

# ‘Our project is not to add to art history as we know it, but to change it.’ The establishment of the Association of Art Historians and the emergence of feminist interventions, 1974-1990

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## Introduction

In 1974 *The Burlington Magazine* announced that, ‘at an inaugural meeting in Birmingham in March this year an Association of Art Historians was formed with a regular constitution.’<sup>1</sup> The following year the AAH began organising national conferences and in 1978 commenced publication of an affiliated journal titled *Art History*. This was a formative moment in British art history, during which the professional status of the discipline was strengthened within the context of an expanding higher education system. This article investigates the intersections between professional legitimisation and disciplinary critique that marked this period in recent history. In 2017, as the UK Association of Art Historians expansively rebrands itself as the Association for Art History, it is worth looking back and taking stock of this earlier moment of disciplinary self-recognition, institutionalisation and diversification.

The coincident emergence of the professional organisation for art history scholars and feminist critique provides a fascinating glimpse of the contradictory forces at play in shaping the contemporary field. Women’s unprecedented academic inclusion and consequent investigations into their predecessors’ historical absence demanded the development of new theories, methodologies and ways of looking at, thinking and writing about art and its history. Feminist intellectual enquiry therefore ascended, entwined with the expanded participation of women in art and academia, but not reducible to it. As Deborah Cherry informed readers of *Art History* in 1982 this enquiry was not intended to be additive but deeply transformative: ‘Our project is not to add to art history as we know it, but to change it.’<sup>2</sup> Thus, feminism’s explicitly political scholarship was fuelled by a profound aspiration to reshape the historical imagination of the late twentieth century. Through an analysis of the AAH records and its publishing history, this article attempts to capture the modes of feminist scholarship produced for, whilst critiquing, that professional context. This examination will demonstrate how the organisation and its publishing outlets created

I am very grateful to Professors Richard and Belinda Thomson for generously gifting their collection of *Art History* journals to support my research

<sup>1</sup> ‘Editorial’, *The Burlington Magazine*, 116: 861, Dec. 1974, 711.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cherry, ‘Feminist Interventions: Feminist Imperatives’, Rev. of *Old Mistresses* by Pollock and Parker, *Art History*, 5: 4, Dec. 1982, 507.

particular conditions of possibility for feminist research in art history – and, indeed, vice versa.

### **Professionalising the discipline: art history in post-war Britain**

In 1932 the textile manufacturer and collector of modern French art, Samuel Courtauld, established an institute in London exclusively for the study of art. However, as Griselda Pollock has pointed out, even at the 'institute's birth there was no unequivocal embrace of art history as an academic study, or as a university discipline connected to the larger Humboldtian curriculum in the German sense'.<sup>3</sup> Instead the Courtauld Institute remained intellectually indebted to a nineteenth-century connoisseurial attitude and produced art historians professionally trained for service to museums, galleries and private collections. Around the same time British art history received an intellectual and institutional boost when, under the directorship of émigré Fritz Saxl, the Warburg Institute opened in 1934. History of Art departments were thereafter instituted at the University of Glasgow in 1948, University of Leeds in 1949 and the University of Oxford in 1955. During the 1960s higher education experienced sudden expansion under the influential recommendations of the Robbins Report (1963), which 'assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so'.<sup>4</sup> Almost simultaneously the first Coldstream-Summerson Report (1960) made 'complementary studies' a compulsory part of art and design degrees, and the combination of these developments contributed to new departments opening across the country, in both the established 'red brick' universities and the newer polytechnics (into which the independent art colleges were increasingly integrated).<sup>5</sup>

Given the rapid growth of the discipline, it is logical that greater formalisation of the art-historical field was desired. Delivered flexibly across historical departments, incorporating aesthetic philosophy, connoisseurship, or taught as complementary studies to film, fine art and design degrees, art history is what Francesco Ventrella aptly terms 'an inherently undisciplined discipline'.<sup>6</sup> The American College Art Association had formed in 1913 with similarly formalising motivations. Elizabeth Mansfield explains: 'Holmes Smith [inaugural president of the CAA] and other proponents of professionalization sought to give art history the disciplinary character of established academic fields: well defined disciplinary boundaries, pedagogical standards, research guidelines, and peer review prior

<sup>3</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Art History and Visual Studies in Great Britain and Ireland', in Matthew Rampley ed., *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, 358.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of these reports see Malcolm Quinn, 'The Pedagogy of Capital: Art History and Art School Knowledge', in Matthew Potter ed., *The Concept of the 'Master' in Art Education in Britain and Ireland, 1770 to the Present*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. For more on the contested integration of art colleges within the polytechnic system see Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: the Art School Revolution*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco Ventrella, 'The Gender of the Art Writing Genre' [review], *Oxford Art Journal*, 40: 1 (2017), 204.

to publication or professional advancement.<sup>7</sup> By 1974, however, such impulses towards standardisation would be tempered by the transversal struggles of feminist, postcolonial and queer subjects; as well as an emergent wave of postmodern critique aimed at undermining the logic of the institution.<sup>8</sup>

Pollock reminds her readers that art history in the UK received 'major intellectual boosts from two waves of continental migration – one of persons and ideas in the 1930s and another in the 1970s of theories and methods.'<sup>9</sup> However, also of great importance was the example set by the more mature professional organisation in America. John White had recently returned from a stint teaching in the US and, as the association's inaugural chair, his experiences were to have a lasting influence on the development of the organisation. Alan Bowness was one of White's colleagues on the all-male steering committee that oversaw the establishment of the AAH during a series of meetings between 1972 and 1974. He recalls that: '[The CAA] gave people an opportunity to meet one another and I think we thought at that time that it would be a good idea to have something similar, because there was nothing like it.'<sup>10</sup> The AAH launched in 1974 and quickly attracted 600 members; its appeal no doubt attributable in part to those collegiate, sociable ambitions of the organisation. At the time of writing in 2017, membership sits at around 1200 (having previously reached 1400), while its rebrand presumably aims to expand on those numbers.<sup>11</sup>

While the 'prestigious Association of Art Historians' was influenced by disciplinary practices in America, so too were the editors of a 'radical forum for historians' titled *Block*.<sup>12</sup> Editor Jon Bird tells readers that '*Block* was inspired by a sabbatical awareness of the close relation between research, teaching and publishing in American colleges.'<sup>13</sup> These recollections from Bird and Bowness indicate a decisive shift in the intellectual and organisational inclinations of the UK discipline, as North American attitudes towards both professionalization and liberalising curricula exerted influence. Intellectually it marked a diminishment of art historical methods grounded in German philosophy and of new alliances being forged throughout the 1970s, as postmodern theory filtered through journals such as the US *October* (1976), and UK *Screen* (renamed from *Screen Education* in 1969). Also significant were the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements taking effect on American campuses, as these political contexts began to remake the terms of art historical study along the lines of radical social enquiry, latterly coalescing under the broad umbrella of 'identity politics'.

A radical augmentation in art history scholarship was taking place across the UK. A couple of months subsequent to the formation of the AAH, the Marxist art historian TJ Clark penned his landmark essay 'On the Conditions of Artistic Creation'. Published in a

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Mansfield, *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 142.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979 [1975]; Samuel Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Pollock, 'Art History and Visual Studies in Great Britain and Ireland', 361.

<sup>10</sup> Interviewed by Liz Bruchet for AAH Oral Histories, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Claire Coveney for confirming the current membership figures.

<sup>12</sup> These descriptions are borrowed from AL Rees and Frances Borzello, *The New Art History*, London: Camden Press, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Jon Bird, 'Introduction', *The Block Reader in Visual Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, xi.

'Rewriting Art History' segment of *The Times Literary Supplement*, Clark suggested the discipline was in a state of 'dissolution' and needed to reaffirm its serious ambitions through a renewed materialist approach to conceptualising art's production and ideological relations. At Leeds University in 1975 the Social History of Art MA was founded under his direction. In 1978, the same year that *Art History* commenced publication, *Oxford Art Journal* was established (it is interesting to note the journal's conservative, local emphasis in distinction to its later radical attitude).<sup>14</sup> 1978-79 also witnessed the short-lived but influential magazine *Black Phoenix*, published by Rasheed Araeen and Mahmood Jamal. Araeen's later success with *Third Text* (1989) suggests that the late-1970s British art world was not yet ready for a journal dedicated to the discussion of race and contemporary art in a global context. From 1979 to 1989, an editorial collective at Middlesex Polytechnic published the 'decidedly alternative' or 'cult' magazine of art, design and cultural politics, *Block*.<sup>15</sup> It is instructive to note parallel expansions occurring across the humanities beyond art history, mediated through periodicals including *Radical Philosophy* (1972), *Race and Class* (renamed from *Race* in 1974), and *History Workshop Journal* (1976). This overview, whilst selective, showcases the diversity of critical cultural research being produced at this dynamic moment, as differently positioned voices in socialist, feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist thought coalesced and found expression in an expansive periodical culture.

In the UK the new models of art history being formulated to challenge institutionally dominant formations of knowledge were often markedly absolute. At Middlesex Polytechnic (home to rebellious journal *Block*) the drive to destabilise bourgeois art history's distinction between high and low culture, by incorporating design history and new cultural studies approaches, led to the founding of Visual Culture as a field of study in the UK.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, and often within the same journals, feminist writers seriously dismantled the gendered terrain upon which modern art's heroic myths were founded. While latterly emerging psychoanalytical and poststructuralist readings called for the deconstruction of liberal humanist theories of art and culture altogether. This drive towards dismantling the boundaries traditionally demarcating the study of art might appear at first glance counteractive to the professionalising impulse motivating the AAH steering committee. And yet, both were intimately connected to the transformations in higher education already mentioned: the proliferation of teaching institutions, the relaxation of entry to previously excluded subjects, and the new objects and methods demanded by these classed and gendered transformations. In 1970s Britain, therefore, art historians were engaged in a two-fold, yet complexly intra-supportive, struggle towards structural professionalisation *and*

<sup>14</sup> The first issue of the journal was dedicated to 'Art in Oxford' (*Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 1, No.1, April 1978). Whilst a later editorial preface added: 'The "Oxford" Section, which we intend always to retain as an essential part of the journal is a forum for articles, reviews, letters and contributions of local interest.' *Oxford Art Journal*, 2: 2, April 1979, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Harris positively refers to *Block* as 'cult' in 'Art History', *Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 1: 1, 1991, 172. Margaret Iversen refers to the journal as 'decidedly alternative' in 'The Avant-Gardian Angels', review of *October*, *Art History*, 6: 4, December 1983, 496. *Block*'s original editorial collective included Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Melinda Mash, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner.

<sup>16</sup> The UK's first Visual Culture MA was established at Middlesex in 1993, under the Programme Leadership of Jon Bird. For more on the history of this field see Marquard Smith's introduction to *Visual Culture Studies: Interviews with Key Thinkers*, London: Sage Publishing, 2008.

intellectual diversification. By considering the dialectical forces of academic convention and political liberation this article seeks to nuance current perspectives on both the AAH (in 'its self-appointed role as the regulator and overseer of mainstream art historical discourse'<sup>17</sup>) and of feminist interventions in art history.<sup>18</sup>

### **Feminism and the politics of participation**

Although it was also an era of intensifying conservative politics, 1974-90 was a hugely productive period for feminist culture in the UK. During the 1970s grassroots feminist art networks and collectives flourished, including, *Feministo: Postal Art Event* (1975-77), *Women and Work* (1973-75) and the Hackney Flashers (1974-80). In 1979 the interdisciplinary journal *Feminist Review* commenced publication, contributing to a ripe periodical culture that included *Spare Rib* (1972-93), *Feminist Art News* (1980-93), *Trouble and Strife* (1983) and *The Women's Slide Library Journal* (1986-90).<sup>19</sup> This journal was published by the Women Artists Slide Library, an organising hub established in London in 1978 that provided a vital space for women artists to archive documentation of their work.<sup>20</sup> A number of significant exhibitions during this period publicised feminist art and curatorial strategies to the British public: *Hayward Annual Exhibition* (London, 1978); *Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* (London: ICA, 1977); *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists* (London: ICA, 1980); *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (London: ICA, 1985); *The Subversive Stitch* (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1987). This overview is far from exhaustive, but demonstrates the variety of feminist work being done across several registers including art production, publishing, exhibiting and archiving.

In the UK, feminist art scholarship was formed within activist contexts; in self-directed extramural reading groups, through participation in New Left and Union organising, and as part of the broader activities associated with the Women's Liberation Movement.<sup>21</sup> Within the academy, however, women were met with a fabricated historical absence. Pollock recalls her surprise encounter with a Suzanne Valadon painting at the Courtauld Institute during the early 1970s: 'The shock, not only of my academically condoned ignorance of women as artists, but of the impossibility, within the existing framework of art history of imagining women as artists, led me to invite Linda Nochlin to

<sup>17</sup> Harris 'Art History', *Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 1: 1, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> The establishment of feminist counterculture in British art history has been carefully recorded in a number of publications, e.g. Margaret Harrison, 'Notes on Feminist Art in Britain', *Studio International* no.196, 1977, 212-220; Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement: 1970-1985*, London: Pandora, 1987; Hilary Robinson ed., *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art*, London: Camden Press, 1987. These have logically tended to focus on the management of independent or extramural spaces; therefore my examination aims to offer an alternative perspective by examining feminism's interactions with an institutionally-dominant organisation.

<sup>19</sup> It seems important to note that those feminist art periodicals have ceased publication, while the interdisciplinary *Feminist Review* continues; a development that requires further investigation.

<sup>20</sup> The WASL was founded by Annie Wright, Pauline Barrie, and Felicity Allen. The *Women's Slide Library Journal* was renamed a number of times and continued publication in one form or another until 2002.

<sup>21</sup> For a vivid account of early feminist organising within the confines of the male-dominated left-wing see: Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties*, London: Verso, 2002.

speak at the Courtauld in 1973.<sup>22</sup> This anecdote illuminates the androcentric conditions of art historical knowledge at the time; it was not only that women's art was ignored, but that its very existence was *unimaginable*. In response to that intellectual lacuna, in 1973 the Women's Art History Collective was founded and at various points included Denise Cale, Anthea Callen, Pat Kahn, Tina Keane, Rozsika Parker, Pollock, Alene Straussberg, Tickner and Anne de Winter. The group came together at a public meeting to discuss the threatened censorship of Monica Sjoo's painting *God Giving Birth* (1968), and thereafter worked collectively to research and educate themselves on women in the arts. According to Hilary Robinson, '[i]t was a group that met regularly for only two to three years, but members of it... went on to develop and publish feminist thinking about art that was enormously influential, shaping the way the field developed in the UK and beyond.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, some of that work was published on the pages of *Art History*. Theorist Nancy Fraser has written about the significance of such spaces for a democratic political practice:

I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.<sup>24</sup>

The existence of alternative sites of knowledge mediation is thus conceived (as per Jürgen Habermas) as essential to the functioning public sphere; due to the possibility of new perspectives, imaginaries, or 'counterdiscourses'. However, if one of feminism's goals is to engage in consciousness-raising, to educate ambivalent audiences – and in so doing challenge the reproduction of hegemonic power – it is necessary also to engage with and work upon dominant cultural formations. This necessity is underscored by Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe who draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of discourse to propose that art history is a site of struggle between 'the *centripetal* forces of the official, centralizing discourse, and the *centrifugal* forces of unofficial, decentralizing discourses.'<sup>25</sup> Although the binary logic sketched here might benefit from further nuancing, the notion of oppositional forces remains influential in shaping conceptions of institutions, power and participation. In the 1970s and '80s, feminism's success in changing the discipline (rather than adding to it) depended upon working successfully across both central and decentralised discursive arenas. For, as Frances Borzello pragmatically enquired of feminist art publishing in the period: did feminism confine itself to a 'ghetto' where it was simply 'preaching to the

<sup>22</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Hilary Robinson, 'The early work of Griselda Pollock in the context of developing feminist thinking in art history and criticism', in Raluca Bibiri ed., 'Griselda Pollock: An Academic Odyssey', special issue of *Journal of Visual and Cultural Studies*, forthcoming 2018. I would also like to thank Hilary for her generous and knowledgeable review of this article prior to publication.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, No. 25/26, 1990, 67. Original emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, 'Centripetal and Heteroglot Feminisms', in Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden eds., *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practice*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, 86. Original emphasis.

converted?'<sup>26</sup> While Deborah Cherry has recalled that 'placing work across different spaces/readerships was important in extending and expanding feminist art histories.'<sup>27</sup> Therefore, although participation could be a fraught enterprise for feminist scholars, it was essential in providing an analysis of art history that would reach a new readership and redefine the boundaries of the discipline.

The Annual Association of Art Historians' conferences were heterogeneous and dynamic, bringing together university and museum professionals to engage with the history of visual and material culture conceived fairly broadly. Feminist participation in these conferences was evident from the outset. However, writing in 1990 of her experiences at academic conferences, Val Walsh described the risk run by feminist scholars 'of being compromised by the dominant ethos of professionalism, unless we explicitly problematize it, make it visible, and actively work to dismantle it through our research and teaching.'<sup>28</sup> At the 1986 AAH conference in Brighton an afternoon event ran alongside the usual visits and tours, offering a semi-autonomous space within which to tackle some of these issues. The poster for 'Feminism and Art History' advertised presentations from Linda Nochlin, Kathy Adler and Tamar Garb, Tag Gronberg, Margaret Iversen, Claire Pajaczkowska, Lynn Walker, Anthea Callen, Bridget Elliot and Lynda Nead, and Gudrun Schubert.<sup>29</sup> Tickets were separately available for this event (unusually attendees did not have to pay the full conference fee) and a free crèche was provided to facilitate wider participation.<sup>30</sup> Anecdotally, the event is said to have been attended by a couple of hundred people and its management became fairly chaotic after the panel Chair, Jane Beckett, announced that she would relinquish the post during discussion as she was an anarchist.<sup>31</sup>

The event concluded with an unrestricted 'closing forum', where a ranging discussion strove to provide an analysis of conference structure and the politics of professionalisation. Divergences emerged over whether the event should have been explicitly gender separatist (i.e. woman-only), or whether open participation was a valuable 'publicity exercise to make feminist ideas known'. Contributors debated whether the

<sup>26</sup> Frances Borzello, 'Preaching to the Converted? Feminist Art Publishing in the 1980s', in Katy Deepwell ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, New York and Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995, 20-24.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Cherry, email to author 2 May 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Val Walsh, 'Art Conferences: Pacification or Politics?' (1991) in Hilary Robinson ed., *Feminism-Art-Theory: 1968-2000*, Basingstoke: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, 71. Walsh specifically analyses the experience of 'white women academics', who may benefit from feminism's creation of new opportunities at the expense of other, black or working-class, women. This was a key debate in 1980s feminism. In 1988 Lubaina Himid and Griselda Pollock debated the issue at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, with Clare Rendell responding later in print; see Pollock, 'Framing Feminism' (1988) in *Feminism-Art-Theory*, 2001, 207-16.

<sup>29</sup> Workshop poster available at the AAH Papers in V&A Archive of Art & Design. Recordings of some presentations and the closing discussion are also available online at the Women's Audio Archive: <http://www.marysialewandowska.com/waa/index.php>.

<sup>30</sup> In preparation for the AAH Conference the following year, a notice appeared in *Bulletin* no. 26 stating: 'We are hoping to offer a free crèche near to the Victoria and Albert Museum, but whether we are able to do so partly depends on the response from members... If there is insufficient response we will have to cancel it.' Nov. 1986, 1. Whether or not the childcare was provided, this certainly suggests the influence of the organisation's feminist members.

<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Hilary Robinson for sharing her memories of the event.

conventional academic language of the conference was exclusionary, and if the discussions of art historians had resecured an artificial division between theory and practice. Some voiced concerns that the establishment of a separate 'feminist' panel would preclude the diffusion of feminist ideas and political effects throughout the entirety of the professional organisation. One comment is especially valuable in indicating how the feminist participants conceived of their work in the context of the conference: 'What's significant about this event today is the insertion of those kinds of [alternative, political] moments into the institution of art history, as represented by the Association.'<sup>32</sup> It is evident from these words that the AAH was regarded as a dominant institutional organisation and therefore a meaningful venue for 'counterpublic' voices to be expressed. It is implied that feminism (as an external, political discourse) is benefitted by an interventional engagement with that site. The forum ended with a conversation about the following year's conference and a vote to judge whether an appetite existed for a second, similar event. It seems in any case that a subsequent event was not organised.

Beyond this one-off workshop, however, the annual conferences also provided valuable networking opportunities for feminist researchers. Lisa Tickner recalls that as a lecturer in a polytechnic institution the conferences provided a valuable context to meet art historians from university and museum contexts.<sup>33</sup> It was at the AAH conference held in Glasgow in 1976 that Cherry and Pollock met and, 'on discovering our mutual interest', began a successful collaboration on the art and life of Elizabeth Sidall.<sup>34</sup> According to Pollock their partnership was forged against a palpably hostile conference atmosphere, where a number of male audience members noisily disparaged women art historians and their contributions.<sup>35</sup>

It is evident from reading the paper titles published in the association's *Bulletin* that the Victorian and Edwardian periods provided a rich source of study for feminist scholars in the early years of the conferences. Topics encompassed women in Victorian art, the work of Gwen John, constructions of the Victorian family, John Ruskin's patronage, the depiction of sexuality in Victorian painting, and suffrage iconography. However, the audience reception of this politically motivated scholarship was predictably mixed; as Kathleen Adler reported, a respondent 'at a recent [c.1985] Renoir symposium in London equated discussion of Renoir within the frameworks of feminist or Marxist discourse as akin to "playing the violin with a spanner"'.<sup>36</sup>

The historical focus of the papers is attributable to a number of practical, theoretical and political factors. Andrew Causey, an executive member of the AAH from 1974-77, recalls that the study of modern art after 1900 was only starting to gain reputability during the 1960s and that a lack of available publications created challenges for researchers.<sup>37</sup> Although this perspective was changing (corroborated by the launch of popular left-leaning contemporary magazine *Art Monthly* in 1976) a marked temporal separation continued to be sustained between art history and art criticism. Indeed, a 1980 editorial in *The Burlington*

<sup>32</sup> Women's Audio Archive

<sup>33</sup> Tickner, interviewed for the AAH Oral Histories Project.

<sup>34</sup> Pollock, email to author 30 April 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen Adler, 'Reappraising Renoir', review of *Renoir* ed. J House et al.; *Renoir* by BE White; *Renoir* by W.Pach, *Art History*, 8: 3, September 1985, 375.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Causey, AAH Oral Histories Project, 2011.

*Magazine* discussed the 'pitfalls in writing about recent art in an essentially historical magazine'.<sup>38</sup> And although the magazine made an effort to expand in that direction, its myopic special issue on 'Twentieth Century Art' remained conservative in its focus.<sup>39</sup>

In logical response to such conditions of disciplinary knowledge those feminist art historians writing in *Art History* at this time – especially Pollock, Tickner, Cherry, Beckett, and Nead – emphasised the links between modernism's ascendancy and the negation of women as cultural producers. Correspondingly, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided apposite case studies for feminism's analysis of modernism's formative moments and its consequent occlusion of women. In a review article of 1981 Cherry offers further justification of such a focus, suggesting that '[t]his period of our history can, I believe, teach us the dangers of reviving competitive capitalism, unemancipated womanhood, and expansionist empire in the later twentieth century, when our position in world politics is declining, our home economy is collapsing and the pound rather than the worker is strong'.<sup>40</sup> In other words, nineteenth-century Britain experienced serious transformations to the economic and legal systems governing gender and class relations and, for feminists working in the 'second wave', there were good reasons to see their battles rooted in that period.<sup>41</sup> There was generally at this time, in embryonic women's studies across the US and UK, a powerful belief in the value of feminist history for current political struggles.<sup>42</sup>

By the mid-1980s the papers presented at the annual conferences embraced increasingly contemporary subjects, as well as evincing a methodological and theoretical focus. This was a fiercely debated area of study; as Margaret Iversen recalled in a review article of 1983, 'a plenary session on Methodology ended in heated recriminations one could hardly call a debate'.<sup>43</sup> The following year in Edinburgh, Iversen convened a panel on 'Innovative Methods' which included Abigail Solomon-Godeau discussing photography and a paper by Annette Kuhn on film noir and sexuality. At the close of the decade at the Tate Gallery in London, Barbara Kruger was invited to present the plenary speech, evidencing a recognition of women artists (if not necessarily of feminist perspectives on art history). Throughout this period feminist perspectives contributed meaningfully to the so-called 'new art histories', which were compelling a drift towards what Janet Kraynak has

<sup>38</sup> Editorial, 'Contemporary Art and the Burlington Magazine', *The Burlington Magazine*, 122: 928, July 1980, 463.

<sup>39</sup> I say myopic because the special issue featured writing about Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brancusi, Roger Fry, Henri Matisse, and R B Kitaj.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Cherry, 'History Repeats Itself as Farce', review of *German Romanticism* by W Vaughan, *William Dyce* by M Pointon, *Sir Charles Eastlake* by D A Robertson, *William Mulready* by K M Heleniak. *Art History*, 4: 3, December 1981, 335.

<sup>41</sup> In 2017's current climate of 'feminist emergency' (as a June 2017 conference at Birkbeck termed it), there are interesting parallels in a new generation of scholars looking back to address women's place in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art historiography: see Meaghan Clarke and Francesco Ventrella eds., 'Women's Expertise and the Culture of Connoisseurship', special issue of *Visual Resources*, 33: 1-2, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich offers a convincing argument to this effect in *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, New York: Vintage, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> The AAH archive shows that Lisa Tickner and Griselda Pollock were invited to this session but unable to attend. Margaret Iversen, 'The Avant-Gardian Angels', review of *October*, *Art History*, 6: 4, December 1983, 496.

termed the discipline's 'present tense'.<sup>44</sup> According to Kraynak the discipline of art history has conventionally defined itself against art criticism, its historical objectivity at odds with criticism's necessary subjectivity. Such divisions became increasingly indistinct under postmodern conditions and changing historical attitudes; those changes also impelled by Marxist, feminist, and anti-racist academic methods that demonstrated objectivity is not possible, historically or contemporaneously.

### **Publishing in *Art History***

Writing in the AAH *Bulletin* in February 1977, John White announced the formation of the association's new scholarly journal titled *Art History*.<sup>45</sup> Whilst various publications mediated diverse articulations of feminist theory and politics, the task here is to demonstrate how feminism was represented on the pages of this new journal and how scholars chose to represent their politico-cultural ideas to a wider readership. In its early years *Art History* provided a somewhat favourable publishing location for emergent feminist interventions. The opening editorial by John Onians explained the journal's ambition to 'particularly encourage writers who show how a study of works of art can help us to understand more about our physiological and psychological make-up, our response to political, social and economic pressures, our reaction to religion, philosophy and literature and our relationship to the natural environment.'<sup>46</sup> Onians' words established an expansive vision for the new journal, and revealed a discipline beginning to look beyond its traditional scope of study to launch itself as a progressive, contemporary field. The book reviews section, added in 1981 with Alex Potts as first editor, provided a particularly fertile space in which writers could explore resonances between art's history and contemporary issues.

Key methodologies and subjects emerge from a reading of *Art History* during this period; particularly feminism's relationship to a materialist paradigm grounded in the social history of art. A question posed by Fred Orton and Pollock in an article of 1980 neatly encapsulates this prevailing attitude: 'How can we go about reclaiming these works for history? What kinds of practices do we, as historians of art practice, need to engage with in order to produce history instead of myth, knowledge instead of cliché and tautology?'<sup>47</sup> A number of articles consequently returned to and revised interpretations of artistic depictions of the working-class, women and regional communities of France, emphasising the effects of ideology in the production, reception and historicisation of these artworks (thus dismantling

<sup>44</sup> Janet Kraynak, 'Art history's present tense', in Elizabeth Mansfield ed., *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and its Institutions*, London; New York: Routledge, 2007. The value of the phrase 'new art history' has been debated on numerous occasions, including this journal's 2012 symposium at the University of Birmingham.

<sup>45</sup> John White, "'Art History': Proposed Journal of the Association of Art Historians', *Bulletin of the Association of Art Historians*, 4, February 1977.

<sup>46</sup> John Onians, 'Editorial', *Art History*, 1: 1, March 1978, v-vi. Emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, 'Les Donnes Bretonantes: La Prairie de Representation', *Art History*, 3: 3, September 1980, 317.

those embedded 'myths' and 'clichés' that Orton and Pollock identified).<sup>48</sup> Eunice Lipton's 1980 article on Edgar Degas, for instance, argued that his well-known laundress paintings should be considered remarkably progressive in their attitude towards working-class women, during a period in which consolidating middle-class ideology emphasised 'the sexuality of working-class women' to rationalise their 'exploitation'.<sup>49</sup> Degas' realism eschewed the hazily sexualised atmosphere preferred by his contemporaries in order to bring viewers 'face-to-face with the boredom and alienation inherent in such labour'.<sup>50</sup> Lipton's materialist feminism highlighted the function of visual culture in reinforcing and legitimising the exploitation of women labourers, and, at the same time, art's potential resistance to ideology.

A further theme to emerge in this archive is the function of popular images in producing and affirming moralistic Victorian ideals of femininity, as charted through the culturally loaded figures of the mother, maiden, prostitute, and suffragette.<sup>51</sup> In an article first presented as a paper at the annual conference of 1981, Lynda Nead reminded readers that Victorian art 'could be seen to have a moral function – its purpose was didactic', thus a 'picture had to uphold the bourgeois standards of morality, it had to re-produce the dominant beliefs and attitudes, and it had to serve the "correct" moral purpose.'<sup>52</sup> The picture to which Nead refers is Alfred Elmore's *On the Brink*, first exhibited at London's Royal Academy in 1865. Elmore's painting portrays the moment that a young woman, perched outside a gambling hall after chancing away her money, is approached by a shadowy male figure through an open window; this is the supposedly decisive moment at which she rests 'on the brink' of seduction. Nead's article inventively situates the painting in relation to newspaper reports and literary fictions concerning 'seduced women' during a period of moral panic on the subject. Thus she refocused the emphasis of art historical analysis upon wider discourses of the period that served to generate a profoundly classed notion of femininity, through the proscription of women's sexuality. The painting, although *imagined* by Elmore, is 'received as "truth", as "fact", and is then offered back as *evidence* for the reality of the seduction-betrayal-prostitution-suicide cycle.'<sup>53</sup> Nead thus unpacked the politics of representation to demonstrate how pictures, newspaper stories and literary fiction served a powerful regulative function in regard to women's sexuality. This was a radically new, feminist way of reading Victorian narrative painting by situating it within a broader cultural matrix of meaning production.

<sup>48</sup> See also: Carol Zemel, 'Sorrowing Women, Rescuing Men: Van Gogh's Images of Women and Family', *Art History*, 10: 3, September 1987; Judy Sund, 'Favoured Fictions: Women and Books in the Art of Van Gogh', *Art History*, 11: 2, June 1988.

<sup>49</sup> Eunice Lipton, 'The Laundress in Late Nineteenth Century French Culture: Imagery, Ideology and Edgar Degas', *Art History*, 3: 3, September 1980, 303.

<sup>50</sup> Lipton, 308

<sup>51</sup> See also: Margaret Maynard, 'I Dream of Fair Women: Revival Dress and the Formation of Late Victorian Images of femininity', *Art History*, 12: 3, September 1989. Robyn Cooper, 'Millais' *The Rescue*: A Painting of a "Dreadful Interruption of Domestic Peace"', *Art History*, 9: 4, December 1986. Katrina Rolley, 'Fashion, Femininity, and the Fight for the Vote', *Art History*, 13: 1, March 1990.

<sup>52</sup> Lynda Nead, 'Seduction, Prostitution, Suicide: *On the Brink* by Alfred Elmore', *Art History*, 5: 3, September 1982, 315.

<sup>53</sup> Nead, 1982, 319.

As well as expanding understandings of gender at a visual-representational level, articles by Pamela Nunn, Adele Holcomb and Hilary Taylor investigated women's legacies as cultural producers who had been excluded from or misrepresented within the annals of art history. These researchers exhumed the histories of individual women to investigate how their positions were materially structured and bounded because of gender. Nunn's 1978 article on the artist Henrietta Ward provocatively begins: 'The Victorian artist, one might think, has been studied at length... but what, in short, of the female Victorian artist? *She* has been studied at virtually no length at all.'<sup>54</sup> Although Ward's painting was well-received at the time, the intervening decades of modernist art writing systematically erased Victorian women from the records; Nunn therefore proposed that the feminist recovery of 'lost' women artists cannot be one of simple reintegration, but must address a system of institutional limitation (defined here as education, exhibition and patronage) to fully understand the logics supporting this erasure. Holcomb's 1983 article echoed this approach in an examination of Anna Jameson, 'the first writer to *define herself* as a specialist on Victorian art in England.'<sup>55</sup> Holcomb provided a bibliographic recovery of the writer, demonstrating how Jameson developed her connoisseurial expertise in advance of art history's increasingly professional (and masculine) status in the later nineteenth century. Thus the specialised historians who followed her, according to Holcomb, 'tend to decry [Jameson's] lack of footnotes'.<sup>56</sup>

A 1986 essay by Hilary Taylor explored the gendered framework of art education at The Slade during 1895 to 1899. Taylor investigated both the educational and professional limitations for middle-class women artists, arguing that common (mis)conceptions about gender are practically self-determining. The association of maleness with 'fierceness and arrogance' relegated femininity outside of the ideal 'modern artist', thus 'a feminine temperament could not be compatible with an artistic one.'<sup>57</sup> Taylor's examination carefully emphasised femininity as a site of difference to which the romantic ideal of the male artist is relationally established. This is a theme that runs comprehensively throughout these articles. The analyses encompass the institutional limitations for women artists in art schools, studio spaces, exhibitions and publishing and, eventually, representation in historical narratives. All of these sites have concretely restricted access to women artists, but – these writers argue – the insidious replication of gendered mythologies, which render 'femininity' incompatible with artistic greatness, carries greater long-term significance for the maintenance of bourgeois sexual differentiation and political economies in relation to art. There is a concerted effort to not facilely reduce femininity to an obstacle that must be overcome, but to understand the production of sexual difference (on both material and representation levels) in all of its complexity.

Although the so-called 'sex wars' were raging among feminists during this period (particularly in the US), discussions of sexuality, desire and pornography rarely made it

<sup>54</sup> Pamela Nunn, 'The Case History of a Woman Artist: Henrietta Ward', *Art History*, 1: 3, September 1978, 293. Original emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> Adele M Holcomb, 'Anna Jameson: The First Professional English Art Historian', *Art History*, 6: 2, June 1983, 171-187, 175.

<sup>56</sup> Holcomb, 182.

<sup>57</sup> Hilary Taylor, "'If a Young Painter be Not Fierce and Arrogant God... Help Him": Some Women Art Students at the Slade, c.1895-99', *Art History*, 9: 2, June 1986, 232-243.

onto the pages of *Art History*.<sup>58</sup> Albert Boime's article on Rosa Bonheur is therefore notable for foregrounding the subject's (probable) lesbian sexuality as relevant to a comprehensive understanding of her art; even as it presented some dubious inferences about the queer life of the painter.<sup>59</sup> Heather Dawkins' article, published six years later, more successfully explored the fetishistic sexual relationship between a Victorian housemaid and her employer, disentangling the complex, classed erotics of their clandestine liaison.<sup>60</sup> Dawkins' analysis is significant in this context for her adherence to poststructuralist psychoanalysis and its mechanisms for understanding the fragmentary nature of identity.<sup>61</sup> The article roamed far beyond a discussion of artists and/or art, opening towards a broader cultural field of study in which an archive of housemaid's diaries and collection of personal photographs become 'texts' subject to historical analysis. This points to the theoretical direction much feminist art history would develop in the 1990s.

The relative scarcity of psychoanalytic perspectives during this period of *Art History*'s publication is striking. A review of Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* pointed to 'the general failure of psychoanalysis (Alloula's chosen paradigm) to articulate the multifarious and ambivalent manner in which colonial relations reproduce themselves at different moments in specific ways. To collapse this complexity into a generalised thesis of power and domination is to fall precisely into the trap so often laid at the door of "vulgar" historical materialism.'<sup>62</sup> This remark insinuates a tension between the materialist paradigm that dominated the radical edges of *Art History* during the 1970s and 1980s, and an encroaching attention to psychoanalytical theories. And, although many feminists remained cautious of historical materialism's inattention to gender,<sup>63</sup> as Cherry wrote in a review of 1982, feminism was structurally indebted to Marx's viewpoint that 'the knowledge validated by a particular society is not neutral but constructed in the interests of the dominant class.'<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> As a point of comparison, *Feminist Review* published a special issue on 'Sexuality' in Summer 1982 and *Signs* published 'The Lesbian Issue' in Summer 1984. For more on the topic of the 'sex wars' see Gayle Rubin's 1984 essay 'Thinking Sex', reprinted in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Some of these strange inferences include the argument that Bonheur openly expressed 'sex reversal' through the depiction of 'certain species – oxen, mules, lions – whose sex roles are exceptional'. Albert Boime, 'The Case of Rosa Bonheur: Why Should a Woman Want to be More Like a Man', *Art History*, 4: 4, Dec 1981, 384-409, 399.

<sup>60</sup> Heather Dawkins, 'The Diaries and Photographs of Hannah Cullwick', *Art History*, 10: 2, June 1987, 154-187.

<sup>61</sup> William B Turner has fittingly put it: 'poststructuralism is queer'. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Annie E Coombes and Steve Edwards, [Review] 'Site Unseen: Photography in the Colonial Empire: Images of Subconscious Eroticism' *Art History*, 12: 4, December 1989, 540-516, 512. Although beyond the scope of this essay, the late arrival of postcolonial discourse to the pages of *Art History* is of further interest.

<sup>63</sup> As Pollock wrote in a review essay of 1984: 'These publications bear witness to a shadowy presence of that which has been called the social history of art. Terms such as class, the bourgeoisie, ideology are trailed across their pages, usually dressing up entirely unchanged perspectives and practices of art history, stylistic history, iconography, compendia and the monograph. *The striking absence, however, is of issues of gender and sexuality.*' 'Revising or Reviving Realism', *Art History*, 7: 3, September 1984, 359-366, 366.

<sup>64</sup> Deborah Cherry, 'History Repeats itself as Farce' [review], *Art History*, 4: 3, December 1981, 335-339.

Resonantly, in 1989, Jo Anna Isaak affirmed (via Pollock) that 'feminism is committed, epistemologically, to realism.'<sup>65</sup> It was here, in the reviews section, that writers vehemently staked a claim to or defended particular political and theoretical positions. The orthodoxies governing the scholarly field seemed to exert less influence on these back-pages and a number of reviews were collaboratively penned; while many made explicit links between art history and current conservative politics, often reflexively commenting on the ideological function of the discipline in 1980s Britain. This was a brief period in the journal's publishing history in which art history did not seem academic or distant, but spoke urgently to contemporary political contexts, including feminism.

### **Art historical backlash**

It is impossible to know with absolute certainty the editorial decisions that shape a journal's output; how many articles were rejected, for example, or which contributors failed to meet deadlines. This is perhaps why moments of animated backlash or acrimony – whether stimulated by error or pointed intervention – tend to intrigue audiences.<sup>66</sup> Such moments offer tantalising glimpses into the background workings of a publication (and by extension the disciplinary discourse) that only appear in normal circumstances as seamlessly complete to its readers. The controversy surrounding Lisa Tickner's article 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970' is one such moment offering insight to the tentative reception of feminism's radically new art history.<sup>67</sup>

The heavily illustrated article refers to a range of canonical painting and sculpture (encompassing Duccio, Bellini, Titian, the Post-Impressionists) to suggest that 'despite her ubiquitous presence, woman as such is largely absent from art. We are dealing with the sign "woman", emptied of its original content and refilled with masculine anxieties and desires.'<sup>68</sup> For women making art in the late twentieth century, Tickner asked how, 'against this inherited framework, women are to construct new meanings which can also be understood.'<sup>69</sup> This challenge of communicating new ideas was as equally true for the critics and historians tasked with making sense of feminism's novel modes of art. By reference to a variety of contemporary artworks Tickner demonstrated how women were seizing control over female representation, in frequently subversive ways. The accompanying illustrations included Judy Chicago's *Red Flag* photograph of 1971, revealing the artist in the act of

<sup>65</sup> Jo Anna Isaak, 'Representation and its (Dis)contents', Rev. of *Vision and Difference* by Pollock, *Art History*, 12: 3, 1989, 362-366.

<sup>66</sup> The tempestuous relationships of *Artforum* are perhaps the best example of this, as captured in Amy Newman's oral history project *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74*, New York: Soho Press, 2003. It is worth noting that *Artforum's* editorial board split over the publication of Lynda Benglis's advertisement referred to later in this article.

<sup>67</sup> Lisa Tickner, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970', *Art History*, 1: 2, June 1978, 236-251.

<sup>68</sup> 'The Body Politic', 242. Tickner's chosen language reflects the emerging significance of feminist psychoanalytic theory, which was particularly evident in the field of cinema studies. See: Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16: 1, 1975. Elizabeth Cowie, 'Woman as Sign', *M/F*, No. 1, 1978.

<sup>69</sup> 'The Body Politic', 239.

removing a bloody tampon; Lynda Benglis' notorious centrefold-advertisement from a 1974 *Artforum*, in which the naked artist clutches a large dildo; Betty Dodson's serial pencil drawings of naturalistic vulvas; and Sylvia Sleigh's reversal paintings showing nude men in classically feminine repose, recalling the paintings of Ingres, Titian and Velazquez. Interviewed in 2011, Tickner evoked the struggle of bringing the contemporary politics of feminism 'into some kind of conversation' with the academic discipline of art history.<sup>70</sup> In 'The Body Politic' she negotiated her coterminous allegiances to feminism and art history, consequently breaking the vow of aesthetic disinterestedness that negates invested political knowledge as well as the messy particularities of embodied female experience.<sup>71</sup> In analysing conventional representations of women, and situating contemporary feminist practices against this 'inherited framework', Tickner's article merged art historical traditions with a new, politicised visual paradigm and fulfilled her goal of bringing both discourses into conversation.

Tickner first presented this research at a panel on 'Erotic Art' held at the Third Annual Conference of the AAH in London in March 1977. Thereafter it was accepted for publication in the first issue of *Art History*. Onians was attempting to shape a progressive identity for the journal, writing in his first editorial that 'in the exploration of new fields for research no materials, no tools, no methods and no new language will be excluded.'<sup>72</sup> He has, in retrospect, described his early editorial policy as 'risky' and 'hot' – adding that he 'always wanted people to take more risks, be stronger, be more assertive.'<sup>73</sup> In 2014 Tickner confirmed this, writing: 'I think he was pleased to have something controversial and 20<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>74</sup> 'The Body Politic' was well received by feminist researchers; it was included two years later in a bibliographic essay in *Oxford Art Journal*, has been reprinted in a number of anthologies, and continues to be widely cited.<sup>75</sup> However, the art historical establishment received it less favourably. One member of the *Art History* editorial board, John Shearman, went so far as to resign in protest against its publication and the article was deferred to the second issue. According to Onians, Shearman 'took offence at the imagery', while Tickner specifically proposes 'the row they had was about the Benglis image'.<sup>76</sup> The outrage therefore seems to have arisen from the publication of explicit female imagery, particularly

<sup>70</sup> Tickner interviewed by Liz Bruchet for the AAH Oral History Project. For more on the policed institutionalisation of knowledge see Helen C Chapman, 'Becoming Academics: challenging the disciplinarians' in *Breaking the Disciplines: reconceptions in art, knowledge and culture*, ed. by Martin Davies and Marsha Meskimmon, London: IB Tauris, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> For more on Kant and disinterestedness in relation to feminist body art, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Editorial, *Art History*, 1: 1, March 1978, v.

<sup>73</sup> John Onians, interviewed by Liz Bruchet for the AAH Oral History Project.

<sup>74</sup> Tickner, email to author 29 April 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Lamia Duomato, 'The Literature of Woman in Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, 3: 1, April 1980. Rosemary Betterton ed., *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts*, London: Pandora Press, 1987. Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970-75*, London: Pandora Press, 1987. The article has been cited in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2003: 249 n.45); Lynda Nead's *The Female Nude* (1991: 65 n.62); *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post-Feminism* (2006: 311); *Erotic Ambiguities* (2000: multiple); *The Ends of Performance* (1998: 288); *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (2003: 44-46).

<sup>76</sup> Onians and Tickner, interview for the AAH Oral History Project.

in the context of art history's established nude 'masterpieces', consequently exposing the inharmonious conjunction of feminist themes and the conventions of the discipline.

The long-running arts magazine *Apollo* responded to the new journal's expansive attitude with a churlish review essay written by its editor Denys Sutton. Sutton describes Tickner's article as a 'novelty [...] at first reading this might be interpreted as a spoof, but it is clearly meant to be taken seriously.'<sup>77</sup> Tickner is referred to diminutively as 'Miss Lisa' and prurient comments are made regarding the sexual content of the artworks. The editor attempts to shore up tradition by using mockery to delineate a boundary between conventional art history and this feminist interloper. Tickner's article, he suggests, 'makes a change for students as they plough through some of the more highbrow stuff.'<sup>78</sup> In this, the article is not unique: sociologist Maria do Mar Pereira has observed similar methods of 'epistemic splitting' throughout the academy, whereby educators insidiously disavow feminist politics through ridicule and laughter.<sup>79</sup> Tickner identified this strategy in a response, published in *Art Monthly*, where she accused Sutton of adopting a 'patronising facetiousness' rather than engaging in 'head-on conflict'. This, she added, 'is sneakier: is ridicules from a position of presumed urbanity whilst avoiding the main issues.'<sup>80</sup>

*Apollo's* review of volume one of *Art History* is instructive in further ways; as Harris has pointed out, it 'will stand well as an example of the values and perspectives of contemporary "institutionally dominant art history".'<sup>81</sup> Beyond Tickner, Sutton takes general aim at a new generation of art historians, plainly wary of the newly professionalised academic sphere. Although he admits, 'now that art-historical doctors and professors abound, some effort might be made to examine the assumptions that underlie this "discipline".'<sup>82</sup> The reviewer gently criticises Potts's Marxist perspective on eighteenth-century historicism for containing 'unfamiliar material'. Thus it seems in regards 'The Body Politic', it was the profane combination of explicit female imagery, unequivocal feminist politics and the contemporaneity of the artworks under discussion that prompted such virulent response.<sup>83</sup> As Harris clarifies: 'Feminism, perhaps more than Marxism – which has always remained a set of intellectual traditions and political organisations overwhelmingly controlled by *men* – was perceived by *Apollo's* editors as a threat, in art history and as a political movement for radical social change.'<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> 'Is there a Doctor in the House?', *Apollo: the magazine of the arts*, October 1978, 222-23. Sections of this editorial and Tickner's response are reprinted in *Framing Feminism*, 1987.

<sup>78</sup> *Apollo*, 222.

<sup>79</sup> Maria do Mar Pereira, 'Feminist theory is proper knowledge but...', *Feminist Theory*, 12: 3, December 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Lisa Tickner, 'Attitudes to Women Artists' (correspondence section), *Art Monthly*, no. 23, 1979, 22-23. The response was published in *Art Monthly* after *Apollo* failed to acknowledge Tickner's correspondence.

<sup>81</sup> *The New Art History*, 45. Harris quotes Orton and Pollock here.

<sup>82</sup> *Apollo*, 232.

<sup>83</sup> The issue of art history's historical and contemporary focus crops up repeatedly during this period. See Onians' editorial for the second issue of the journal. And Dawn Ades' criticism of 'British Art History's obsession with chronology and history (as that which has passed), not recent or contemporary', in *The New Art History*, ed. Rees and Borzello, London: Camden Press, 1986, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Harris, *The New Art History*, page. Original emphasis.

## Conclusions

The sections above aimed to uncover the contribution made by feminist scholars to the newly established Association of Art Historians and to consider how readers encountered feminist debate on the pages of its academic journal *Art History*. This summary ends in the 1990s for various intersecting reasons. An additional stage of development marked by the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) saw polytechnics merge with or transform into universities and in 1998 tuition fees were introduced, profoundly altering the educational terrain upon which the new social art histories of the 1970s and 1980s had been built. As Lisa Tickner mentions, 'I think the emphasis shifted more towards visual culture for some of us.'<sup>85</sup> This suggests that, faced with art history's resistance to their critique, some feminists chose to relocate their intellectual originality to other disciplinary contexts; contexts that had been shaped by the very discourses traced here. The development of visual culture studies was catalysed by feminism's critique of art history, alongside Marxism, postcolonialism and cultural studies methods. How successful these interventions were in remaking rather than diversifying the art historical discipline is something that has been debated since (at least) Clark's *TLS* essay.<sup>86</sup> This transference of intellectual energy is implied by Harris who, writing in 1991, pointed to a shift in editorial focus and dramatically decried the enclosing parameters of *Art History*: 'The reviews section, a hotbed of marginal neo-Marxist, neo-feminist and neo-post-structuralist seething phillipic during the early and mid-1980s, has been tamed.'<sup>87</sup>

Feminism's own institutionalisation also has to be considered at this historical juncture. Different publications suggested that in 1982 feminism was at the cutting edge of a 'new art history', or contributing to a 'crisis in the discipline'.<sup>88</sup> By 1987, however, a panel convened by Ann Cullis at the AAH Annual Conference investigated 'Working in a Post-Feminist World?'.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, Susan Faludi famously diagnosed a 'backlash' against feminism that she had observed mounting throughout the 1980s.<sup>90</sup> This suggests that in the space of little under a decade, feminism had transitioned in general consciousness from 'new' to 'post'. Writing in 1988, however, Linda Nochlin remarked that although feminism may appear 'safely ensconced in the bosom of one of the most conservative of the intellectual disciplines. This is far from being the case.'<sup>91</sup> Despite such uncertainty or limited recognition, institutional contexts *had* partially shifted; impelled in large part by two decades of feminist intervention. Amelia Jones's article of 1994, for instance, included the photograph of Benglis that provoked controversy sixteen years earlier, alongside its diptych counterpart of Robert Morris in sadomasochistic clothing, and alarming images of

<sup>85</sup> Tickner, email to author 29 April 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Deborah Cherry has explored these contradictions in 'Art History Visual Culture', *Art History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Sept 2004, 479-493.

<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Harris, 'Art History', *Year's Work Critical and Cultural Theory*, 1: 1, 1991, 137-175, 171.

<sup>88</sup> 'The New Art History?' was a conference (and later book) organised by Jon Bird at Middlesex Polytechnic in 1982. That year a special issue of the US *Art Journal* was published to investigate 'The Crisis in the Discipline', ed. Henri Zerner, 42:2, Winter 1982.

<sup>89</sup> Association of Art Historians, *Bulletin*, no.28, July 1987, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women*, New York: Crown, 1991.

<sup>91</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, Power and Other Essays*, Boulder CO: Westview, 1988.

performance artist Bob Flanagan nailing his penis to a stool. 'There was,' according to Jones, 'no resistance at all to publishing "Dis/playing" and no complaints that I know of either.'<sup>92</sup>

Debates concerning feminism's institutional participation would continue into the new decade – and indeed, beyond. One area of dispute (of particular relevance to this journal's readership), concerns the very writing of art history and criticism; that is the form these new ideas took in print. In the mid-1990s Borzello contended that, '[m]uch feminist art writing comes from academics and is couched in a language which many who are interested in the topic of women and art find opaque. Feminist book reviews in the journal *Art History* are like reading a foreign language, the language of academia, to be precise'<sup>93</sup> And indeed, although this article has not examined the *writing* of feminist art history specifically (concentrating instead on its content and institutional framing), upon reflection the texts published in *Art History* do extend the 'language of academia' to an extent that writing in, say, *Spare Rib* may not have. However, a rationalisation for this writerly 'smuggling'<sup>94</sup> can be found in an earlier declaration from Pollock: 'I know why I write as I do: it is a political act of contesting the power invested in institutions of knowledge and demanding a space for women to redefine the world.'<sup>95</sup>

In his 1991 review, Harris offered the important observation that *Art History* 'chooses material, on the whole, which reproduces rather than produces knowledge'<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the furore over Tickner's article illustrates the difficulties encountered by stalwartly novel or political modes of scholarship. Feminist work was being done elsewhere – in independent reading groups, women's art journals, collectives, and consciousness-raising groups – however, the Association of Art Historians acted as a site of disciplinary legitimation. This *reproduction* of knowledge (as Harris frames it) arguably brought awareness of feminist arguments to a wider, less immediately interested readership. Encountering feminist writing through the pages of *Art History* permits a glimpse of how these writers explored its theoretical and political conditions of possibility within that institutional space, and how some of those ambitions came into conflict with conservative forces. It can be surmised from this investigation that, during the 1970s and 1980s, at a crucial moment of disciplinary self-recognition, critique and consolidation, feminist participation in new professional spaces enabled a generation of scholars to establish critical authority in a contemporising discipline; whilst reciprocally determining the shape of that field of study.

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<sup>92</sup> Jones, email to author 7 June 2013. Editor Marcia Pointon recalled trouble with the printers over the image, but on this occasion the controversy was not within the art historical community. Pointon interviewed by Liz Bruchet for 'AAH Oral Histories'.

<sup>93</sup> Frances Borzello, 'Preaching to the Converted? Feminist Art Publishing in the 1980s', in Katy Deepwell ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, New York and Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995, 20-24.

<sup>94</sup> I borrow this phrase from Irit Rogoff, who has theorised smuggling as a form of institutional critique in an essay published on eipcp.net: 'Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality', 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Framing Feminism' (1988), in *Feminism-Art-Theory* ed. Robinson, 207-16, 210.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Harris, 'Art History', *Year's Work Critical and Cultural Theory*, 1: 1, 1991, 137-175.

Victoria Horne ... the Association of Art Historians and the emergence of  
feminist interventions, 1974-1990

published essays in *Third Text*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Radical Philosophy* and *Feminist Review*.

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