

INTRODUCING WITH OTHER EYES:  
LOOKING AT RACE AND GENDER  
IN VISUAL CULTURE

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*How does a feminist movement for social change "de-Westernize" itself?*

—Caren Kaplan, "Postmodern Geographies," in *Questions of Travel*

*It is, in fact, art history's continuing adherence to a theory of immanent aesthetic value that has prevented historians from fully examining the ways in which the work is related to all the other institutions and practices that constitute social life.*

—Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, "Introduction," in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*

This book's cover shows a tightly cropped black-and-white close-up photographic portrait of Franz Roh, an art historian, taken in 1926 with his eyes closed. I chose to begin with this image that draws attention to the art historian's shut eyes both to give an example of how images are being read differently now in the context of a burgeoning new scholarship, as well as to reexamine the preeminence given to the "eye" and the notion of emotionally detached, objectively accurate vision in the discipline of art history. This image works suggestively to present a subversive and furtive glance that challenges the gaze of the art historian, who ordinarily attempts to control the look, in the sense that he takes the study of the object and the artist as his chief professional aim and leaves himself out of the picture. Sexual, racial, and social meanings tend to be imposed on objects and artists that are extensively defined, not on the art historian. Lucia Moholy, the photographer, attempts slyly to turn the tables when she makes Roh the object of her gaze. However, Roh seemingly in trying to evade her surveillance makes himself difficult to capture. He shuts his eyes and in so doing exempts himself from her scrutiny.<sup>1</sup>

This anthology seeks to address how contemporary cultural critics and historians have thrown open the field to new questions that undermine older ways of art historical seeing. Therefore, it is meant not just simply as a response to traditional art historians, nor does it have much to do with the figure of Franz Roh in particular (who indeed was a rather complex figure in his own right).<sup>2</sup> Rather, it continues a discussion that is occurring both inside and outside of the field of art history regarding a feminist visual culture

and how it can develop new paradigms of social criticism that do not rely on either the traditional underpinnings of the discipline nor on unitary notions of "woman." In the discipline of art history, it is only fairly recently that feminist art historians, cultural critics, and artists have begun to reexamine mainstream ways of looking as well as the issue of spectatorship in this regard.<sup>3</sup> This has been a difficult task since, unlike within the field of film studies, an idea of innocent vision as simple perception continues to haunt the discipline. No matter how anachronistic, a "trained eye" and a good visual memory are skills still revered today in art history, in which learning about art involves primarily "developing an eye" in order to unlock the purported secrets of art.

One of the tacit assumptions that still guides the normal activity of the art historian, according to books that describe the discipline to undergraduates such as Mark Roskill's *What Is Art History?*, is that "the artist is long since dead, like the corpse in a mystery (or unwilling to talk about what he did), and much is lost or missing, both in the way of works and in the way of evidence."<sup>4</sup> Within this scenario, art history is constructed through narratives of absence and loss. Yet this emphasis is not to simply mourn the loss of irretrievable objects but, rather, to regard it as a highly productive opportunity to put to test the powers of the discerning eye and reestablish the rightful value and the true artistic merit of objects. According to Roskill, this is a long, laborious process in which success is equated with a prolonged, contemplative gaze: "A work of art is affected in the way in which it is seen. . . . And if it is to give up its secrets, assuming it has some, it most often has to be worked at. Particularly if it is a great work of art, it does not spontaneously lay itself open to us."<sup>5</sup>

What is striking about this passage is that both the duration of the look and the viewing process itself are construed as incontrovertibly masculinist, as evidenced by the way in which sexual difference is inscribed in the very language and formulation of the act of looking. Moreover, there is a disturbing voyeurism evoked in likening the work of art to a female body that will ultimately yield its secrets and "lay itself open to us." Spectatorship within the discipline is constructed here as an ordinary part of the development of a craft or skill in which an opposition between woman as image and man as bearer of the look is naturalized as part of an apprenticeship that leads to art historical mastery. This naturalized process of looking was challenged by both early feminist film theory, in particular Laura Mulvey's highly influential 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," as well as John Berger's well-known 1972 book and film series *Ways of Seeing*, which acted as a catalyst for considerations of sexual difference and spectatorship specifically in the field of art history.<sup>6</sup> However, both Mulvey's and Berger's arguments of a strict separation between active and passive roles in looking according to sexual difference have a certain currency in traditional art history in the sense that the viewing practices defined the gendered process of investigation in the profession.

The process of looking in the field doesn't always focus exclusively on filling in missing or lost evidence, especially when it comes to contemporary art, nor does the way that art reveals its so-called secrets follow the normative heterosexual script suggested by Roskill, Berger, or even Mulvey. Such a monolithic conception of seeing could not account for the appeal of this profession to a broader group of practitioners, particularly gay men and lesbian women or/and critics of color or Jewish women who partially fill its ranks.

This doesn't mean that all art historians do engage in a masculinist way of looking, and it doesn't mean that lesbian women, straight women, or women of color cannot adopt a position of sexual or racial voyeurism. Rather, since all kinds of men and women can and do derive pleasure from looking at works of art, this fact suggests that the process of looking might transpire in a more multiform "bisexual" fashion.<sup>7</sup> Consider, for example, the genre of the nude and the homoerotic dimension involved within the most basic and supposedly neutral of scholarly practices: male art historians viewing male nude figures by male artists. Or the more clichéd and predictable heterosexual voyeurism at work in the analysis of white female nudes, or the opportunities for interracial looking available in viewing, for example, the Polynesian nudes of Paul Gauguin<sup>8</sup> or the black male nudes in Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the issue of spectatorship, there are other possible viewing practices. Consider the following two alternatives. The first turns on what bell hooks refers to as "oppositional looks," a process in which the gaze functions as a site of resistance.<sup>10</sup> Rather than viewing works of art or film through a disembodied process of visual detachment, a spectator can place herself in a position of agency through a more embodied subjective viewing process that takes into account questions of difference, sexuality, and power. For hooks, however, the experience of this more critical viewing process will be neither uniform nor universal for all women. What she advocates is a different kind of looking, which neither rests on the ideology that art is a universally understood experience nor relies on the professional look of objectification or connoisseurship. In her book *Black Looks*, hooks directly acknowledges how race and colonialism structure feminist ways of seeing, and it is in this sense that her concept of the oppositional gaze departs from earlier feminist notions of looking. She emphasizes in particular how empowering confrontational viewing practices are for black women who construct their own ways of seeing to "speak" their experience:

Like that photographic portrait of Billy [Billie] Holiday by Moneta Sleet I love so much, the one where instead of a glamorized image of stardom, we are invited to see her in a posture of thoughtful reflection, her arms bruised by tracks, delicate scars on her face, and that sad far-away look in her eyes. When I face this image, this black look, something in me is shattered. I have to pick up the bits and pieces of myself and start all over again—transformed by the image. (7)

Hooks's reading of the photograph of Billie Holiday situates the image not in relation to the kind of inquiry that Roskill's analysis does (her concern is obviously not with uncovering secrets in the archive, or with questions of attribution, dating, authenticity, and rarity) but in terms of a discourse of feminist African American experience—a perspective rarely addressed in conventional art history. In doing so, hooks demonstrates her presence and point of view in the way she chooses to look. Thus, hooks's perspective is significant in how it constructs a way of seeing in which the process of investigation is part of the object of knowledge.

The second viewing practice turns on imitation and parody and suggests a process of looking in which the meaning of race and ethnicity or the experience of racialization is by no means uniform or univocal across racial and white ethnic groups. For Ann Pellegrini's

theory of spectatorship, it is important that what race, sexuality, and ethnicity mean differs among Jews, Asians, Latinas, and blacks as well as within these social groupings. There is also not the same expectation that hooks has that viewing practices, whether they are confrontational or not, will be affirming, or the assumption according to Mulvey that they will be readable through a male gaze. In this sense Pellegrini's theorizing challenges both the terms through which Laura Mulvey advanced her interpretation of the male gaze and visual pleasure, as well as hooks's notion of an oppositional gaze. For her article in this collection, Pellegrini chooses as an example for her theory the film *Without You I'm Nothing* about a Jewish lesbian performer, Sandra Bernhard, whose performance about her desire to be black, by impersonating Nina Simone, Diana Ross, Cardilla DeMarlo, Prince, and Sylvester functions as a parody of her inability to translate herself across racial boundaries:

What prevents Bernhard's impersonation from being a "simple" act of appropriation is its open failure to forge an identification between her black audience of address and herself. The audience withholds its belief, refusing to authorize Bernhard's vision of herself. Moreover, Bernhard sets herself up as an object of ridicule for that audience, conspicuously dramatizing the distance between her audience's and her own self-understandings. Bernhard's performance is self-ironizing. The audience does not "get" Bernhard; Bernhard does not "get" her audience. But the very misrecognition is to some degree what compels the performance.

... Yet so obnoxious is much of Bernhard's performance, so arcane many of her jokes, that the film ultimately frustrates any lasting identification between even its (phantasmatically) white audience and Bernhard, thereby leaving no place to "fix" identity within or through the film.<sup>11</sup>

Pellegrini seizes on this example of Bernhard's perverse repetition of racial and sexual stereotypes in order to undo them, and in this respect her article offers a theory of spectatorship that shifts theoretical discourse of looking relations to yet a third position that is neither the neutral and universalizing gaze of art history nor the oppositional gaze of bell hooks in her reading of the Billie Holiday photograph.

Though crucial new work by feminist theorists such as bell hooks and Ann Pellegrini challenges existing methodologies and looking relations by questioning how art history continues to determine the truth of its objects within its own discourse while erasing the positions—national, racial, sexual, class-based, and gendered—from which these discourses are spoken,<sup>12</sup> it has not been enough to destabilize the virtually unmarked position of universality from which it claims to see or pass judgment.<sup>13</sup> The discipline of art history is still primarily in the business of determining what may be considered legitimate and reliable knowledge and what must be marginalized, as well as gauging the merits of works of art with a certain aloofness and disengagement from social relations altogether. Despite the concerted efforts and groundbreaking work of a number of art historians, artists, and critics over the past twenty-five years, including the writing coming out of important traditions of feminist scholarship, Marxist-based social art history, and more recently scholarship influenced by the writings of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault,<sup>14</sup> the authority of this art historical gaze that claims to "transcend" time and place persists in the new work as well as the old, particularly in terms of the way that the implicitly ethnocentric agenda of

art history gets reproduced. This persistence makes it still an urgent issue for younger scholars, such as the contributors to this volume (including me), to address. In certain ways our project is even more complex than those of our more established colleagues, since we are now questioning so many underlying assumptions of the discipline at once, at a moment when there is an even greater resistance to change. Moreover, we are trying to define a different kind of looking, which takes into account sometimes incompatible theories of representation, performance theory, feminist theory, and colonial discourse that are each contested on their own, and even more controversial when put together.

My idea of putting together this anthology came about initially as an attempt not only to critique a continuing cultural investment in traditional art historical narratives that insist on the disengaged look of the universal man, but to imagine what the field could look like if it did not place at the center of its discourse the "discerning" eye but were more self-reflexive about how the discipline transmits and reproduces its racial and gendered premises. As an image of scholarship, detachment is a gendered privilege of knowing no bodies, of being, in Donna Haraway's words, "a conquering gaze from nowhere," a gaze that claims "the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation."<sup>15</sup> What I am proposing, then, is a greater attention to the complex discursive and rhetorical dimensions of visual culture and the ways in which scholarly attention makes gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, nation, and race peripheral.

Following the recommendation of feminists such as Haraway and others who claim that feminists should work from their embodied perspectives in order to produce what she calls "situated knowledges," I find that much of the impetus behind putting together an anthology such as this one comes out of my own personal investedness in intervening in the discipline of art history, and what I have come to see as its ideological assumptions. As a feminist scholar who teaches visual culture in an interdisciplinary women's studies program at Josai International University in Japan and has a multidisciplinary Ph.D. from the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, I have been deeply influenced by the changes brought about in the humanities and social sciences by feminist cultural studies, particularly the way it has reformulated what counts as both pedagogical practices and scholarship. Since I have found cultural studies and feminist theory so genuinely responsive to both my intellectual and pedagogical concerns, specifically how they shift awareness away from the consumption of knowledge to the production of knowledge, I wondered how it would be possible for the field of art history to change to become compatible with feminist cultural studies but with an emphasis on the visual arts.

One of the ways that this anthology responds to this question is through presenting scholarship that treats art not as something that can be taught in a disinterested way as information to memorize, or as a conduit to high culture, but as a vital and living tradition that is constantly being negotiated in everyday life. Many of the authors in this anthology start from the notion of what it means to be a cultural subject, and this point of departure takes the form of a renewed emphasis on the autobiographical. However, this turn to the autobiographical is meant to be quite distinct from earlier autobiographical tendencies that privileged the author. An author-based presumption of speaking from the heart, or confessing one's essence, has been replaced by the autobiographical expression of a writer

or artist as an embodied individual within the process of cultural interpretation. Since Roland Barthes's well-known proclamation of the "death of the author," there has been a shift away from the author or the artist to a privileging of the reader or spectator.<sup>16</sup> The abandonment of author-based interpretations and the elevation of women as readers and spectators have had many beneficial effects on feminist scholars. For some of the authors in this anthology, including me, these changes have opened up a whole history of masculinist discourses and artistic traditions to feminist appropriations and recontextualizations. For it enables any art historical text or work of art, however masculinist, to be read from a feminist point of view. This elevation of spectators to the position of textual and visual creators is an empowering development that underscores the erotic source of looking and complicates the question of spectatorship and consumption. This new framework in which women are no longer put into place by the power of the white male gaze has informed a rethinking of what we do, not only in the field of women's studies but also in art history and the arts in general.

From such an autobiographical turn, then, this anthology addresses the impact of gender, race, and sexual politics of imperialisms and nationalisms on contemporary visual culture and its practices. Though this set of issues has been influential in cultural studies and American studies, there has been little attention paid to them in the traditional disciplines that study visual representations, in particular art history. Thus the multidisciplinary focus of visual culture suggests not only the need to point to some significant blind spots in the traditional disciplines of the visual arts, but the need to remap the field in a way that is more responsive to important scholarship that is already under way in other disciplines such as anthropology, American studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, film, and even literature where cinema studies, popular culture, and cultural studies are taught.

Though the purpose of the anthology is to intervene in the way the discipline of art history is taught, the contributors to this volume refuse to do this simply by wrangling over the canon and traditional aesthetics. Rather than refighting battles that have been taking place for the past twenty-five years in the visual arts, we propose to make apparent the breakdown of the divisions between disciplines, which has resulted in an ever-widening gap between student multidisciplinary interests and what is taught in academic departments of art history. It is into this gap that this anthology will insert itself. This is why I use the term *visual culture* rather than *art*, *film*, or *media* to signal a shift in emphasis in the visual arts toward work that broadens conventional notions of traditional "high cultural" agendas to include so-called impure visual practices (television, video, popular culture, photography, advertising, computer technologies, junk, altars, and so on). Such work by its very nature dispenses with hierarchical cultural distinctions such as high versus low, elite versus mass, modern versus folk, Western versus non-Western, as well as with academic departmental divisions like film versus television, theater versus performance studies, art and art history versus communications.

Yet the study of visual culture is not just about expanding the dominion of objects to encompass a broader range of cultural forms within the discipline. The admission of popular culture, advertising, video, and so forth into the curricula of art history departments alone will not bring about change, as we have seen during the moment when femi-



nists and postmodernist artists such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger were accommodated into the canon, or more recently when artists of color such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Martin Puryear, Betty Saar, Fred Wilson, James Luna, among others, began to appear in art history coffee-table books and surveys.<sup>17</sup> For as long as these "new" artists and their work get included as merely the new subjects that make up a fixed culture, their disciplinary descriptions will do no more than create storehouses of knowledge having almost nothing to do with lived culture, much less its transformation. Unfortunately, accommodation of new artists and new kinds of art has shown that their inclusion does not necessarily lead to a different framing of the whole, which would ideally affect those critics and artists who never do feminist theory, multiculturalism, or postcolonial discourse at all.

Another purpose of the anthology is to rethink already ongoing debates that are focused on multiculturalism. Though current high-profile cultural events organized around multiculturalist themes have widened the field, what is absent from these events is an understanding of the way, for example, that the notions of race and ethnicity are tied to questions of gender and sexuality, and linked to recent scholarship on nationalisms and postcoloniality.<sup>18</sup> There still remains a great need for a feminist critique in visual culture that establishes racial, ethnic, national, and postcolonial concerns since much of the current feminist work in the field does not address feminist participation in these discourses, and how race/ethnicity as a specific category of analysis operates within them. On the other hand, the work that does address feminist and racial concerns does not necessarily focus on questions of white ethnicity. A case in point in the visual arts is the important 1994 book *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*.<sup>19</sup> The anthology presents a wide array of works from this period including the work of Adrian Piper, Faith Ringgold, Ana Mendieta, and other women of color who were active during that period. However, what is noteworthy is how the anthology is the first in recent years to begin to bring back to scholarly attention the work of many Jewish artists from the period, such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Carolee Schneeman, Joyce Kozloff, and others who have been neglected in recent accounts. As strong and refreshing a revisionist history this represents, nonetheless, the terms of exclusion still presuppose a feminist sisterhood that cannot account for racial and white ethnic differences. The relative absence of white ethnicity as a category in the book, and Jewishness in particular, over and against the visibility of African Americans and Latina artists as women of color, is quite striking and points to perhaps the limits of this kind of revisionist project that attempts new inclusions but also reinstates long-standing invisibilities and visibilities dating from the very period it chooses to study. Thus, there still remains a great need for an examination of how different white ethnic women's identities are tied to other social identities and mediated through institutional discourses of art history.

This anthology, in contrast to *The Power of Feminist Art*, deals with questions of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationalism, as well as gender and has been particularly informed by the shift in feminist consciousness that has taken place within the past fifteen years, prompted by recent writings and art by women of color on race and lesbianism as well as recent work on whiteness and Jewishness. Since the beginnings of the current feminist movement, and with particular insistence since the early 1980s, women finding

themselves outside the frame of dominant feminism—lesbians, black women, other women of color, Third World women, white ethnic women—have contested the terms of its discourse, pointing out the limits of gender as the sole emphasis and the need for feminists to recognize the claims of other forms of difference besides sexual difference. For example, feminist art critics such as Michele Wallace, among others, have pointed not only to the inadequacies of the prevailing concept of woman as heterosexual and white but also to white feminism's own consolidation of Western, middle-class culture. In the afterword to the anthology on *Black Popular Culture*, Wallace writes:

The key problematic among feminist theorists of color in our debates around identity and "otherness" has been this notion of "and blacks too." The insight of the most recent generation of feminists of color has been that blacks (or black women or women of color or black men) cannot be tacked onto formulations about gender without engaging in a form of conceptual violence. In no theoretically useful way whatsoever are blacks like *women*.<sup>20</sup>

Not only can one not simply add black women to feminist categories but also, according to Wallace, one must develop a theory that takes into account the complicity of constructions of gender with ideologies of race, sexuality, and class. Wallace's emphasis on the need for a complex understanding of the way that the categories of gender and race are interarticulated is important, but I would extend her categories to include not only women of color but white ethnic women who might have also had an uneasy allegiance to feminism that would erase a consideration of other differences.

Unfortunately, neither has taken place fully within the debates on postmodernism and feminism in the arts, given the monocultural and assimilationist tendencies in art and art history departments.<sup>21</sup> But without these debates the story would be even more dismal than it is now. With the rise of performance and body art in the past two and a half decades have come unavoidably gendered and racially specific representations of the body in art. Because of these and other specifically feminist and queer practices, postmodernist theory has had to make space for the consideration of the construction of the gendered, the racialized, and the queered subject since the late 1970s, when body-oriented practices in the art world split off into a separate discipline that is largely discussed within performance studies or theater departments rather than art history. It is in part due to the support of these other institutional spaces that feminism, postmodernism, and more recently queer theory have emerged as three of the most important intellectual movements in the arts of the past two decades: all three have offered a challenge to the notion of representation and its address. All have tried to transform art practice by challenging both the humanist notion of the artist as romantic individual "genius" and the modernist domination of two particular art forms, painting and sculpture. But there are differences, too. Postmodernists offered new forms as well as a new self-consciousness about representation, but unlike the feminists and/or queer artists their focus was not necessarily overtly political, in the sense that they did not have strong ties to political projects. In this regard, feminist and queer artists/theories were not really fully compatible with or even an example of postmodern thought even though many were very influenced by postmodernism. However, together with women of color they became the most powerful force in changing the direction in which postmodernism was heading and continue to be to this day.



Yet despite the groundbreaking importance of these shifts, many postmodern feminists and queer theorists who see the value of postmodernist theories in the arts are still somewhat Eurocentric in their perspective, in the sense that they don't always acknowledge the different forms that feminism takes as a critical practice. According to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, two contributors to this anthology and the editors of *Scattered Hegemonies*,

In fact, many postmodern feminists in the United States see postmodernism as a movement toward ambivalence, the decentered subject, and so on, rather than as a thorough critique of modernity and its related institutions. . . .

What gets left out of such considerations are the concerns of many women across the world regardless of whether or not they choose to describe themselves as "feminists": the place of women in the nation-state, resistance to revivals of "tradition," the complex issue of fundamentalism, the situation of workers in multinational corporations, and the relationship between gender, the nation-state, and mobile, transnational capital.<sup>22</sup>

Kaplan and Grewal want to expand the understanding of feminist postmodernism to one that takes into account the workings of gender in new forms of multinational domination. They believe that it is only by addressing the relationship of gender to global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, as well as local structures of domination within and outside the United States that it is possible to construct a less exclusionary feminism that considers the cultures and traditions that a diverse group of women negotiate in their everyday lives and their art. Such innovative approaches are especially important in art history since dominant regimes of visual representation say nothing about the historical differences of women as such. Indeed, the framework of feminist theory initially developed in relationship to cinematic representation by Laura Mulvey that claims that men look and women are looked at doesn't on its own challenge or complicate the prevailing Euro-American terms of feminist art history.

Following Grewal and Kaplan's attempt to flesh out more innovative theories and strategies that offer a place for more complex categories of female identity and sense of belonging that are not solely about U.S. cultures and situations, the essays in the anthology are examples of how recent work coming out of a subfield of cultural studies called feminist colonial discourse studies has much to offer, especially in terms of putting into practice the writing and teaching of a different kind of art history or art criticism. Some of the scholars working in this area include Grewal, Haraway, Kaplan, Anne McClintock, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Kum Kum Sungari, Ella Shohat, and Gayatri Spivak.<sup>23</sup>

The term *feminist colonial discourse studies* designates feminist critical discourses that thematize issues emerging from postcolonial relations and their aftermath (including a wide range of diasporic circumstances from the late nineteenth century to the present). One of the ways this anthology intervenes institutionally in these debates is by making available writings by Third World women and U.S. women of color as well as lesser-known ethnic white women who are involved in interdisciplinary feminist work. Since there are very few women of color with Ph.D.'s in art history, but many seeking interdisciplinary degrees in humanities disciplines who write about visual culture, it is important that their scholarship be made available, all the more so in that it is this kind of scholarship that is

most likely to redefine in the near future what art and art history departments and women's studies programs, and so on will be.<sup>24</sup>

What *With Other Eyes* accomplishes is to show that these new changes are already happening. However, the stakes of what it means to intervene in the field of art history are not uniform for all the authors in this anthology, since only a few of the contributors teach in art history departments. Given that many of the writers in this anthology are coming from other, more interdisciplinary fields, their stakes in the culture wars in the arts are not as high as those who are doing this kind of work within the field, where a series of local battles around hiring, promotion, funding, and curricula has taken place, as evidenced by a set of articles highlighting the antagonism between art history and visual cultural studies, with the most recent aptly titled "Art History's Anxiety Attack" by Eloy J. Hernandez in 1997. Hernandez's article "Questionnaire on Visual Culture," published in the summer 1996 issue of *October*, and the three articles written in 1996 by Scott Heller for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Art News* that occasioned Hernandez's piece have not only given visibility to the polarizations and tensions in the field but also have shown the existence of an audience of students, artists, scholars, and journalists whose interest in our work is wider than what the generally narrow public polemics suggests.<sup>25</sup> This anthology is written for that broader audience.

The book has two parts: part 1 is called *Gender, Race, and Nation: Histories and Discourses*. Part 2 is titled *Contemporary Visual Discourses: Postnational Aesthetics*. The premise behind part 1 is that in order to understand and deal with contemporary visual culture, it is important first to examine how historical racism and sexism have affected the very constitution of the disciplines themselves and what gets excluded from their purview. Though all the authors in both sections are women, this is not meant to conflate feminism with female authorship. For many of the authors a feminist approach does not mean they will be writing exclusively about women artists, critics, or historians. Thus, the inclusion of only female authors in this anthology is less a statement about the exclusivity of feminism and its scholarship and more a programmatic response to a discipline that is notoriously sexist and racist.

Given the current debates that seem to polarize visual culture and art history, I must point out that the anthology does not argue for a priority of feminist cultural studies over art history. Rather, it demonstrates some of the ways that this new scholarship falls beyond the scope of some of art history's long-held assumptions. For example, in my essay "Ghosts of Ethnicity: Rethinking Art Discourses of the 1940s and 1980s" I historicize the emergence of the New York School's critical hegemony and its transnational Jewish history to offer an example of how even the most well-known formalist aesthetic positions are inescapably imbricated by the politics of identity. At the same time that the essay argues that the experience of ethnicity has been at the heart of U.S. modernism all along, it also takes issue with ways of seeing black and Jewish experiences that underestimate the differences and hybridities among these groups. Inderpal Grewal's chapter, "Constructing National Subjects: The British Museum and Its Guidebooks," might also fall outside what is ordinarily considered art history because her ideological analysis of spectatorship at the British Museum refuses to focus solely on the museum's objects. Instead, she puts her

attention on the working classes who came to the museum and how mid-nineteenth-century British Museum guidebooks constructed a discourse of spectatorship through a discourse of colonialism, nationalism, gender, and class. According to Grewal, this discourse suggests that bringing the working classes into the museum was not simply a way to “educate” them, but also a way to negotiate rigid class differences, by producing national pride in the exploits of the aristocracy and thus establishing an “imagined national community” seemingly based not on stringent class lines, but on national and postcolonial ones that were gendered.

In the case of Francette Pacteau’s chapter, “Dark Continent,” her interest in examining certain gendered and racialized constructions and expressions of French and American feminine beauty and the persistence of this legacy in the present historicizes the notion of beauty in terms of different national traditions. Starting with the Hottentot Venus, she examines a wide range of discursive constructions of black femininity including Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, Josephine Baker, and Jean Paul Goude’s image of Grace Jones. Drawing on the theoretical writings of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Homi K. Bhabha, among others, Pacteau complicates a psychoanalytic discourse on (white) femininity and beauty by taking into account the workings of colonial discourse. As Pacteau’s article indicates how a discourse of visual culture on beauty is already interdisciplinary by nature, Shawn Michelle Smith’s “Photographing the ‘American Negro’: Nation, Race, and Photography at the Paris Exposition of 1900” brings together scholarship from various disciplines—history of photography, literature, women’s studies, postcolonial studies, and American studies. Smith examines the ways in which photographs participated in the construction of contested American identities by analyzing two sets of photographs presented at the “American Negro” exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Reading the images produced by Frances Benjamin Johnston, a white woman photographer, against the photographic albums collected by W. E. B. Du Bois, Smith demonstrates how to differing degrees both sets of images contested national and racial identifications posed by eugenicists and white supremacist nationalists at the turn of the century and posed competing notions of what constitutes a multicultural nation.

This more historically based section sets up the context for part 2, which examines how current conceptualizations of the disciplines are being refurbished in ways to accommodate new kinds of artists, critics, and historians who are not unmarked as white or male. However, the difference between the two sections should not be simply read as historical versus contemporary. To do so would miss the contemporaneity of the concerns in a diachronic sense in the first section and how they prepare us for some of the thematic issues that the whole volume raises, even though essays such as the ones by Grewal and Smith are more specific about period and argument.

Both sections address the persistence as well as the changing connotations of binary oppositions—such as First World versus Third World, colonizer versus colonized, dominant versus dominated, modern versus primitive—that are inadequately theorized, as in the case of women. The privileging of white in the binary also needs to be rethought since it assumes that whiteness is a monolithic entity devoid of multiple ideologies and ethnicities (see, for example, the chapters by Ann Pellegrini, Irit Rogoff, and me). It is important to examine how these binaries signify differently to diverse subjects when they

are applied to contemporary visual culture within subcultures in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, or Israel.

The second part also attempts to move outside of such paradigms of colonial discourse and destabilize the segregation reproduced in the traditional disciplines by focusing on new kinds of feminist writing and feminist artwork that call into question these oppositions. There is a growing scholarship by critics, artists, and filmmakers that in the words of filmmaker and writer Trinh T. Minh-ha "challenge[s] the West as authoritative subject of feminist knowledge, while also resisting the terms of a binarist discourse that would concede feminism to the West all over again."<sup>26</sup> These more interesting developments are exciting and need greater exposure, especially in fields that tend not to see gender and colonial discourse as relational terms in tension with one another but as strictly hierarchical ones, with feminism's being exclusively equated with the West alone. In this section, the contributors' multiple points of departure complicate questions regarding a gender-, ethnic-, and race-based notion of location and what it means to imagine the United States, the United Kingdom, France, or Israel as a nation that one unproblematically belongs to.

In "Daughters of Sunshine: Diasporic Impulses and Gendered Identities," Irit Rogoff uses categories of gender and Eurocentricity to critique the limits of the discourses within which "High Culture" with a capital C gets practiced in Israel. Drawing from both popular and high culture (the work of Israeli artist Sigal Primore), Rogoff points to the contradictions that Israeli feminist artists and critics face in challenging restrictive nationalist notions of acceptable Israeli femininity as white, European, and socialist. Caren Kaplan's "'A World without Boundaries': The Body Shop's Trans/National Geographics" is a departure from the anthology's emphasis on visual artists, critics, and museums but is significant in broadening its terms to include work done currently in women's studies departments that combines discourses of transnationalism, feminism, and popular culture with those that deal with circuits of consumption in an era of globalizing advertising narratives. Kaplan's analysis of gendered visions of colonial discourse in Ralph Lauren Safari ad campaigns and the Body Shop's corporate representations reveals how women are represented in mainstream advertising narratives as traveling in a world without boundaries through ads that associate the practices of consumer culture with the glorification of travel.

In "Making Art, Making Citizens: Las Comadres and Postnational Aesthetics," Aida Mancillas, Ruth Wallen, and Marguerite Waller trace specific histories of colonial discourse in their own region to show both the importance as well as the difficulty of constructing viable feminist alliances across racial, ethnic, and national lines. This essay focuses on the autobiographical work of practicing women artists and writers in the San Diego/Tijuana region and examines the politics of gender and race relations within different psychic spaces associated with women's daily lives in this border region.

"The Fae Richards Photo Archive" makes the issues of lesbian representation, feminist politics, and race in the United States central. The work, a collaboration between Zoe Leonard and filmmaker Cheryl Dunye for Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), is a fictional photographic archive of an African American lesbian woman who lived from 1908 to 1973. The archive draws on photographic tropes from the period to give the pictures a "reality effect" in order to make us see precisely what we have not been allowed to

notice about other African American women. Richards is represented not only as a servant and a performer, but also as a lesbian involved in an affair with a prominent white female director. Thus, Leonard and Dunye's construction of Richards's works is a commentary on the absence of the representation of such figures resulting from the historical prohibition in U.S. culture of cross-racial looking and the prohibition accorded to lesbianism and cross-racial sex during that period.

In "Archaeological Devotion" Jennifer A. González writes about the installation pieces of Amalia Mesa-Bains, Renée Stout, and Jenni Lukac to emphasize a visual overlap of institutional domains to include other social affinities and communities outside of U.S. avant-garde art communities as critical sites for female resistance. Through a rhetorical analysis of these artists' works she examines how powerful a practice it is to bring reconstructed notions of home and religion into the public art gallery or museum space, in terms of enabling a generationally and ethnically diverse female community to be portrayed in the context of the artists' own self-agency. Each artist's visual display of collected artifacts, she argues, needs to be understood for both its interrogation of a modernist legacy and for the way such visual displays map an alternative and complex conception of women's histories not reducible to nostalgic signs of an "outside" other.

Griselda Pollock in her article "Tracing Figures of Presence, Naming Ciphers of Absence" shows how Sutapa Biswas's work replaces unitary notions of "woman" and "Britishness" with plural, complexly constructed conceptions of social identity. In addition to examining the figurative paintings and multimedia works and performances of Sutapa Biswas, Pollock also credits her role in effecting curricular change in the Leeds Department of Fine Arts away from an exclusive focus on Marxism and feminism to a program that makes colonial discourse more central to its examination of art and theory. The institutional particularity of Pollock's essay is significant in the sense that it documents a specific instance in which questions of nation, postcolonialism, and feminism are currently transforming the hierarchical order of scholarship and feminist art practices.<sup>27</sup>

All the articles in this anthology are reevaluating traditional discourses and viewing practices about art and culture to acknowledge the diversified differences at work in the field of feminist visual culture as well as in contemporary art practices. Rather than posit final readings of particular cultural products, most of the articles question the writer/interpreter as arbiter of cultural value, by pointing to his or her specific investments motivating a reading. The emphasis is indeed on shifts in critical viewing in relation to questions of nation, transnationalism, citizenship, and gender. The first section examines a genealogy of modern art history and how its very constitution as a discipline is rooted in nation-states and constituted through racism and sexism. This more historically based section contextualizes part 2, which challenges the current conceptualization of the disciplines by focusing on new kinds of feminist writing in visual culture and feminist artwork. Many of the essays in this section focus on issues that are still not discussed within the discipline. In particular, the section foregrounds the visual work of white ethnic cultures, immigrant cultures, and Third World populations as a way to emphasize transnational visual production as well as just national ones. The impact of gender, race, and sexual politics of imperialism and nationalisms on contemporary visual culture and its practices has not been



much examined in the traditional disciplines. I hope these essays have much to offer in terms of enabling a new form of dialogue to take place that acknowledges the complexity of what is actually happening in feminist visual culture at this moment.

## NOTES

1. Lucia Moholy was a photographer closely associated with the Bauhaus in Weimar, and then Dessau. She was married to Lázlo Moholy-Nagy in 1921 and worked closely with Moholy-Nagy in the creation of photograms and photomontages. She continued her photographic work throughout her life and combined her photography practice with her teaching, which emphasized the social history of photography.

2. Franz Roh was not a conventional art historian but a photo historian and one of the foremost spokesmen for the formalist/modernist model of photography. He was known for dispelling the notion of the unique, hand-printed art photograph in favor of a kind of modernist photography that self-consciously emphasized its very reproducibility. He wrote a well-known article on the photographer Moholy-Nagy titled "Mechanism and Expression: The Essence and Value of Photography" and published two books in 1929, *Foto-Auge* (a selection of photographs from the *Film und Foto* exhibition edited with Jan Tschichold [Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1973]) and *Moholy-Nagy: 60 Fotos* (Berlin: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1930).

3. See Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" in Feminist Art History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

4. Mark Roskill, *What Is Art History?* 2nd ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 9.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972). More recently, the interventions of the Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group of feminist political artists formed in 1985 to specifically critique racist and sexist institutional practices of the art world, have also put an emphasis on looking relations. For further information regarding their posters and activities, see *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

7. See Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 360-74.

8. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," *Art in America* 77, no. 7 (1989): 118-29.

9. See Jane M. Gaines, "Competing Glances: Who Is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*?" and Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary." Both appear in *New Formations* 16 (Spring 1992).

10. bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115-32.

11. In this volume, see the chapter by Ann Pellegrini, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real): Sandra Bernhard's Whiteface."

12. See among other books on this issue bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995); Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

13. There seems to be a return in recent years to using positivist histories and chronologies on the part of U.S. curators to reestablish the neutral gaze of the art historian, as evidenced in the recent exhibition and book by Paul Schimmel at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the Geffen Contemporary, Los Angeles, titled *Out of Action: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* (London: Thames and



Endson, 1998). See also Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 33-59; Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon, 1990); Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Ravn, eds., *New Feminist Criticism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Michele Wallace, "Why Are There No Great Black Artists? The Problem of Visuality in African-American Culture," in *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 333-46.

14. See Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); and Michael Ann Holly's "Wölfflin and the Imagining of the Baroque," in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretation* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 347-64.

15. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 188.

16. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-48.

17. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Race, Sex, and Gender in Contemporary Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); Horst de la Croix, Richard Tansey, and Diane Kirkpatrick, *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 9th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991).

18. *Postcolonialism* generally refers to the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. The term was originally used by historians after the Second World War to designate the postindependence period, as in terms such as "the postcolonial state." Since the late 1970s the term *postcolonialism* has been used by cultural critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization.

The term *colonial discourse* derives from the interdisciplinary area of contemporary postcolonial studies. It is a formulation of recent currency that can best be understood as designating a conceptual area first marked out by Edward Said's *Orientalism* and his use of Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as a strongly bounded area of social knowledge.

19. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

20. Michel Wallace, "Why Are There No Great Black Artists?" 342.

21. Often the concerns of postmodernists are seen as opposed to those of the multiculturalists, as evidenced by the split between postmodern theorists (often white) and multicultural theorists (often critics and artists of color). In an attempt to account for this racial divide, bell hooks, who has been something of a mediator in this debate, suggests that part of the problem seems to be the way that gut-level experience has always been opposed to critical thinking in the arts in the United States. See bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 23-32.

22. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 21-22.

23. See, among others, Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Deborah Gordon, ed., "Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse" (special issue), *Inscriptions* 3/4 (1988); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies*; Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989); D. Emily Hicks, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist*

*Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

24. For a partial list of works already published in the arts on feminist theory and colonial discourse, see Jesús Fuenmayor, Kate Haug, and Frazer Ward, *Dirt and Domesticity: Constructions of the Feminine* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992); Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995); Saidiya V. Hartman, "Excisions of the Flesh," in *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993), 55-67; bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995); Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Constance Lewallen, *Mistaken Identities* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992); Gilane Tawadros, "Beyond the Boundary: The Work of Three Black Women Artists in Britain," *Third Text* 8/9 (Autumn/Winter 1989): 121-50; John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Lydia Yee, *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art* (New York: Bronx Museum of Art, 1995).

25. Eloy J. Hernandez, "Art History's Anxiety Attack," *Afterimage* (May/June 1994): 6; "Questionnaire on Visual Culture," *October* 7 (Summer 1996); Scott Heller, "Rochester Is Only University Offering Ph.D. in Visual Culture," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 19, 1996, A15; Scott Heller, "Visual Images Replace Text As Focal Point for Many Scholars," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 19, 1996, A8; Scott Heller, "Changing Course: Art Historians Replace Traditional Surveys with New Approaches," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 3, 1996, A19. Also see letter from David S. Andrews, professor of art history, University of New Hampshire, in "Letters to the Editor, The Role of 'Visual Culture,'" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 13, 1996, B7.

26. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 106.

27. The Leeds Department of Fine Arts is a unique art program in which art practice and cultural and feminist theory are taught together rather than being separated into distinctive schools or disciplines of art history and studio art.