

'Between the Other and Not-All: Identity/Alterity of women artists in contemporary art'

This talk will be a development of ideas about subjectivity and agency drawing on my article: 'Other' and 'Not-All', Rethinking the Place of the woman artist in 'Contemporary Art' Revista de Estudios Globales y Arte Contemporáneo: Art Global Age Vol 2, No 1 (2014) online journal, University of Barcelona:

<http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/REGAC/article/view/10253>

Thank you for the invitation to give a keynote speech here today.

I am pleased to be in another part of Europe today exploring women artists and art history while my country is deciding whether or not to be part of the EU or the EEA or go its own way at the margins of Europe.

- 1) I want to begin with these 2 quotes from Lisa Tickner in 1988 and Griselda Pollock in 2014. These suggest where the feminist problematic in art history as a discipline might lie: in an exploration of the contradictions presented in different forms of art history and of the social and symbolic role gender plays in historical understandings.

What I wish to discuss this morning concerns how to think about the “frame” of art history – as a problematic - to discuss women artists across the 20th and 21st century. I want to raise questions and issues about the current state of feminist art histories – given their now complex materialist, psychoanalytic, trans-national and cosmopolitan/ historical dimensions and the strong focus on sexual difference as the primary means to consider questions of art and gender.

- 2) I want to refer at the start to 4 different uses of the term – Exception. Each variant in English presents us with a means to think about the constitution of readings/interpretations of the works of women artists which continue to place women artists as “exceptions” – across the problematic binary of Identity/Otherness.

Euro-American culture continues to value all artists' contributions to contemporary Art as examples of what is 'exceptional' and still aims to write the story of art by linking certain forms of “exceptionalism” into many partial narratives about these tendencies or trends. Art history sees its role as offering us more types of case studies/remarkable art works/remarkable forms of art practice/remarkable people as artists: whether it is the

handmaiden to the market or museum presentation. In art, to be recognised as unique and singular remains a key category of praise. It marks out what is THE exception, as opposed to things that are to registered and understood as “exceptions” to the rules and often discarded or excluded. Exceptions are not valued in the same way as that which is “exceptional”. Exceptions in this sense have no transgressive value, they are left-of-field, “odd” or outside of the disciplinary boundaries of the field itself.

The disciplinary field in which these disparate objects are linked is not neutral – but always aimed at/for someone – The field itself is an ideological construct with a mode of address. The field is not unitary or a monopoly determined by one or two authority figures who determine which objects are taken as canonical, even when all too frequently, as Tickner, notes in another essay: novelty is taken for rigour – and the focus is on a “positivist” view of art as a sequence of objects, not on how the discipline “objects” to certain types of practice or sets limits on its own internal boundaries of investigation.

These values in art around the “exception” and what is “exceptional” create enormous problems for speaking about women artists: being a woman is not an exceptional state of being – as 52% of the world population: there are always “great exceptions” among women – Prime Ministers, authors, scientists, diplomats - pioneers in all disciplines - who precisely because these women are distinguished from the others i.e. the common lot of women often named as housewives and mothers. It is only this distinction which renders them more Exceptional in their achievements. So, is the history of women artists – mirroring art’s selective tradition - only to be a tracing of these pioneers, these “exceptions” ?

In art, the feminine exception also has another meaning which is captured by this quote from Lacan that the feminine exception...in its particularity...contradicts the masculine universal. The discussion of singular exceptions among women artists tends as a result to focus on elusive forms of feminine Otherness marking a difference, of work which contradicts routine and widely accepted stereotypes of the feminine as a form of resistance to limitations suffered or imposed; and in visible markers of femininity distinct from and often against masculinity embedded in feminine approaches to spaces/genres/media etc...have appeared in different ways in feminist revisions to art history.

- 3) The vocabulary around exception underpins the most common vocabulary used to describe “greatness”. This discourse has regularly put women on the side of the negative: mediocre.

I do not think that the problem can be solved by a simple reversal of value attached to this binary, Identity/otherness though there are plenty of attempts by scholars to do so.

- 4) Feminist criticism has repeatedly presented the stakes for women artists in two versions: an obstacle race – the race to the top – or as a selective filtering out, the race to recognition of a few more names.

But it is not success or failure that we should be assessing or focusing on.

If we take seriously psychoanalysis claims to examine the unconscious of all human beings, this is – as Jacqueline Rose points out – the “failure” of identity for all subjectivities.

“Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved. Nor does psychoanalysis see such “failure” as a special-case inability or an individual deviancy from the norm. “Failure” is not a moment to be regretted in the process of adaptation, or development into normality....Instead “failure” is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories”.

Nor should we be looking for instances of failure in the subjectivity of women artists. The majority are already associated with “failure” in culture by the scheme of exceptionalism. We should not be attempting simply to reverse this scheme by “proof” of success. This is a trap.

- 5) I want to give this sociological example from Feminist research by Titia Top of the problems that arise when a sociological analysis rests exclusively on “background” of a person in relation to status claims about success.

While sociologically it is important to examine elements of the biography of an artist to the generation, peer group, city, family support etc. – if one were seeking to explain someone’s life. It does not work to explain the work they produced. Art history no longer predominantly takes this approach, especially with regard to contemporary art but there is a fetishization of this approach in the presentation of an individual’s work in a solo show.

In its worst forms, a “gloss” is put on the same hagiographic elements emerge in reassessments of women’s lives, because no attention is paid to any social or cultural factors – only to a story of being an artist and making art. These form the “myths” in the story of exceptional women:

Women are dependent on their teachers and this influence continues beyond their time as a student – ie the work is derivative and unoriginal.

Women's autonomy is constrained because they are economically dependent on father, family or partner – ie the work is small in size and ambition.

Their partner changed their life – not them, not their desire, not their ambition.

Even where women are well-educated, well-travelled and economically independent, they could not achieve their potential, because of bourgeois expectations of them as wives and mothers (and this affected them, even when they didn't have children or had many).

They were stopped from being an artist by this, even when they were privileged, educated and mobile, and we must consider alcoholism, mental depression, lack of money, lack of opportunity, or abusive relationships as a reason why in setting the scale of what they did or did not do.

- 6) I want to give as a “current” example of this – the “gloss” placed on the publicity for Sonja Ferlov Mancoba – in contrast to the scholarly re-assessment of her work in the Cobra group. On the one hand she is associated with poverty and determination (two qualities not unknown amongst avantgarde artists from the 1930s in Paris) – but her self-criticism is presented as destructive and the reason why she did not gain market success in her lifetime. Her marriage to Mancoba is NOT discussed in the publicity. All references to their 30 years of happy marriage in Montparnasse are erased – the circumstances are revealed in the show itself through documentation and a very beautiful letter in which she writes that he completes her sense of self. By contrast, the scholarship marginalises her in the avantgarde as “minor” players to Cobra. All this detracts from the achievement in the work of a form of international abstraction taking full account of African art forms, especially an exploration of masculinity in the mask, the shaman and the warrior as key figures of her work. The abstraction she pursued was one of relationships through formal means: including sculptures about co-operation between peoples across continents.
- 7) The second example is the show ‘Modern Couples’ – which is a very poor rehash – of Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron's book. Women artists were good but never as good as their male peers, their work and reputation was lesser, curtailed, rejected, marginalised – because they were women. While the show expands to include different kinds of relationships – queer and straight, inter-racial and bi-national, the thesis remains that women had a “lesser” role – as muses, partners, wives, lovers – and their art suffered – it did not “thrive”. This recognition

reinforces how a few women only can be exceptions to this pattern amongst their sex. That these women are only discussed in “couples”, renders the thesis of “Otherness” even more apparent and damaging. More books, perhaps a museum or a dedicated room or more attention does not shift the “self-evident” identification of heroines, members of the avant-garde, women of interest in this story.

- 8) This broadening of names of artists is evident online and in art histories monographic “dictionary” and blockbuster show traditions. The familiar process of “dismantling” how women are omitted from historical narratives; their “recovery” as lost or forgotten women and the attempt to offer a “reconstruction” in new frameworks has been underway for more than 40 years. But it does not seem that we have progressed much in the last 20 – only that museums seem more willing to make these kinds of exhibitions today. This problem is not solved by a focus on the atypical woman: the woman who is a lesbian, or of a different race or ethnic group. The same problem will inevitably return when we have an art history written which nevertheless celebrates a diversity of women. I want to make it clear that it is not the intention but the method I am criticising.

In 1982, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard described feminism as having a “broadening affect” in questioning the litany of art history, arguing that it would lead to an adjustment of historical perspective, not a history of women artists, by a questioning of the sexual assumptions and attitudes in the creation and naming of “Art”.

Feminist art history became identified with different choices in approach and subject matter, the question of how a feminist reading or perspective might be constructed while acknowledging how gendered binaries operate in language and value. The renewed interest in categories of “self-portraiture”; “still-life”; “the splits between city/country” and books examining psychoanalytic terms like “informe”; “the uncanny”, or “the abject” also emerged. In the midst of this, feminist scholarship on “critiques of the male gaze”, “the category of the nude”, ideas about women’s self-representation and a recovery of their work in craft, textiles or applied arts all took off. These approaches were searching for new and different ways of considering female self-representation as well as raising variants of feminist aesthetics which would depart from conventions already established by men and existing types and forms of art history. While it was constantly acknowledged that much basic research about women artists remained to be done – i.e. to reconstruct the scale and scope of women’s activities as

contributions to the visual arts, this was matched by a concern to avoid stereotyping and to reconstruct women artists' claims to being unique and different in a historical manner.

In 2005, in *Reclaiming Female Agency*, Broude and Garrard argued their aim was to “rebalance” the picture and show at all levels the “steady and ongoing participation of women in culture” – and by reclaiming women’s history, in time, men’s history – specifically its narrow, distorted or inaccurate masculinist accounts - would be rewritten. The stress of agency and subjectivity, however, albeit mediated through the renewed engagement in the 1990s with post-structuralist debates did not “decenter” the subject, question the “death of the author”, or reorientate the discipline to new kinds of study – these explorations were left to contemporary art. Howard Singerman’s book “Art History after Sherrie Levine” in tacking the problem of appropriative and readymade strategies to conventions in art history would present an interesting case study of how this challenge was worked out.

- 9) Here is another example, the binary reversal of names in plaques which opened the Elle@Centrespompidou one year experiment to rehang the galleries with only women artists.

And the learning page of MOMA’s website which “contains” and manages its collection into neat categories around works identified by an address to identity politics and intersectional claims for different kinds of Otherness. These categories now form the “standard stuff” of teaching on ‘gender, sexuality and representation’ courses in the USA and UK. A resume of how critical theories about representation, gender and genre have changed the debate to themes and “issues”.

If these problems seem acute in terms of the presentation of women in modernism and the avantgarde – overwhelmingly because of this focus on artworks and individual makers - they have not been dissolved by the contradictions of considering contemporary art or of feminist art since the 1970s. From the early 1970s, it was largely female art historians and curators who were the only ones doing this work, inspired by feminist ideas and happily calling themselves feminist art historians: these women, as they were largely women, with only a couple of men joining the conversation, were the only ones writing monographs on women artists, organising collective or large-scale exhibitions of women artists, recovering women artists from the basements of museums and arguing for them to be shown. Has this situation changed after 50 years? Not really.

In a previous paper, I tried to use a Lacanian idea – as presented by Slavoj Žižek – to read symptomatically, through an analysis of symptoms, the current position of women artists in contemporary art. I used the idea of the big Other – a symbolic framework which is not “Real” but has an imaginary and determining existence in how we think about culture: substituting this fantasy formation for the characterisation that feminism often attempts to name and identify as patriarchy. The earlier paper proposed that while the hypervisibility of a few contemporary women artists had escaped the symbolic position of Otherness that modernism had imposed and increased the diversity of role models for being a woman artist, some women still remained ‘great exceptions’ in the newly constituted global cosmopolitan transnational art world – exceptional in that sense of rare and few in number, as well as distinct and different in the art scene. By contrast, the majority of women remained unsymbolized, externalized, and became the not-All, the unsymbolised figure – outside representation - in the Real from which the imaginary structure of the “big Other” as a patriarchal symbolic order is actually formed.

This paper continues this line of thinking but returns again to Lacanian problems differently. Psychoanalysis has had a major influence in framing precisely these questions of identity/Otherness/Subjectivity/Agency/the position of the subject. I want to ask critically: Can this return to psychoanalysis really find a way to encourage us as feminists to think differently about our project and what we are doing – or is it just another kind of metaphor to expand our understanding of how the existing status quo, how patriarchy itself operates? Since the 1970s, this was why so many feminist writers have engaged with Lacan, re-reading him and re-constituting his ideas – and even though the emphasis is usually fixed on the initial fascination of his work around the gaze and the mirror phase (which has been so dominant)... There are many other strands of post-Lacanian thinking to consider – about the m/Other’s role in identity, matrixial thinking or alternative figurations of the breast as a counterpoint to the phallus, or metaphors about “two lips” in order to question how dominant premises within society/culture can be analysed and open or mark a space in which the same objects of desire (as object o/a) might be constructed across different orders of recognition and desire.

10) Lacan described as a **lathouse** those temporary objects that serve as stand-in's for the object small a – the imaginary point/object of our desire. His complex schema presents 4 different orders of discourse – each with a different starting point and emphasis. I’d like you to bear in mind that in using his figural schemes and metaphors, even Lacan argued that ‘It is not necessary for [discourse] always to pass by way of them, and for things

to turn in the same sense. They are only an appeal to you *to take your bearings* in relation to what can be called radical functions, in the mathematical sense of the term.’

However, this detour via Lacan’s musings on philosophy, culture and Marx and the discourse of the psychoanalyst - may bring us to another direction and find a way to reformulate the agenda of what we are doing when we say we are embarked on feminist research in art history or about the problematic of contemporary art.

For Lacan, S1, the master statement has the capacity to ‘give an account of how something that is spread throughout language like a trail of powder, is readable, that is to say that it catches on, creates a discourse.’ But it is still not a metalanguage, not an eternal truth, only a discourse. Obviously I too want to question the discourse of the University, the master and that of the analysand in the dominant discourses in art history: neither is complete, nor is it nothing at all. There are gaps, we highlight these all the time. But would we agree with Lacan that the only alternative to the master, analysand, University - is the discourse of the hysteric? The discourse of the hysteric – if we put in the place of the hysteric – the woman artist – is the one who generates the symptoms that the discourse of the psychoanalyst is created from. For too long women have been put in the position of the hysteric: we are mad, bad, ugly, difficult – where we behave or think differently from common social expectations.

Yet, his idea of repetition interests me as an object of study because there are certain traits which like a psychosis or mental illness keep recurring, especially when I consider or look at certain common repetitions in feminist scholarship. Maybe I want to understand why we return to the same tropes in feminist scholarship – is it because this kind of discourse fosters a sense of enjoyment – as Lacan ironically suggests about University-based knowledge? Does repetition satisfy some sense of what is recognisable as University-based knowledge? Why is feminist politics excluded – except in the form of a tamed methodological approach, where a woman artist is the subject?

As Lacan suggests, is the master’s discourse conditioning us into an acceptance of a slavish acceptance to existing norms in academic scholarship – are we acting as slaves to this system and are our efforts simply supplying more fodder to the master discourse, a surplus discourse from which we do not profit and which generates no new surplus value?

Are we – in the place of the slave – who wishes to overthrow the discourse - really questioning what has been stolen from us by the master discourse? Are we simply setting up more research to please our masters – for enjoyment in this pursuit of knowledge is not transgression? Is it the case that feminism in its ‘revolutionary aspiration[s] has only one

possible way of ending, only one: always with the discourse of the Master, as experience has already shown.’?

How do we recognise in our statements the chain of signifiers which constitute the subject – that of the teacher, or the academic – not our ‘object o’ – our objects of desire?

Lacan suggests ‘What is at stake is the effect of discourse which is in effect one that rejects’ – this is the strange position of mastery in ‘la dominante’ – a constant rejection of norms, values, procedures. The ‘dominante’ discourse continues through what is rejected but it is also the mechanism through which people identify themselves and seek identifications. This is where the appeal of feminist art history for women scholars has been: a means to identify themselves and to seek identifications within it from and with other women in history. The works of women artists are an object of desire which we do seek through making statements to occupy or have a place in a master discourse: research in this field becomes the identity of the researcher, the self-confirmed feminists. In place of certainty, perhaps it is time to accentuate the doubt, to remember the doubt (as Gayatri Spivak suggests the primary reason for research in the humanities) – not the continuation of insertion in the system – but as Irigaray suggested, a certain jamming, an interruption, an intervention is needed? Perhaps a more planetary intervention?

It was feminism’s contribution that it could reformulate this master’s discourse. Not doing this is what is feared when feminism is described as a purely “reactive” force “after the fact”, its critiques only react to existing frameworks they have not transformed them. A

Displacement, correction, adjustment of meaning – for mediocre works or marginal artists – which does not change anything. I worry that this huge effort of feminist research by many women scholars and some men will be erased: feminism will be forgotten as the discussion of women artists as simply artists will be developed: gender itself will be erased as a ground or discussion point.

Lacan argued that the radical function’s purpose in these figures expressed algebraically is to write “two orders of relations to exemplify what logarithms come from” – not simply to add more examples to those existing but to recognise that a new set has been formed, or, alternatively, to invent a new kind of logic which in operation does not leave you in the same state as before. Surely we should pay much more attention to this displacement – to two orders of discourse which implies a transition away from the same – not to Otherness – but to different kinds of subjects/objects/forms of knowledge.

I want to express some concern that focusing on women artists' 'agency and subjectivity' will tackle the questions raised above – too much work on groups, tendencies, clusters, formations is needed to start to understand the multiplicity and complexity of women's art practices. In the 1980s, when I started my own University-level education in feminist art history, there was a considerable turn away from the biographical and studies of the individual artist. The reasons for this were more than just a critique of male mastery and were aligned to the idea that the master's discourse could not be solved by looking at women artists in isolation. The same story would just be told over and over again. In its place was a desire to reconsider how women artists are discussed in collective terms, to think again about women's connections to each other in clubs, societies, organisations – in female networks and through female friendship – both historically and in the contemporary moment. Otherwise, will we have simply more discourse of the same, more products, more consumption of the same – even when it is women artists who are the subjects of our discourse. If we become 'resigned' to this dimension of discursive truth, we might risk reproducing only the master's discourse, not the one we envisioned or hoped for which would disrupt it, produce Otherwise, offer not an alternative but an entire refashioning of research priorities: open up whole new fields of study.

11) How to move out of this impasse when the constitution of "contemporary" as marking a break does not help?

Art history is formulated now around three commonly used and dominant frameworks for discussing art today are: modernism, postmodernism and contemporary art and suggest that these form the dominant for 20th and 21st century art and are regularly articulated in relation to it. This slide is without dates because it is precisely the dates of this periodisation which is still a subject of debate in art history. The feminist problematic in art history needs to consider more carefully the effects of these frameworks for women artists?

Terry Smith, the architect of many descriptions of the "contemporary", notes how it was only 8 years ago, that the word "contemporary" started to be commonly used in relation to the discipline, publishing and teaching of art history: prior to that definitions depended on modern art, the century or pre- and post-1945 – even though the term "contemporary" had been in use to describe art extensively since the 1990s in the art market. (**The State of Art History: Contemporary Art**' Smith, Terry *The Art Bulletin*; Dec 2010; 92, 4;

ARTbibliographies Modern pg. 366.) His comment demonstrates the time lag of art history – as longer than that of art criticism. Is the contemporary, he asks, even a legitimate field of critical, theoretical, historical and art historical inquiry – or is it just more criticism and theory applied to art made in the present?

When modernism ended (if it ever did); whether a period of late modernism can be seen as opposed to an early modernism and when this break occurred; when and where postmodernism or the contemporary begins and if postmodernism ended with the use of contemporary or represents only the notion of a continuation within modernism. These are all still highly contested questions in art history as a discipline. Does modernism and the historic avantgarde simply stop in 1939? Does late modernism begin post-WW2 or in the 1960s – when the reputation of Duchamp was massively revised? When did postmodernism begin – in the 1950s or in the 1980s? Is the only way of talking about “contemporary” art after 1989 or does the definition start post-1968? Shouldn’t we be paying more attention to how these frameworks are constructed and the implications of these frameworks for how women artists are positioned?

Griselda Pollock’s advocacy of an elliptical traverse of time, like ‘a criss-crossing, backward and forward, as well as a distorted, circling movement across the terrain of aesthetic practices’ (‘Virtuality, aesthetics, sexual difference and the exhibition: towards the virtual feminist museum’ in Morineau, C. (2009) editor, *elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collections of the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Paris:Centre Georges Pompidou*. 2009: 324). Catherine de Zegher’s exhibition *Inside the Visible* (1996) was the approach which underpinned this analysis which showed that by considering works from different decades by the same woman artists, these divisions did not work.

How time is used to define art movements, art periods sits at odds with the commonly used, if problematic categorisation, of “periods” in feminist art – is there a different approach to time, post-1968, in the 3 or even 4 waves of feminisms since the “radical” pioneers of the 1970s? Should we follow identification of feminism in the art world in relation to its own self-declared generations or waves? Will the metaphors of pioneers and heroines (as Gabriel Schor’s curation of the Feminist Avant-garde Sammlung Verbund collection, of women artists as participants in a feminist avant-garde situated only in performance, video, photography and film, help us do this? Should we map feminism only in relation to periods/movements – e.g. Feminist conceptualists: feminist post-conceptualists; feminism in minimalism; feminist post-minimal abstractionists? As Peter Osborne reminds us: “post-conceptual art” is not the name for a particular type of art, so much as the historical-

ontological condition for the production of contemporary art in general' (cited in Smith). Where is the space here for feminist post-conceptual work in the name of the historical-ontological condition for women and women's histories in the production of contemporary art?

12) I developed this graphic to try and explain different orders within feminist research.

One continuing in modernist modes, even into post-modernism. The other signalling the contemporary through Mary Kelly's notion of "art informed by feminism". This is a split in language and object within the discourses in and around feminism.

Is it always a question when talking about feminist art to contrast the 1970s with the present, be it in the 1990s or in the 2010s? As Mira Schor and Kate Mondloch have pointed out there has been a suppression of the art of the 1980s in these accounts – i.e. of the generation 2.0 women born in the 1950s were rendered invisible by this scheme – a position secured by the 2 dominant 2007 exhibitions, *WACK!*'s (SFMOCA) focus on art before 1970 and *Global Feminisms*' (Brooklyn Museum)'s inclusion of artists born after 1960.

Terry Smith's ideas of contemporaneity in contemporary art supposedly exceed old definitions of the modern in relation to modernity in that it is 1) an art present now, 2) a departure from or repudiation of previous art styles 3) a way of explaining definite events, people, artworks in synchronic time, and 4) offers a sense of radically diverse conjunctions of people, events, artworks, senses of time and space in the same moment and space? His project for art history, no longer a meta-narrative, is still charged with explaining developments from modernism/postmodernism transitioning into the contemporary - held together by a carefully constructed narrative of uneven developments and tendencies. This led Terry Smith to his own formulations of three groups present in the 2010s : 1) remodernism and retro-sensationalism in the art market, 2) artists working from post-colonial, multi-cultural and indigenous perspectives in exile or in diasporas around the world and on collective enterprises and 3) those working on the framework of ecological values – a response to our planet in crisis. 'Place making, world-picturing and connectivity are the most common concerns of artists' in his version of contemporaneity – where location/distance and local or regional developments take priority. Should it now be the aim of feminist art history to write women artists into this crumbling and questionable narrative form? It would not be hard to do – but the premise of this is that we are still "adding" women to a history in formation which continues to "marginalise" or problematise them.

The art world and the art market expanded dramatically in the 1990s into its global form, as mapped by Belting and Andrea Buddenseig's global art market project.

It's not just a question of temporality, geo-political questions are now at the forefront of people's minds.

13) And 14) I suggested in another lecture that it would not be hard to construct a BRIC or a MINT form of feminism – these two development tendencies defined by economists mark the latest phase of global markets and future expansion in the world economy.

China is already the 3rd largest art market in the world.

The question of global constructions – as economic formations – in the 1990s changed how we understood and how artists responded to Eastern Europe and the rise of “tiger economies” on the world stage. Where is a feminist approach to world histories of art? How does feminism confront not simply multi-culturalism but a global/transnational/transgenerational politics juxtaposing developments from 1st to 4th world, North to South or West to East political constructions work?

14) Arsenale in Ukraine represented this vision of internationalism in its 50% women artists and this is what contemporary art amongst women artists when they are included tends to look like today.

How do new formulations of the local and global disturb and rearrange the overwhelming emphasis in art history on the national in an international frame? Contemporary art's local “multi-cultural” is now determinedly part of an international/global model, as the focus on Euro-American dominance in modernism has shifted through postmodernism into a “contemporary”, trans-continental, “biennale” model of considering art from 60-70 countries in conjunction with each other. N.paradoxa's journal proudly could boast that it published 500 articles by on and about art from more than 70 countries in the world, during its 20 years of operation – any glance at the website will show you that this vision of internationalism is present in contemporary art.

2019 is a going to be a “bumper” year for women artists to be shown in major venues. The curatorial team of MASP in Sao Paulo will be dedicating its year to Brazilian women artists and major international shows of women artists after 3 conferences on the subject. Tate Modern has proudly rehung its contemporary collection so that 50% of the solo spaces are dedicated to women artists and 1/3 of the collection on display is by women. The 2019 Venice biennale curated by Ralph Rugoff proudly announces it is going to show 50% women

for the first time in the Biennale's history – the caveat is that this just happened to be a preference of the theme of the curator, not a quota system of any kind. Paolo Baratta, commissioner of Venice Biennale, *could not explain why* this had never happened before and denied even being unaware of any previous percentages regarding women artists representation in the Biennale's history.

- 15) There are still “stars” – like Louise Bourgeois or Pipilotti Rist whose work because of its work with installation, materials, the body, female identity neatly sits in both feminist and contemporary art camps – and have been the subject of much research in both.
- 16) The volume of women needs to be considered: and not just in pop photos like this one of women working in abstraction
- 17) There are still contradictions: witness this interview with Pauline Olokowska – which I have juxtaposed with Sanja Ivekovic. Nostalgia about Soviet images or an examination of images of women from history is often regarded as more engaging than the attempt to demonstrate how Polish women in the Solidarity movement are written out of history.

Ewa Majewska writing about the **‘Feminist Art of Failure, [the artist] Ewa Partum and the Avant-garde of the Weak’** ([Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej](#) ISSN: 2300-200X 2016-07-21 [Znajdź](#) Nr 16) argues that goal of feminist criticism should be as a challenge ‘to the militant and heroic/victorious avant-gardes of the past as well as allowing one to reject the false distinction of melancholic feminist art and resistant art, which, as Ewa Plonowska-Ziarek acutely summarized, are two sides of the necessary feminist resistance to patriarchy, both in the socio-political realm, and, more specifically, in the process of artistic production’. (Ewa Plonowska-Ziarek, “Feminist Aesthetics: Transformative Practice, Neoliberalism, and the Violence of Formalism”, *Differences* 2 (25) 2014.)

Are these developments, fuelled by feminist theory and 50 years of feminist research, or competition between museums and art projects for radical new strategies to present to the public, or finally the recognition of the volume of women artists working across the world at present? As Nancy Fraser, has acutely observed: feminism is becoming an alibi of neo-liberal values of empowerment and entrepreneurship and the reasons for this lie within feminism's vision of itself. The excessive celebration of a minority or the press and media narrative given to “any” woman artist is adding to and fuelling this assumption.

As Terry Smith goes on to suggest, contemporaneity in a more general sense indicates immersion of viewer and artist as a “total immersion in the present” and a more general sense of a local/provincial avant-garde seeking and gaining ground in an national/international milieu – collaborating and exchanging with artists across borders – making and marking what he defines as a transition from modern to contemporary.

In turn, he endorses Hans Belting’s de-definition of art history – its end – as marked by a crisis in which – iconography, iconology and kulturgeschichte on the one hand and modernist historicism on the other as now played out. “No new paradigm had come into view as a replacement, nor was one likely if it were to be confined to the traditional, studio, and craft-based arts”.

In considering Danto, he confirms how late modernism through pop art had become “philosophy”, it was post-historical because no new style would emerge and even discussing styles of art was a story that was now over.

Or do we recognise and follow Okwui Enwezor’s diagnosis of a “post-colonial constellation” – of supermodernity, andromodernity, specious modernity and after-modernity in which “Contemporary art today is refracted, not just from the specific site of culture and history but also – and in a more critical sense – from the standpoint of a complex geopolitical configuration that defines all senses of production and relations of exchange as a consequence of globalization after imperialism”. (cited in Smith). Where is the space here for feminist post-colonial visions of supermodernity, gynomodernity, specious or post/after-modernities? Or will Bourriaud’s “Altermodernism” suffice – as the conjunction of modernism and post-colonialism – “an assumed heterochrony, that is, from a vision of human history as constituted by multiple temporalities, disdaining nostalgia for the avant-garde and indeed for any era – a positive vision of chaos and complexity” (cited in Smith). Where is the space here for feminist heterochronic, post-modernist, post-colonial work?

Where (in Smith’s characterisation) are the ‘pervasive, various and persistent’ tropes of feminism in contemporary art from the 1960s to the present acknowledged?

- 18) Two attempts here on this slide – as examples of Probyn’s identification of local, locale and location in postmodern discourse and Anne Ring Petersen’s dissection of keywords in contemporary art looking at multi-cultural and third-world discourses. We need to extend and develop these models for discussion of feminist contemporary artworks.

Meena Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, reviewing academic courses which declared a transnational approach, identified that politics of location was routinely defined by a measure in academic scholarship of degrees of separation or connectivity – particularly in the US.

In Separation – the Transnational is always “elsewhere” – outside the US – in courses which focused on politics of multi-culturalism within the US, reinforcing the separation between local/national discourses on women of colour and transnational comparisons.

As Connection – the Transnational subject was always subject to a hierarchical spatialisation of power in which proximity/distance recreate a US- or Eurocentric organisation of syllabus in an “us” or “them” or “add and stir” combination of places / spaces / events.

Alexander and Mohanty advocate:-

Necessity of recognising the multiple, unequal ideological, political, economic and discursive practices

In geographies, temporalities and interests in order to examine politics of location in relation to

the politics of knowledge ‘What might be possible when different cross-border practices, spaces and temporalities are brought into ideological and geographic proximity with one another in ways that produce connectivity and Inter-subjectivity (tense and uneven) rather than absolute alterity’.

Recognise and be more critical of:

---‘location’ as an epistemic advantage – in where and how we speak -

--- invisibility of “Others” in the academy in contrast to their “hypervisibility”/fetishisation in curriculum

---A “multiple feminisms” strategy more analytically viable than the

‘Euro-American feminism as the normative subject’ of feminist and LGBTTT/ Queer studies curricula

---Avoidance of “interrogating heterosexuality” – or complicity of state in reinforcing social norms

(including heterosexuality) in citizenship and nation-building structures (welfare systems, structural adjustment programmes, discursive legal practices) (M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty ‘Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational feminism as radical praxis’ in Meg Luxton and Mary Jane Mossman *Reconsidering Knowledge: Feminism and the Academy* (Fernwood, 2012))

The question of multiculturalism is not outside feminism = it is within it, and now central to it.

I always described the project to n.paradoxa as bringing feminism and contemporary art into a relationship with each other. This left the question of how this relationship would be formed as an open problematic.

I want to end by returning to the politics of feminism.

There is a clear division between approaches in feminist research currently which does align with political camps who focus on different objects and have different objectives. I've tried to characterise them in this slide. This is not a judgement form, it's an example of parallel tracks. I cannot advocate one over the other. In n.paradoxa's pages, all were published. The last slide is a quote again by Lacan but relevant to art history, and the problematic of feminism as a future anterior.