modes of the museum while offering new logics of connection, posing different questions to the assemblages, and seeking other knowledges that might exceed the premises upon which the initial conversation-encounters were planned. The museum has its places of display, its archives, its video and cinématèque, its library, its spaces for theoretical exchange. It is also responsive to changing priorities and the emergence of new perspectives, questions and critical re-examination.

Understanding my own trajectory by means of a series of concepts developed to work through a constantly unfolding, unpredictable, dynamic exploration of art and culture generated by the initial raising of the repressed question of gender, allows me to make two key assertions that contest the proposition that we are now ‘after the new art history’. It is far too soon to assume that a long-term project is ‘over’; rather it might be necessary to track more carefully the processes and moments of its inevitably changing evolution. Secondly, we need to ask what is the nature of the ‘desire’ that seeks to place any forms of art history in the past?

I have no issues with scholars feeling the need to expand the field of our very complex endeavour, to reconceptualize the central problematics for research. Indeed the idea of art historical research as a landscape with many settlements, each with outstanding scholars devoting years to dealing with their chosen problematic, seems vital precisely because of the dangers of institutionalizing and canonizing a very limited set of propositions and procedures. It was that straitjacket effect that initiated a moment that I am calling the adversarial.

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The Adversarial Moment, not ‘The New art History’

Some years ago, I wrote a paper called ‘The Mirage of Posterity’. There were a lot of posts around: postmodernity, postcoloniality, and postfeminism. These were not, however, of the same order. Post-modernity was understood as Modernity’s unresolved contradictions come home to roost evidencing an internal critique and mournful disenchantment. Postcoloniality speaks to both renegotiating the dark legacies of colonization and celebrating the creative responses to situations of release from colonial domination that implicate former colonizer peoples and colonized peoples in new and hybrid relations. Postfeminism was declared, however, to suggest that feminism was over, done with, relegated to the past. Afterfeminism. I wanted above all to challenge this mirage of willed posterity. Feminism is not over; it is still relevant, vital, needed. But it soon became apparent, that once someone wants you dead, your resistance is already spectral. Resistance would need a different strategy and use of my own theoretical resources to comprehend the impulse to negate.

The cultural and literary theorist Raymond Williams offered the suggestion that at any moment in cultural history, there will be residual, dominant and emergent elements. The new does not completely replace the old, for the old is often not yet exhausted. Whatever dominates is never alone on the scene; emergent forces are always being generated within it. In Art History, for instance, there was a moment in the late twentieth century when emergent forms contested the dominance of existing conventions. The key question now is what are the emergent trends and whence do they come? What has become or remained dominant? How might residual elements function as a kind of conscience for those seeking new dominations?

There is we know is a sociology of the discipline of Art History: who does what, where and why? There were largely men’s clubs for the study of different periods such as the Italian Renaissance or the Dutch seventeenth century, and clubs for the scholars specializing in the oeuvres of specific such as Rembrandt Rubens, Turner, Picasso or Richter. We are also at this moment witnessing a worldwide shift to a focus on contemporary art. Something like 85% of PhD students in US graduate schools are writing about contemporary art. I imagine similar statistics in the UK. Does this not register a very substantial shift in the historical imagination that once fed into Art History and the interests its historicizing serviced?

As an institutional academic and museum discipline, Art History was created in the nineteenth century nation states that defined their identities by territorialized, racialized and selective cultural narratives of which the history of their art was the visual and material track imbued with a deeply Hegelian, progressivist telos. The shift to the contemporary may register a radical sociological alteration of our relation to time—a loss of the historical—but also to space, which is no longer exclusively defined by such national entities because of internationalization and globalization. The contemporary is at once a kind of

simultaneity typical of rapidly changing economic-technological remappings of time and space. The contemporary refers to what is happening now or around us. It is also a usefully shapeless envelope that will include rapidly displaced novelty, with swift losses of position as the latest and the leading. At the same time, this shift to the study of the contemporary amongst graduates registers, symptomatically, a new reality: the future lies not in the academy and university, shrinking and failing to provide secure professional futures for the bright young scholars, but in the ever expanding curatorial field with collectors, dealers, proliferating biennales and new museums of contemporary art as the field of contemporary art making and consumption itself explodes under the pressure of the new uneven distributions of wealth created in rapidly expanding economies in Asia and through the now unchallenged force of globalizing capitalism in its current phase.

If this is a crude picture of the present, what was the past?

The so-called culture wars of the later twentieth century created an adversarial condition. The old or canonical Art History inherited from the nineteenth century was forcefully challenged by the emergence of a range of critical formations. Each one proposed different procedures and identified different issues that had to be confronted in both the analysis of art’s histories and in the analysis of Art History itself as historical and ideological formation.

Was this simply pluralization? Or was it symptomatic of a key problem of the adversarial moment? Raymond Williams identified a ‘selective tradition’ that functioned hegemonically to exclude from consideration and respect a range of factors shaping the production and consumption of cultural forms, while actively producing a representation of and for the world deeply marked by sets of selective and often violently supported interests which were passed off simply as ‘tradition’. So the issue was not a ‘new art history’ to replace the old. The adversarial moment challenged the very assumptions of Art History itself as the production of a selective tradition masquerading as the only tradition. Pluralizing the concept of art’s histories as did Adrian Rifkin in 1986 and I did in 1988 exploded the idea of a consensus and hence of a simple replacement of one orthodoxy by another under the unchallenged assumption that the linking art and history was self-evident and took only the forms Art History had predominantly specified. In a volume titled The NEW Art History, published in 1986, Adrian Rifkin already declared the ‘idea of a new art history stale... an anxious liberal stratagem to market a faded product in a new package’. Rifkin critiqued a deep conservatism in much of the so-called new art history that did not, in effect, really question the canon, the tradition and its cherished series of objects. Referencing Walter Benjamin’s critique of that privileged series: art objects and the artist, Rifkin wrote:

The common element of all these new art histories is the coupling one way round of the other of these two words ‘art’ and ‘history’. They remake the coupling, and it holds them together too. But whether you take it in the shape of the museum, the coffee table book, the auction house catalogue or

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the scholarly monograph, in forms old and new, it signals only one *series of valued objects, objects whose culturally ascribed value demands that they have their own history*. This is the ‘series’ that Walter Benjamin described as the expropriated trophies of class domination, ripped out of their production history, represented as a natural repository of values, and demanding acquiescence that they should be recognized as such. It is to this series that new art historians put their questions, Marxist or feminist, or whatever. Even though they know that the series is an effect of history, they refuse to allow this knowledge to undermine their object of study.13

Rifkin thus locates the contest not as a battle between brands of art history, new or old, but between modes of analysis that do or do not accept the central premises of what has come to be known as Art History: a series of objects that have value sustained by their own historicization torn asunder from the messy bloodiness of their real conditions of production and use.

Rifkin was correct in so far as within the emergent contestants there was another level of conflict precisely because some wished to defend the series against those prepared to deconstruct it. Leading social historians of art for instance dismissed certain concurrent tendencies such as feminism or queer studies as either mere novelty seeking (Clark) or (unforgivably) as ‘Balkanization’ (Crow). Who can forget the shock of Clark’s statement in 1974?

It ought to be clear now that I’m not interested in the social history of art as part of a cheerful diversification of the subject, taking its place alongside other varieties—formalist, ‘modernist’, sub-Freudian, filmic, feminist, ‘radical’ all of them hot-foot in pursuit of the New. For diversification, read disintegration.14

Both Rifkin and Clark, probably in some people’s minds iconic figures of the ‘new art history’ disown the term completely but for radically different reasons. Clark seeks to hold his practice against a new supermarket of brands of art history that splinter and trivialize fundamental questions while Rifkin is asking scholars to imagine modes of analysis not defined by being Art History at all (art made by artists producing a category of valued objects with their own histories).

By naming this the adversarial moment I want to stress that it was not, despite Clark’s and Crow’s position, simply a battle for the heartland of Art History in the grand manner of revolutionary theory. It was a contest over what field might emerge to study certain kinds of aesthetic operations without sustaining Art History’s primary system of values.15 Pluralization of art’s histories did not merely

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15 For my own analysis of art history as a discourse generating its central artistic subject, the artist, see Griselda Pollock, ‘Artists, Mythologies and Media — Genius, Madness and Art History’, *Screen* 21:3, 1980, 57-96. See also Mary Kelly’s extension into modernist criticism, ‘Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism’, *Screen* 22:3, 1981, 41-52.
introduce relativizing variety as Clark dreaded. It stated something deeper about
the historical enterprise itself. It acknowledged the contested and situated nature of
all knowledge production while also insisting on an agonistic field of competing
discourses and interests that did not replace each other. In its forms of intellectual
practice, research, writing, teaching and collaborating, it forged deep bonds with
real struggles worldwide against existing forms of domination. Art History was
hence susceptible as a socially instituted historiographic practice to both
deconstruction and discourse analysis.

The adversarial moment was not merely about how to do art history better
or differently. It opened up for question what the predominant formation called Art
History did. It examined its real effects. As a representational activity, Art History
relates to the production and dissemination of systems of power gendered, classed,
raced and heteronormative. In 1978, Edward Said’s Foucauldian analysis of
Orientalism brilliantly exposed the intricate relays and networks between formal
colonial operations of political and military domination and the esoteric scholarship
of researchers, the imaginative fiction of novelists, the phantasmatic scenarios of
painters. The point was this. Power, difference and violence are not extrinsic to
the discourses of Art History and the practices of art, being imported by ‘politics’
into this formerly politics-free zone. As a discursive and institutional formation Art
History has both deep roots in, and profound effects on, these systems of
differentiation and power. Colonization mapped the globe in both material and
symbolic ways. What Art History does and says has, therefore real political effects
through its symbolic constructions of a selective cultural tradition and its limited
assigning of value and creative potential. Socializing art history is not the same as
reconfiguring our understanding of the relays between art, society and ideological
effects and transformative aesthetic possibilities.

So the notion that there were many constituencies and voices emerging to
contest the production of knowledge about art and the existing systems of
representation of the world through the presentation of art according to Art
History’s dominant protocols cannot be, must not be, identified with individuals,
names, writings, or even specific books: the personalizing habit. We have to
understand the historical conditions for this contest arising within the anti- and
post-colonial struggles, in the new social movements for civil rights that challenged
racist hierarchies inherited from enslavement history, for lesbian and gay rights and
for women’s rights, itself with a long durée in the history of Modernity, now
contesting with Art History because the narratives of human culture and creativity
shaped by nineteenth century European thought were part and parcel of what was
being struggled against.

Our current moment lacks the certainties with which initial adversarial
contestation reconfigured and relocated critically the art historical and to a lesser
extent the curatorial field. One of the arguments I wish to make is that it is not a
matter of coming after, in the sense of an obligatory moving on from what preceded
us. Rather we might ask: Has the project been defeated rather than merely
superseded? If so, by what and how so? Is one of the failures of our present the
incomplete assimilation of the implications or even the substance of that after which

we apparently now stand, wondering what to do and where to go next? Does not the compulsive habit of labelling, classifying, dividing up and then offering to students these pre-digested distorted fragments on so-called ‘approaches or methods’ courses function as a form of effective destruction, murder even, of that which radically challenged the normative discursive and ideological modes for thinking about art and its histories? Is the retrospective labelling of interventions as assimilable approaches and perspectives precisely a form of effective hegemonic defence of the core system of values: the series of valued objects and their authors whose exceptionality as ‘artists’ confers value on their products?

The sense of retrospective evaluation initiated by the Birmingham conference puts a parenthesis around the last forty years. Yet this seems a short time frame for the unfolding of specific intellectual-political projects whose deeper fidelities might be missed if the differences between various publications were taken at face value. So our periodizing habits, as art historians, preclude the appreciation of the longer durée of even one intervention or project.

Another way to think this time-lapse between now and then is to incorporate the fact that both intellectual and artistic practices constitute singular sites within the larger socio-economic formations of which they are, at the same time, indexical symptoms. These formations are dynamically subject to historical processes that are not immediately discernible. Thus any thinking scholar will react in her or his work to these shifts in historical time: i.e. cultural shifts within this long durée that has recently speeded up its rate of change. Do we then see only unexpected turns, changes of direction, betrayals of the project, or are such turns sensitive adjustments to changing conditions? Thus what seemed the imperative of social or feminist projects in the 1970s was historically specific; the urgencies of the present may shift the still feminist project into different modes or questions. Current feminist thinking and analysis addresses questions such as affectivity, ethics, violence, citizenship, historical memory, trauma etc… why? Because the cultural preoccupations with the catastrophe of the twentieth century have become so oppressive that they mandate modes of analysis that classic Marxism with its utopian progressivism towards final redemption/revolution or poststructuralism’s atheism and disenchantment no longer sustain. We lose their own dynamic interactions over time with shifting historical challenges, if we continue to label and time-frame intellectual procedures.

Put simply, in the adversarial moment, Art History was called to account by the dispossessed, the colonized, the oppressed and the excluded. These groups’ access to education under post-war social democracies and social polices aiming at greater social equality made them acutely aware of the contradictions in their own societies while providing them with the intellectual tools necessary for mounting this challenge from inside the university but outside the disciplines. The studies movement challenged the nineteenth century distribution of knowledge by traversing disciplinary boundaries in the name of lateral alliances, transdisciplinary concepts and new supranational constituencies of opposition: women, lesbian and gay, African-American, Hispanic etc. Visual Studies and Cultural Studies were part of this creation of the novelties that emerged out of the expansion of the post-1960s university whose potential is being erased in Britain by current reconsolidations of the universities under new funding schemes that render intellectual adventure a
bad financial risk. Our moment of art historical practice is in hock to the nakedly
dominant form of contemporary capitalism: the market, heritage tourism, culture as
consumption and entertainment and the nature of economic, social, and cultural life
in what Zygmunt Bauman has characterized as liquid modernity. This concept might
also explain this compulsive after-ness.

One of the most respected of contemporary sociologists, Zygmunt Bauman
has emerged as a major theorist of the contemporary human condition with his
concept of liquid modernity.17 Developed across a plethora of books which chart
liquid life, liquid love, liquid fear, the concept of our times as fluid or liquid as
opposed to a succession of solidified social formations, temporarily fluid only at
moments of transition or revolution, offers a new perspective on the cultural
dominant since the mid-1990s. Despite Bauman’s having written about art and
more recently about the changing function of culture in the transition from solid
modernities to liquid modernity, the world of art history and cultural analysis has
not embraced the Baumanian diagnosis. Its crude outlines are this:

In its original formulation, ‘culture’ was intended to be an agent for change,
a mission undertaken with the aim of educating ‘the people’ by bringing the
best of human thought and creativity to them. But in our contemporary
liquid-modern world, culture has lost its missionary role and has become a
means of seduction: it seeks no longer to enlighten the people but to seduce
them. The function of culture today is not to satisfy existing needs but to
create new ones, while simultaneously ensuring that existing needs remain
permanently unfulfilled. Culture today likens itself to a giant department
store where the shelves are overflowing with desirable goods that are
changed on a daily basis—just long enough to stimulate desires whose
gratification is perpetually postponed.18

There appears now to be no guiding thesis or counter-thesis to enable us to
discern the critical response to the seductions of the image massively displayed
across the vast network of international exhibitions and art entertainment venues
that used to be called museums. The embrace of the present, and of presentness as a
novel mode of at once being in time and yet outside of former ideas of temporal
succession determines that which theorists try to pin down as contemporaneity.
Thus, in his analysis of what is contemporary art, Terry Smith declares:

Contemporaneity is the fundamental condition of our times, manifest in the
most distinctive qualities of contemporary life, from the interaction with
humans and geosphere, through the multitude of cultures and the ideoscope
of global politics to the interiority of individual being. Against its grain, we
must write its history, as it is happening, otherwise it will elude us—even
perhaps destroy us.19

Smith’s idea of a desperate necessity to write a history ‘as it happens’ flies in the face of conventional ideas of history as that which is not the present, as that from whose chaotic occurrences significant order can be gleaned only in retrospect, ridding our vision of the chaff of the incidental and distilling the grain of the truly determining. Such a perspective, granting the present the right to define the past, is being displaced by a necessity to adjust to a constantly changing, liquefying present, moving for its own sake too fast for us to grasp. This is both a very different subjective situation and historiographical position.

As scholars we are not outside of the conditions of our times be they liquefying or contemporaneous. We are its symptoms but also as art historians and historiographers we come to the present problematic not only burdened by disciplinary protocols derived from the earlier historicist moment of art history as a will to create order and derive knowledge from ordering the past by nation, period, style, movement, oeuvre and master but with resources for critical self-assessment of our own dehistoricizing temporal moment.

Our discipline was formulated between the philosophic initiative to identify a specific mode of experience and its natural or cultural objects—the aesthetic—and a historicizing and temporalizing project that enabled a classification of world civilizations whose destiny was to arrive at the point from which this history was being written under its determinist telos. Are we witnessing the crisis of that art historical order from which like rats, the majority of graduate students are fleeing as if from the sinking ship? What do we do with Art History when art writing and curatorship become the most fashionable and financially wise investment in liquid times? Why tie yourself to a period or a specialization? Why not be flexible following the tide of ever changing fashion? Being in contemporary art allows for the millennial generation’s favoured and liquid adjustability, flexibility, and mobility. On the other hand, scholarly art historians are at risk of becoming like birds in the wake of the ship of contemporary art, following on and catching up into academic currency that which the dealers, collectors and curators lay out in their trail as they travel the oceans in their floating cruise ships or insulated private jets. Many an art historian decides his or her topic by seeing upon what the market and the collector has conferred status, which their scholarly writing then endorses as immediate legitimation (not historicization for that might require critical evaluation rather than the supplementation by affirmative or explanatory discourse). This situation is seductive. I too have been seduced into the study of the contemporary. Intellectual agility is tested as ways of writing up art generates a new idiom of analysis. But, can we still keep a historical imagination in play?

Part II

In this part of the article, I have chosen to perform a work of deconstruction of the framework for the conference *After the New Art History*. Not undertaken as a gesture of negative critique, my reading seeks to undo a misrepresentation of the past that distorts the future that is being imagined or coaxed into existence.

The concluding paragraphs of the call for papers read:

*Finally, growing external political pressures on the Academy, which have been focused on instrumentalising art history, are potentially threatening to turn the discipline into a service industry for the market, stripping it of its force as a mode of radical social and cultural inquiry.*

This conference will examine the state and futures of radical art history within this context. What has been gained for the discipline over the past 40 years, and what are the dangers for these gains in the present? What are the current challenges for radical art history, and how are they being met?

There is much I would want to endorse here in terms of thinking about where we were and where we are going, and what are the threats to the academic and intellectual integrity of our research and teaching. I am less convinced as the preceding pages will suggest about a singular notion of a radical art history that encompasses all forms of dissidence from that which was hegemonic in the discipline under one umbrella. By posing the concept of the adversarial moment, I have wanted to reintroduce the historical configuration of the conditions that generated a series of mutually challenging critical interventions that have themselves unfolded in sustained forms over forty years while the hegemonic practices have been consolidated in institutionalized practice sustained by real economic and market-led investment in highly valued series of objects and their guarantee of value: the privileged author-artist. A radical art history distracts us from seeing both the forces that constantly undermine critical practices of thought and in art itself while disfiguring the specific values of the many, different event antagonistic directions which critical thinking about art, culture, visuality and difference have taken. In some cases, these new directions disown their relation to Art History completely, founding a distinctive field with its own objects of study and methodology. Others forge new interdisciplinary alliances the better to focus on a specific problematic folded into the larger field of histories of art, seeing, images, representation, perception and imagination.

I want, therefore, to tease out from two other paragraphs of the Call for Papers the problems we all face as a result of some of Art History’s worst habits and how they short-change our ability to use the recent past, a very different moment indeed, to make a critical space in this contemporary, liquid time.

The New Art History

*The term ‘new art history’ has long been an established – albeit contentious – part of the critical lexicon of the art historical discipline. Associated with the pioneering
social and feminist art histories of T J Clark and Griselda Pollock of the 1970s (expanding in subsequent decades to encompass post-colonial, Freudian, post-Freudian and wider gender-studies approaches), it denoted a conceptual shift that foregrounded the dependence of intellectual inquiry on a priori ideological / political values.

The first recorded use of the phrase ‘The New Art History’ appears to have been the titling of a conference organized by the editors of BLOCK magazine in 1982: The New Art History?. The question mark after the title put it up immediately for interrogation. The conference of 2012 and this issue themed ‘After the New Art History’ marks the thirtieth anniversary of BLOCK’s conference. The 2012 conference then becomes the closing parenthesis. Afterwardness is our moment—does that hint at mere historical supersession? Or might it signal the belated arrival of a former trauma, a symptom of Nachträglichkeit? 21 Recall Theodor Adorno’s use of the notion of ‘after’ in his difficult phrasing of our epoch and our constant political orientation: After Auschwitz. This phrase contains both the spatial and temporal coordinates of the German word nach. Nach means coming after an event in time, but also being oriented towards it, as in journeying towards a certain destination whose memory cannot be closed off in the past. ‘After the New Art History’ can, therefore, be glossed as the return of the repressed rendering its adversarial moment pathogenic, troubling, to be suppressed because it disturbs the now. Or it can be a positional question: if it has happened, we cannot but be its legatees. The question is who wishes to be faithful to its memory?

This year, 2012, is coincidentally also the fortieth anniversary of the John Berger’s landmark television series Ways of Seeing.22 Perhaps the BLOCK conference in 1982 was itself a tenth anniversary of that event, declaring its own alignment with this momentous challenge to establishment, class-privileged and British Art History—formed as we know not in the universities of the enlightenment as in Europe, but out of a motley crew of relative amateurs, in both senses of the word, collectors, connoisseurs, moral evangelists in art, painters, and aristocrats.23 The Burlington Magazine, Apollo and the National Gallery formed the foundations for Art History in Britain in this century and the oddity of London housing the fragile façade of the Courtauld Institute of Art in the 1970s/80s and the exiled and

21 Originally translated as ‘deferred action in English and ‘après coup’, Jean Laplanche has proposed the term ‘afterwardness’ for Freud’s central concept for the psychic processes that do follow linear development. Instead events, impressions, feelings and experiences are changed, acquire significance, and become psychically effective through the retrospective revision engendered by later events. Lived time generates constant re-arrangement and re-transcription of older elements. Laplanche defines this more precisely by arguing that it is that which in the past was not capable of being assimilated that is most particularly susceptible to afterwardly revision. Trauma—that which cannot be processed by the psyche but which lends its unbound affects to secondary events that effectively trigger the unprocessed event’s occurrence in this secondary, belated but originary repetition. It is the second scene that in reversal endows the primary one with its pathogenic affect. Things become a trauma by deferred action. See Jean Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, ‘Deferred Action’, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, London:Karnac Books, 1988, 111-13.


dislocated Warburg Institutes led to an idiosyncratic revolution in the field of Art History forged as much in the art school-polytechnics as in Screen magazine and extra-institutional reading groups or magazines like BLOCK and Spare Rib.

This other genealogy is not included in the framework identified by the call for papers; it is clearly an important addition. Artist, writer, leftist, Berger framed his TV assault on civilizational art history represented by the patrician director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark by means of a summary of the recently translated essay by Walter Benjamin ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility’, which appeared in English in American and British editions in 1968 and 1970 respectively. Thus reclaiming a link to an earlier moment of intense politicization of culture and cultural resistance to fascism in the dangerous 1930s, Berger assaulted the entire aestheticizing framework of Art History and offered much more than a historical materialist reading of art. Using Benjamin’s shift from Art History’s own models, Berger characterizes the vast and largely banal cultural production of oil painting as the art of a possessing class. He offers a proto-feminist reading of representation of women notably the female nude that iterates this condition of ownership, and a revelation of the symmetries and continuities between art and advertising, as well as art and pornography. Berger exploded carefully policed boundaries between zones of image culture and blew up the selective ‘series’ (recall Rifkin quoting Benjamin) and its system of values.

I also discern, however, perhaps unknown to Berger, equal affinities between his book project and the work of another scholar who was opposed to aestheticizing art history, Aby Warburg, notably in the Mnemosyne Atlas of Warburg’s last years. The relationship lies in the shared focus on the image rather than on the art object, personified and idealized as art or artist. They also share a sense of the historical nexus of the often dangerous functioning of the image in its varied distribution and uses, while acknowledging the play of deeper psychic and social structures elaborating the forms of images grounded in both material and psychological necessities. Finally Warburg, much admired by Walter Benjamin, traced the traffic between regimes or sites of image-making and image dissemination that did not privilege, therefore, the fine arts over other forms of mechanically produced image, high versus popular culture, West versus elsewhere.

Struggling with the long durée and recent racialization of cultural difference notably through anti-Semitism, Warburg was definitively anti-nationalist and internationalist in his perspective, defying the appropriation of art’s histories for modern, nationalist racism and bourgeois Europe’s self-definition and


delusion. Warburg’s absence from our sense of new moves in the art historical field is another of our selective memories losses.

The term ‘new art history’, questioned in the Block conference with an interrogative at the end of the phrase had been affirmatively installed in 1986 by a publishing venture by two figures on the margins of academic art history, A.L. Rees, a film scholar and the journalist and art writer Frances Borzello. The authors of the volume of this title included were a motley and completely heterogeneous bunch: Dawn Ades, Stephen Bann, Jon Bird, Victor Burgin, Lynda Nead, Tom Gretton, Charles Harrison, Margaret Iverson, Alex Potts, Neil McWilliam, Paul Overy, Marcia Pointon, Adrian Rifkin, John Tagg, Ian Jeffrey. Nothing unites this crew from which notably Clark and Pollock are absent. The term New Art History, resented by most, has somehow remained in currency despite its having been battered to death by a major article within the collection by Adrian Rifkin that I have already quoted. Why, we must ask, do we repeat the offence by even using the term, while never truly taking to heart what was not only a warning but also a devastating critique?

In 2000, for instance, Jonathan Harris was commissioned by Routledge in to write a ‘critical introduction’ to the ‘New Art History’. Repeating the already perverting phrase gave renewed life to its fateful formulation and obscured other ways of understanding the foundations of the adversarial field. He was uncomfortable with the title but the publishers needed the tag line to encompass and master competing diversity and internal conflicts as a ‘range’ of possible ‘approaches’ all reduced to a few quotations from each player – just indeed as Adrian Rifkin had stated in his excoriating critique of the term in the book of the title. This again erased serious points of conflict, muting the real agonism of what is at stake.

Rifkin had specifically distinguished feminism’s genuine innovations from the conventional social histories of art, because, unlike the latter, feminism radically challenged the ‘series’ (Benjamin) and the structure of values sustaining it. Thus social historians of art from T J Clark to Charles Harrison, can and have ignored the issues of race, gender and sexuality, deeming them extrinsic to the proper questions of what they defend which remains a white, Eurocentric masculinist canon closed against any other modes of reading the image, cultural practices, and committed to the centrality of the artistic subject. Despite these strongly worded arguments

30 One of the more extraordinary events was Charles Harrison, Painting the Difference: Sex and the Spectator in Modern Art, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, a study of sexual difference and modernist painting in the nineteenth century that critiqued feminist initiatives in this area as vigilantist and proposed that the great canonical male modernists already made sexual difference structural to modernist spaces and gazes. Rather than joining in the conversation, feminism was negated in order to reassert canonical authority for artists who are men while their women peers are relegated to second rank and historical insignificance.
against framing the intense debates post 1970s as ‘new’ directions in art history, therefore, newness has stuck. In due course, what was new has now become old, and so new newnesses must be found because we need to be constantly renewing ourselves.

It is because of this almost millenialist framing of certain approaches as once-new fashions, that in the field of the new feminism can be treated now as démodé. Others, being a little newer and inherently sexier and apparently more easily co-opted have not been so swiftly shelved. The post-colonial enters, incompletely of course, World Art History or Global Art Studies, forgetting the blood and violence of international relations in post-and neo-imperial times. Without our noticing, we have become symptoms of our own condition: namely of liquid modernity in which change is made for the sake of change and the long durée and its deeper historical perspectives have become not only uninteresting but unthinkable in terms of a matrix that requires newness as the price of any value in a ever shifting condition of structural uncertainty necessitated by the current conditions of globalizing capitalism.

T.J. Clark’s manifesto for the social history of art, which he understood as a reclamation of an existing but ruptured tradition of historical materialist thinking in Art History that had emerged in the 1920s-30s, appeared in the 1973, the year after Berger’s publication of Ways of Seeing as a Penguin book, in The Image of the People.31 I am not at all convinced that Clark’s careful identification of all the bad habits in preceding attempts to articulate art, history and politics that he did not want to repeat, has yet been fully grasped. I wonder how much of his equally finely tuned statement of what he aimed to examine, are, or have been really taken to heart, understood and communicated when we casually identify him or he gets taught as a ‘Marxist’ or a ‘social historian of art’? Very little, I suggest.

Linking Clark and Pollock, as Marxist and Feminist, align the two as if equally possible brands within the basket of novelty, rather than, as they have been for many long years, interestingly adversarial if mutually respectful positions with the possibility of finding feminists who engage deeply if critically with the historical material tradition. Labelling as Marxist, Feminist, Structuralist, Psychoanalytical, Post-colonial, Queer makes it easy to stand outside of any of these demanding analyses and very different priorities, while completely obfuscating the often finely woven intersections. These result not from fixed allegiances to one -ism or position. Rather art historians engaging with class, racialization, gender, sexuality and the post-colonial are responding to the real of historical agonies subjectively experienced and culturally articulated. Thinking is not badged but critically responsive to the demands of history.

Clark contested while acknowledging descent/dissent from the social history of art that he inherited from earlier generations of Marxists who had, he argued, been part of the larger historiographical context of later nineteenth and early twentieth century history studies within which Art History once held a significant position. Clark challenged, however, earlier Marxist theses about culture by replacing the crude base/superstructure explanations of one-way determination

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from economic foundations. Informed by Althusserian revisions that allowed each level of the social formation some degree of autonomy and cross-determination, Clark was interested in interrogating precisely how a social condition becomes an aesthetic formulation. Far from replacing formalism or concern with aesthetic specificity by pre-given explanations of their causes in a social elsewhere, he wanted to trace the specific *mediations* between social process and artistic form. To do this he drew on some of the theoretical currents he had encountered in Paris ca. 1968: Deconstruction, Lacan’s new theories of the linguistic psyche, and notably the Situationist theory of capital as spectacle that allowed him to read Modernism for its failures located in contradictions it rarely overcame. Although not a Freudian or a sub-Freudian, Clark acknowledges furthermore the significance of psychoanalysis as a key modernist theory of the mind, subjectivity and necessarily important for both aesthetic creation and our readings of it.\(^{32}\)

Amongst his many critiques of the canonical methods within the social history of art and beyond that Clark wished to criticize in the discipline in general is ‘their picture of history as a definite absence from the act of artistic creation: a support, a determination, a background, something never actually *there* when the painter stands in front of the canvas, the sculptor asks his model to stand still.’\(^{33}\) Drawing on a then prevailing structural and Althusserian Marxism, Clark insists that: ‘Art is autonomous in relation to other historical events and processes, though the grounds of that autonomy alter.’\(^{34}\) Critiqued in a review by Rifkin for remaining inside the ‘series’ of great works by great artists, Clark offers a procedure within it to modify the way the artist/history transaction might be analysed precisely as a transaction and a translation.\(^{35}\) He insists, therefore, that the artist *makes* the encounter with history. It has a certain unpredictable contingency that makes new demands of the art historian: the art historian in turn has to discern the historical structures that the artist encounters willy-nilly (being a historian) but also to disclose the specific conditions of any one meeting when the content of experience acquires a form, an event becomes a specific image in a specific medium (being a historian of artistic practices). This mediated, transactional work of what I would call aesthetic translation is thus at heart a work of *transformation* in which the work of art *works* its already freighted ideological materials—from actual materials and processes to the less tangible but none the less effective ideas, beliefs, and modes of experience, themselves preformulated by ideologies that again the artwork works. We have here a differentiating assertion of the aesthetic as central to the social art historical project, made possible by introducing the Freudian concept of an economy of work as in dream work or mourning work: Freud’s dynamic economic modelling of psychological processes.

This is why I have to challenge the phrase: *...dependence of intellectual inquiry on a priori ideological / political values.*

T. J. Clark’s social history of art is labelled as Marxist (but in a manner critical of its own inheritance. Griselda Pollock’s feminist social history of art is

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\(^{32}\) T. J. Clark, ‘*Freud’s Cézanne*’, *Representations* 52 (Fall 1995), 94-122

\(^{33}\) Clark: *The Image of the People*, 12.

\(^{34}\) Clark: *The Image of the People*, 13.

\(^{35}\) Rifkin, ‘*Marx’s Clarkism*’, *Art History*, 5:3, 1985, 488-95.
named… well feminist. These two isms, clearly have had political forms: both revolutionary and reformist. But no one takes to the streets or organizes as political parties or movements under such names. Feminism represents something more than the Women’s Movement. ‘Marxist’ and ‘feminist’ identify foundational and modern philosophical projects that extend into other areas of social and cultural enquiry that may have political effects according to their site of enactment or articulation. These sites of feminist work, for instance, may effect changes in the distribution of power, or, in Rancierian terms, the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (what can be said, heard, represented) through acknowledging the symbolic and imaginative plane as one of the levels of the social ensemble that includes the aistheton — what can be apprehended by the senses. 36

We make the mistake of reading back from symptomatic flare-ups of political instances to their underlying theoretical forms, treating the former as the cause of the latter. Instead we should understand that there could be no communist party without Marx’s thought while Marx’s thought is not identical with communist parties or even socialist states. There would be no women’s movement without feminist theorization and politicization of rights, society, and gender. Something had to be thinkable, sayable and doable before it could be manifested as political action. Feminism is, however, ‘managed’ nowadays, that is to say effectively negated as a relevant project for our discipline in general, by being framed only as a purely political and activist project extraneous to major historiographical or art historical inquiry, thus missing the fact that one of the most lasting legacies of its most recent resurgence of feminism has been a world-wide intellectual revolution that has radically altered the entire field of knowledge.

We name the matrix for Marxist analysis interrelations between material conditions of the production of life and symbolic as well as social forms. Class is one configuration of that relation as a symptom of inequalities generated in those historical conditions that might be transcended by action informed by an understanding of the matrix. The matrix of feminist analysis is that axis of social distributions of power and a symbolic representation of all power relations we name gender.37 Gender as either a social or a symbolic axis was not encompassed in Marx’s vision. He naturalized gender hierarchies as pre-social, even though Engels identified the latter as potentially the first form of class relation. Using his insight gender theory takes us to the socialization of life, hence touching upon death and certainly sex. Gender is at once a social form of hierarchical power and disempowerment fracturing human societies along lines of perceived sexual division, and a symbolic site for the representation of power in general. To feminize/castrate/disempower/subject another being, in terms of class or race is to

37 The most comprehensive explanation of this is by Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, The American Historical Review, 91:5 (1986), 1053-75. Scott reminds us that not only is gender not the naming of two sexes but the definition of an asymmetrical relation; ‘Gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.’ Reaching from social formation to symbolic representation gender also operates at the level subjective identification in ways that traverse the economy and the polity., 1067-8.
diminish them only because association with the feminine is an association with a diminished term vis-à-vis an empowered one. Once gender is introduced as a problematic of the fabric of social relations, and of symbolic inscriptions subject to historical transformation, then new areas of experience and institutional, discursive operations become available for theoretical analysis: sexuality, vision, the body, temporality, assigned symbolization of reproduction, social space, violence, personal safety, human existence and its modes of continuation and so forth. These cut across and even conflict with the priorities emerging out of other matrices such as the historical materialist, although valiant efforts have been made to articulate not only class with gender, but the social relations of racialized and colonial oppressions and those based on human sexualities and psycho-sexual formations of desire and embodiment. But they also interrupt or at least qualify those approaches that place themselves not outside of history but out of the social.

The tendency to intellectual laziness through shorthand use of labels is one of the major devices for deforming and obliterating the histories of intellectual endeavour and their conflicts. The second is personification. So I am introduced as a feminist art historian. This personal labelling allows ‘you’ to think you know what the adjective means; it allows the world to keep me confined inside the cage of an already-closed mental category. The adjective ‘feminist’ appears to specify and identify while it disqualifies me because it leaves unexamined the unmarked category ‘art historian’ which is clearly other than the ‘feminist art historian’. She is not really an art historian, because she is a feminist art historian. Or she is a representative of a minority, a sub-genre of the field, whose outsidersness to the unmarked core, namely the un-self-critically normative, is exposed by the need to use the adjective to distinguish the other. Most non-feminists sloppily think that being a feminist in art history means that I go on and on about women artists, who have been excluded from the series of valued objects and their makers, and for whom I have to fabricate a special case based on something other than the norms by which the included have been included. Being interested in women (as opposed to analyzing gender formations) affirms that I must care little about real or good art because I place an extraneous concern—gender or sexual difference—above the central issues: aesthetic value or historical importance. My only ground for what I do ‘as a feminist’ then appears to arise from extraneous politics imported from sociological elsewhere. The Benjaminian critique applies here. The attempt to change the field is undermined by such naming so that the canonical series and its values, the privileged construction of art and artist, can remain. I am quarantined as a feminist while those who are or identify with the privileged place of white straight men art historians do not have their sexualities, ethnicities or allegiances to the patriarchal distributions of power and privilege inflicted on them as a badge, partializing their views. There is thus a fundamental asymmetry that preserves the series and its value system.

Placing me within a feminist sub-set, allows the arguments made by feminist thought to be confined to those who choose to be part of the sub-set alone. The others, as a result, do not have to read feminist literature, or track the evolving project over forty years, analyze the stakes in various arguments and differences, or make it part of the discourse, even while those of us who work with feminist
Concerns do continuously read and engage with a great variety of literatures and approaches, open to all searching questioning and new research.

When I am invited to give a special lecture I often ask the audience what work of mine they have read: who in terms of textual enunciation, therefore, do they think is speaking to them? They usually mention a scattering of texts, mostly old ones, but never consistent selections. From the typical first year methodology courses students may have heard of feminism but it will have been presented as a single entity, a single perspective, lumping together several historical generations of highly differentiated and argumentative intellectuals who belong to one of the major intellectual events of the twentieth century: the entry of women as women into the field of research notably in the arts and humanities in order not only to speak in their own name (as opposed to being intellectual transvestites) but to reconfigure the landscape, methodologies and effects of intellectual enquiry itself. Compression becomes misrepresentation. We have not yet worked out how to incorporate feminist, queer, postcolonial critiques as non-optional necessities for any critical thinking about art and culture.

Self-labelling is one thing. Identifying with an adversarial intellectual project is also a matter of pride. Others’ labelling me or any one else a feminist, however, in this manner, is delexical—it points me out—while, at the same time, muting the challenge of feminist thought in its complexity and effacing both its many histories and its own adversarial or agonistic evolution. The label contains both thought and history within the feminist rather than as arising from history calling for all of us to recast our modes of operation because, as a result of the event that is feminism, we know that gender frames us all. If we allow gender, class, race and sexuality to be mere tokens in language confined inside an -ism and a labelled individual who represents that ‘position’, and upon which certain people insist, it allows the impression that there is an art historical field which can be legitimately pursued without such attention to structures which are performatively enacted in the rhetoric, the syntax, the metaphors of the language in which we write.

Gender is not a women’s issue. It is a fact of culture and society. Writing of Freud and Nietzsche, Plato and Freud and phallocentric language in general, the philosophers Sarah Kofman, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig have demonstrated brilliantly that gender and sexuality are not contents of which one may or may not speak. They are forms or rather they form the very language and intellectual architecture in which white men philosophers philosophize and white men art historians do art history. That was the entire point of my book with Rozsika Parker, Old Mistresses, a term coincidentally also forged in 1973 to reveal that language itself had already foreclosed on any recognition of women as artists of historical significance.

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, offers the provocative idea that gender is an effect of our iteration, our performative enunciation of the socially constituted categories. This is not voluntary performance; but obligatory performativity. We become what we say we are. Thus gender has no given origin, source or essence. The social ordering of gender notably in a heterosexual matrix of man and woman imprisons us. Butler proposes various forms of resistance and transformation once the depth of this entrapment that is virtually synonymous with identity becomes critically available to us.
Old Mistresses, the book, which has just passed its thirtieth anniversary, was not a book just or at all about women artists. It was a systematic deconstruction of the symbolically structuring and performative effects of the language of art historical writing that made sexual difference, and its hierarchies and exclusions, structural to an ideological project performed across all the instances of art historical activity in that form that defines itself by historically significant art objects and their creators. Thus effacement of works by women from view by not collecting and showing or by never writing about their works was coupled with, and resulted from, an insistent use of gendered metaphorics already at work in Art History. To sustain the historically perverting trick of making all art masculine, the discipline constantly needed, however, to summon a spectral femininity, equated with lack of skill, originality and intellect, to serve as a negative cipher for an ideological operation by which art and artistness could be appropriated as the unmarked, natural condition of white and heteronormative masculinity and vice-versa. From this metaphorical field supported often by real institutional exclusion, Parker and Pollock then identified the specific conditions of women’s strategic artistic interventions, which were consistently present in all eras and places of art, but which were both negatively impacted by restrictions and positively enabled by the differential negotiation of those conditions. Each intervention then would have to be read work by work, formal solution by formal solution, case by case, just as we would do to study ‘the artist’s’ encounter with history of which Clark wrote. As much as I might demand a certain equality of being part of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ before the court of the history of art, I cannot and should not eradicate the real and painful conflict that we cannot wish a way by mere intellectual tolerance. Just as the postcolonial critics do not wish to let well-meaning ex-colonizers off the hook quite yet, so the challenge posed by feminism to the world can be uncomfortable and pretty personal.

What are the new new art histories, then?

In recent years such interlinking has been undermined in a number of ways. Embryonic discourses such as neuro-art history, environmental approaches to art and neo-Darwinian accounts have sought to create alternative ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ and depoliticised paradigms of inquiry.

While immanently critiquing depoliticization, this statement maintains the notion, none the less, that what came before was politicized. This sets up a binary opposition—new and newer—that is, in effect, also politicized and depoliticized. From the critical perspective of the 1970s, there is no politics-free zone. Furthermore, the operation of our art historical research is not political in the trivial sense, invading the space of culture from an alien sphere. That adversarial moment can perhaps be read through what Jacques Rancière has recently theorized as mésentente. Badly translated, this means ‘disagreement’. Rancière adds the concept of le tort/ the wrong that makes the political become the recurrent space of

contestation because democracy or equality never arrives. The effect of the radical challenges of the 1970s was to disclose the politics of representation and to identify the role of the imaginative, the formal, and the aesthetic, in relative autonomy, as specific sites of the articulation of the determining structures, which class or gender analysis identified as being graspable in systems of representations and practices. That was a moment of exposing the mésentente, the generative wrongs of class, race, gender and sexuality. Once articulated in adversarial form, these wrongs do not go away or get sorted. Other dimensions emerge to challenge and qualify our initial fumbling responses to the gross wrongs of exclusion or repression of the issues. The political theory of Agonism, explained by its leading exponent, Bonnie Honig argues that ‘to affirm the perpetuity of the contest is not to celebrate a world without points of stabilization; it is to affirm the reality of perpetual contest, even within an ordered setting, and to identify the affirmative dimension of contestation.’

If we quarantine certain kinds of art historical project as a priori political, then others can claim a different cover—science—for what is, from the former position, as ideologically framed as their own. Being ideologically framed, subject to beliefs and disciplinary protocols does not mean that genuine knowledge is not produced; it merely reminds us that there are always limits and pressures. James Brockman, for instance, published a fascinating study of answers offered by leading scientists to the question of what they believed but could not prove, creating a bit of a media uproar when the results were published because of the radical undermining of the association of science with proof and truth. Scientific research has specific protocols for its activities that are based on hypothesis and experimentation, but the scientists who frame the research and the discursive models through which they organize their own fields are not outside the social or immune to the ideological framing of their interests. The radicals identify ideologies at work but they also accept their inevitability even in their own apparently radical projects. Marxism is a technology of class just as feminism is a technology of gender, participating in the very discourses and practices by which these social processes are represented, apprehended and contested. But those who define others as political, do not acknowledge the operation of ideology and hence, as positivists, can disown their own framings, and appeal to an imaginary form of knowledge free from politics, that is, from contestation and interests, and authorized by that apparently ideology-free zone, science. This is a frank denial of the dynamics and hence politics of history. What could be a better refuge for those resisting the demands for self-

43 Any discourse about gender, including feminist critique, participates in its formulation and theory itself functions just as much as art or cinema as a representation of gender. Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1987, 19-21.
recognition as gendered, classed, sexed and raced subjectivities than to fall back on biology, the hugely ideologically-inflected refuge, to talk about the brain rather than the embodied mind, the differentiated psyche, the socially responsive subject. Subjectivity, corporality, sexuality, visuality: all our -ities are precisely terms generated to challenge the desire to invent through discourse a notion of a refuge from the real of sociality and socialized humanity.

This does not mean that I would discount the explorations of neurological formations that use the study of the history of visualization and its current radical transformations through the intensification of image culture to ask new questions about the relays between modes of human seeing and the formulations that might, in a feedback loop, reshape its own material substrate. Neurological and psychological explorations of the conditions under which humans turn perceptual capacities into imaginative and inscriptive acts must be one dimension of any research into the history of the image and visualization. Such investigations are not new; they have a long and complex history in which their sociology does not disqualify the knowledge they produce. But like all human practices, especially that which seeks to know how we work, such research is not immune from being a politics of knowledge.

The we come to Visual Culture, the institutionalized contestant or hybrid off-spring that disowns Art History on account of the latter’s privileging of the ‘series’ of objects and their artists in favour of a concept-led field premised on potential cultural histories of seeing, imaging, and regimes of visual representation.

On the other hand, it [visual studies] has been seen as insufficiently self-critical; for many proponents of visual studies its institutional success has led to a blunted vision, in which the value of basic categories, such as ‘art’ allegedly remain uninterrogated.

Now we come to the fissure to the left of the field that some try to deal with by adding the word and between two internally contesting projects: Art History and Visual Culture or Visual Culture Studies, the domains and the procedures for their study. Clearly visual culture studies operate with different matrices for the analysis of the regimes of representation and the core operation the image from what I have been naming the art history of the series. One might say that Visual Culture Studies descends from Berger and hence from Benjamin because it disowns completely the series of objects and the values that sustain their separate historicization. Visual culture takes a determinedly anti-aesthetic stance, bracketing some of the key questions in Art History but with specific sets of conceptual framings: - isms give way to ities: the visual becomes visualities, the sexual becomes sexualities, bodies become corporalities and the functions of the image are tracked without reference to the core instrument and ideological figure for aestheticizing art history: the artist, the artistic subject who is the effect of specific operations by art historical practice:

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monographs, one-person shows, catalogues raisonné, authorship.

I am tempted to agree that there might be blunting of vision or intellectual edge that has come about through the rather slipshod and mechanical deployment of certain complex elements of the expanded theoretical vocabularies necessitated by the profound nature of the intellectual challenge that feminist, post-colonial, queer and other critiques pose to the order of art historical business. I have shivered at many an art history conference at the banalized versions of immensely critical theoretical formulations derived from deconstruction or psychoanalysis. But these problematic instances are typically examples of conventional Art History partially reclothed as Visual Culture, thus pepped up with a few concepts. This feint is radically different from the systematic reformulation of its foundational concepts in conversation with major thinking systems.

Take the ubiquitous concept of the gaze. It is too often a blunt instrument with which to beat up any visual representation. When termed the male gaze, this instrument simply knows in advance what will be seen, reducing all works to a predetermined formula that is, of course, external to the actual and often complex operations of the visual field or scene. Firstly, I wish to insist that there is no such thing as ‘the male gaze’; the immense significance of the new modes of analyzing sexuality and spectatorship is radically short-changed by a tagline that links pleasure in looking at women to predatory masculine heterosexual eroticism. The entire point of Mulvey’s originating formulation is not that art or cinema merely reflect or rehearse an obvious fact that straight men like looking at women erotically. It is to point out counter-intuitively the opposite, and for all men irrespective of sexuality. To look upon the image of woman is to risk encountering the threat of death. Under phallocentrism, the image of woman is the image of death and hence phobic defences characterize the formation of the visual economy under phallocentrism visually: fetishism and voyeurism. Incomplete reading of theory can read to complete misrepresentation.

Visual culture exercises a certain democracy of analysis, but at a price that its practitioners are willing to pay because of what is added to our field of understanding by bypassing the aesthetic and even the pathetic in the name of the adversarial. But their emergence into distinctive institutional and publishing operations leaves the radicals in Art History who shared some of the new turns worrying at some losses on either side, and like me, struggling to inhabit two, sometimes incompatible, spheres. If Visual Culture moves out of the series and focuses on regimes of representation and visibility, in the Rancièreian sense, what forms remain for what we might now call, pace Derrida, Art History under erasure. How do we accommodate the aesthetic without falling back into the aestheticizing art history disowned by Warburg?

Hence the introduction of the term the aesthetical in my title. Of course, there is a tradition of Marxist aesthetics, and indeed of feminist aesthetics, psychoanalytical aesthetics, migratory aesthetics, aesthetics after Auschwitz,

45 For all its ubiquitous citation, the theoretical architecture of this very complex argument has been reduced to recycling two or three sentences, thus losing the movement of the argument. Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Screen, 16:3 (1975), 6-18; See also Griselda Pollock ‘The Male Gaze’, in Mary Evans and Carolyn Williams (eds.), Gender: The Key Concepts, London: Routledge, 2012.
comparative aesthetics—led, for instance, by Parul Dave Mukherji, who works between Sanskrit and Western philosophical aesthetics. What are the legacies for thinking through the aesthetic now that do not reassert the series and its structures of value?

Within the radical intellectual trends of the class of 1968 there are several options for thinking with the aesthetic upon which I draw. Julia Kristeva, who forged a relay between the semiotic and psychic placing artistic practices at their hinge, represents the first. The aesthetic, aligned with transgressive dimensions of music, dance, poetry and visual art operates as the site of constant renovation and potential transformation of the organizing symbolic. These practices, forged as the avant-garde in conflict with the nineteenth century bourgeois state have, however, acquired new historical significance in the context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century information society. The aesthetic acquires a newly defensive obligation. Kristeva argues that the administration and massification of subjectivities in information society and its techno-cultural forms endow aesthetic practices with a renewed potentiality or we might say destiny, namely, an ethical one, in relation to the concept of singularity that can transcend the anthropomorphic forms of difference in the symbolic contract that give us the delusional pairing man/woman. Hence the figure of the artist might be reclaimed from the canon as a site not of ahistorical individuality but historically situated singularity whose value becomes a radical position of resistance to formulaic consumerist subjection.

This clearly chimes with feminist enquiry that does not seek to create a new collectivity of women artists, but to find means to specify each differentiated singularity without disowning the psychic as well a social conditions of differentiated existence and self-representation. Equally artists who are men cease to be presented normatively or as universal, unmarked subjects: the artist. Their differentiated singularities equally require close reading and subtle specification. A pluralistic understanding of human conditions is then created.

A second arena is psychoanalytical aesthetics that identifies the aesthetic with processes of transformation of the inner world of the subject by gestures of the other and by vicarious forms of gestures both materialized and symbolically operative in music, art, dance, etc. The aesthetic stands for the non-cognitive dimension of affects that arise in primordial contact with otherness of persons and the world. This leads into notions of art as an encounter-event whose subjectivizing and affective aspects can bring about affective shifts within the participating subjectivities mediated by aesthetically produced forms. Because of the specific focus on affect, this might be understood as the alliance with the pathetic, with the

49 Kristeva draws on the medieval Christian philosopher Duns Scotus for this concept of singularity, which she then richly applied in her study of Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette as instances of a feminine genius. The point is to shift from identifying someone for what they are to tracing the work by which the writer inscribes who s/he is: ‘thisness’ versus a thing or person’s ‘common nature’.
Finally there is the Rancièrian notion of the aesthetic. Rancière formulated his own often-baffling vocabulary to articulate his conception of both aesthetics and politics. Aesthetics is neither art theory nor the philosophical discipline that studies art and judgement. It refers to the ‘distribution of the sensible’: ‘le partage du sensible’ which clearly works better in French where the word sens oscillates between terms that are opposed in English: understanding or meaning and sensation. Aesthetics becomes a necessary term because it too is neither cognition nor sense perception but a mode of apprehending while also being affected by the world. For Rancière the distribution of the sensible is ‘the mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception and thought’. This gives rise to historically differentiated regimes of this distribution or articulation. Rancière identifies the ethical regime of images (associated with Greek classical thought), the representative regime of art (associated with the French classical tradition) and the aesthetic regime of art (associated with romanticism and modernism). Regimes of art are modes ‘of articulation between three things: ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and ways of conceptualizing both the former and the latter’.

If society is composed of certain distributions of what can be said, done, made or heard, which are articulated in certain regimes, there is of necessity a certain kind of policing, or formal management and control. It is against this function of the police that Rancière poses politics, as a disturbance of the prevailing distribution of the sensible, as the actions and enunciations by which different kinds of political subjectivities might emerge to contest the dominant forms, even while there will always be elements that remain unspeakable. The tension in society is premised on disagreement—la mésentente—which is not misunderstanding or lack of understanding. Rockhill summarizes disagreement as ‘a conflict over what is meant by “to speak” and “to understand” as well as over the horizons of perception that distinguish the audible from the inaudible, the comprehensible from the incomprehensible, the visible from the invisible.’ The conflicts are figures of a wrong—le tort—which refers to failures in the field of equality that cannot be resolved for instance through legal procedures, a court case, but require changed forms of political subjectivization that will reorganize the field of experience and hence the distribution of the sensible. Equality is not equalization but a work in constant progress composed of acts undertaken by emerging political subjectivities that contest the naturalized order of meaning and experience.

This formulation rather finely states what I have been arguing: I am making a distinction between a certain historiographical operation that has represented, that is spoken of, the last forty years in a manner that polices its efficacy out of existence. By reasserting the adversarial, or in current terms, the agonistic dynamic as essential...
to a long-term struggle, by refusing to allow conflict and contestation to be packaged up, named, personified and reified as ‘past’, I have wanted to suggest that far from being over, the transformation of what can be said, thought and represented is still urgent, vital, incomplete. There are ways in which its deep radicality has been quarantined by labelling it as ‘radical’, political, feminist, and so forth, while not internalizing its questioning and demands for change at the level of our intellectual or political subjectivities and hence practices. The radical challenges to the dominant distribution of the sensible were never likely to be swiftly embraced. But we can examine ourselves, who are at least identified with such challenging, as to how we represent this project of rethinking Art History and rephrasing art’s histories: how we are affected by the liquid modern trends, the pressure for the new, the turns of fashion and the force of the contemporaneous.

Art History’s relation to its founding concepts of history and art, of a past and of the aesthetic as a value (rather than a regime, an affect-formulation or a shifter) was traumatically challenged ca. 1970. Trauma defines that which cannot be immediately assimilated. But, as Freud taught us, the repressed returns, belatedly and differently, garbed in the novel shocks of its own moment. The search for the new or even the discussion of coming ‘after’ that which is confided to the demoded past betrays the fidelity that informs long-term projects, such as the feminist project. Within such long-term explorations and their continuing virtuality, there is inevitably regular reorientation as the ground beneath our thinking feet shifts. Other narratives and forgotten moments of the past can become resources and useful companions in this situation.

I spend a lot of time discussing the relations between generations in a post-patriarchal time: liquid modernity does mark the suspension of the paternal function in critical ways. Feminism is, however, afflicted with its own linguistic idiocies, none more problematic than the idea of waves: first, second, third wave for instance. Intellectual daughters of the scholars of second wave are also subject to a longing for the new that comes after the older generation. I want to hold on to a longue durée to resist the timelessness of liquid time as well as the often destructive logical of the Oedipal model of the generations. I want to reassert the adversarial and agonistic to resist the muting of pluralism and its deadly embrace. I suggest we can reclaim the aesthetic because transformative creativity is part of the long struggle. I suggest that we need to consider pathos, to remember that all of what we are doing is founded on suffering, violence, and exploitation and it is getting worse.

Despite what looked to my hosts at JNU, therefore, like unexpected turns, in which the passionate and the aesthetical as well as the psychoanalytical appear to have displaced what they expected as ‘feminist-social art history’ I would maintain there are deep fidelities in the multi-threaded fabric of my critical project that represents a singular, historical moment in the long history of thinking about art, history, images, visualities. To respect them we need to disavow the model of the new and the old, the displaced and the novel, and see if at last we might actually internalize and, in a nachträglich, afterwardly manner, make real, effective and urgent the radical legacies from throughout Art History’s long durée and art’s many histories. Instead of the Blind Leading the Blind into endless troughs and hollows where we all fall down, we need another image to guide us across this multi-occupied, shared and interacting landscape.
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