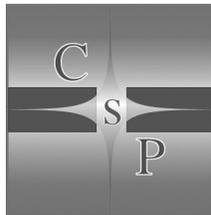


Blaze

Blaze:
Discourse on Art, Women and Feminism

Edited by

Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women and Feminism, Edited by Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka

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DEDICATION

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Feminist Art Activist, Artist, Writer, and Critic,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF IMAGES.....	xi
PREFACE	xii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	xvii
INTRODUCTION.....	xx
PART I: LEADERSHIP	
Recollections of the Early Years of the Women’s Caucus for Art in Boston.....	3
Patricia Hills	
Honoring Feminist Paths: The Lifetime Achievement Awards.....	21
Susan King	
Report on the History of the Women’s Caucus for Art.....	37
Eleanor Dickinson	
The Color is Green: Art, Women, and the Art Market.....	71
Noreen Dean Dresser and Laurie Elizabeth Talbot Hall	
Growing an Art Museum.....	83
Ruth von Jahnke Waters	
Pioneer Chicana/Latina Artists: Creating Institutional Inclusion	89
Patricia Rodriguez	
The Burden of Inclusivity: Second-Wave Feminism and the Third-Wave Era	103
Dena Muller	
New Paradigms for New Media	113
Jeanne Philipp	

Critical Writings on Feminist Topics	125
Joan M. Marter	

PART II: CRITICISM

Perma-Wave: Bridging Feminism's Generation Gap	133
Maria Elena Buszek	

Expected? Curious?: The Place of Feminism in the Public Art Classroom.....	145
Cher Krause Knight	

Gendered in Stone: Women in New York City's Public Art.....	153
Harriet Senie	

Representations of the Female Nude	163
Cynthia Fowler	

Ritual and Performance: A Collective Inquiry	175
Anna Wexler, Mari Novotny-Jones, Janet Gillespie, L'Merchie Frazier, Catherine McGregor	

The Cow Culture: A Dilemma in Public Art	197
Joan Ryan	

Veracity	203
Laurie Beth Clark	

Anonymity as a Political Tactic: Art Blogs, Feminism, Writing and Politics	213
Mira Schor	

PART III: COLLABORATION

The Tipping Point Project: A Case Study in the Collaboration between Medical Anthropology and Art	229
Ellen S. Ginsburg and Jennifer Hall	

Defining Place: Building Communities Through Public Art.....	239
Christina Lanzl	

Mentor and Mentoring: The Woman's Way.....	251
Elinor W. Gadon	
Transforming Personal History into Paintings.....	255
Thea Paneth	
Imagistic Imagery Exchange in Mother-Daughter Art Making.....	259
Simone Alter-Müri and Denise Malis	
Transnational Metaphors: Receptive Spaces in Public and Private Rituals.....	269
C.M. Judge	
CoachTV: Collaborative Process for Understanding.....	285
Emily D. Eastridge and Raishad J. Glover	
PART IV: THE WORK	
Artist as Scholar: Scholar as Artist.....	293
Jennifer Colby	
Conversations: The Parallel Universe of Public Art.....	303
Pamela Allara, with Ellen Driscoll and Mags Harries	
Practical Ecofeminism.....	315
Aviva Rahmani	
Enacting Relationship: Ecofeminism and the Local.....	333
Ruth Wallen	
Drawing the Circle: From the Private to the Public to the Classroom and Back.....	349
Sharon Siskin	
How to Make Waves.....	359
Anna Shapiro	
From Fire to Water: Crafting a New American Dream.....	367
Ann T. Rosenthal	

Hello/Hola..... 377
THINK AGAIN (David John Attyah and S. A Bachman)

CONTRIBUTORS 379

APPENDIX: WCA LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD HONOREES 389

INDEX..... 393

LIST OF IMAGES

1-1 1979 Lifetime Achievement Award Honorees	page 24
1-2 1980 WCA Washington D.C. Alternative Conference Awards	29
2-1 Annika Von Hausswolff, <i>Back to Nature</i>	160
2-2 Katy Grannan, <i>Carla, Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA</i>	162
2-3 Carla Williams, <i>Untitled (Bath)</i>	164
2-4 Catherine McGregor, <i>Sheraton</i>	181
2-5 Laurie Beth Clark, <i>Veracity</i>	198
3-1 <i>The Tipping Point Project Sculpture</i>	227
3-2 Thea Paneth, <i>Dancing Shoes</i>	249
3-3 Denise Malis, <i>Child of Mine</i>	252
3-4 Elsa Voelcker, <i>My Daughter's Canvas</i>	266
4-1 Ellen Driscoll, <i>The Loophole of Retreat</i>	295
4-2 Mags Harries, <i>Terra Fugit (detail)</i>	297
4-3 Aviva Rahmani, <i>Trigger Points</i>	312
4-4 Ruth Wallen, <i>I♥Del Mar</i>	321
4-5 Sharon Siskin, <i>(In)Visible Installation</i>	353
4-6 Anna Shapiro, <i>Wave III: Instructional</i>	361
4-7 THINK AGAIN, <i>Hello/Hola</i>	377

PREFACE

Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism is a feminist anthology comprised of second-wave and third-wave feminist artists, art historians, critics, journalists, curators, interdisciplinary artists, and arts administrators of diverse backgrounds, living across the United States. We developed this book from our open call for essays for the 2006 Annual National Women's Caucus for Art (WCA) conference, held at the Sheraton Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts.

Founded in 1972, the WCA is a volunteer, non-profit organization. Its mission statement to "increase opportunities, visibility, and recognition for women in the arts" has been at the core of every action at the WCA. An elected president, representative officers, and a national volunteer board governed by a code of by-laws, all support 29 independent chapters across the United States. Each chapter is governed by the consensus of a steering committee. Conferences typically reflect this configuration, often featuring national voices, as well as local leadership in the arts, largely determined by the hosting chapter.¹

The conference co-chairs, Karen Frostig, Kathy A. Halamka, and Cynthia Runge, all worked in concert with the Boston chapter steering committee to develop a title for the 2006 National Conference *Digging Deeper to Build New Paradigms*. The title began as a sly play with words about Boston's famous "Big Dig" public works project. However, this title quickly turned into a framework for addressing the emerging constructive discourse between second-wave and third-wave feminists. This illuminated shared concerns, as well as divergent approaches and positions.

Past WCA Boston Chapter president, Cynthia Runge, developed a network of relationships while researching what was needed to successfully host the conference: booking venues, negotiating rates, and creating contracts. Kathy A. Halamka focused on keeping all the disparate elements in focus, and on crafting the various visual exhibitions, including the 2006 National Exhibition. The national exhibition was held at the Kniznick Gallery, within the Women's Studies Research Center (WSRC) of Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. The jurors for this nationwide call for artists were Wendy Tarlow Kaplan, curator of the Kniznick Gallery, and Raphaela Platow, curator of the Rose Art Museum,

Waltham. The exhibition, *Vital Voices: Women's Visions*, joined the WSRC's mission, "Where Research Art and Activism Converge"²² with the mission of the WCA. Karen Frostig contributed to the overall development of the conference, while devoting her primary attention to the panel program.

Our initial open call for conference papers was advertised in numerous venues, as well as posted on the national and local Web sites of the WCA. As chair of the conference panel program, Frostig was deeply committed to broadening the general scope of the conference, raising the bar for engaging discourse, and to developing fresh dialog between second-wave and third-wave feminists. In order to supplement the slim response to the original call, she developed an outreach initiative. Frostig contacted numerous art professionals from across the United States. Recognizing the instrumental nature of networking, she was keenly aware of the historic record whereby privilege and omission determined professional success or failure. It was important not to impose a privileged system of representation onto the development of the panel program.

Intuitively, Frostig began this process by returning to the period when she first joined the Boston chapter of the WCA in 1988. She contacted the leaders of this chapter from that time: Susan Schwalb, Patricia Johnston, Patricia Hills, and Alicia Faxon. All of these women had remained active in the art world and many of them held key positions of leadership at various universities in the area. From these conversations, she accrued names of arts professionals working in a variety of contexts. These names were added to a growing resource list of feminist artists, academics, and activists, as well as community arts activists working outside of established institutions. It was critical to spark the participatory interest of feminist artists and art historians, as well as other leaders of the feminist art movement represented in a number of recent publications. All possibilities, from national to local, were under scrutiny.

The networking prism became the mechanism to expand this conference. These conversations opened up a panorama of ideas and issues on the minds of many women across the country. The serendipitous nature of how one conversation led to the next, added a measure of adventure to the process.

Although this process skewed to some degree the open nature of conference panel development, the end result reflected countless conversations and input from hundreds of women who recommended many of the speakers at the 2006 conference. In part, because of how the panel program developed, there were many friendships and mentoring relationships represented on the various panels. Overall, the panels could

be seen as an expression of women admiring the work of women. The feeling of a “homecoming” was palpable. In addition, presenters were not required to submit official abstracts in advance, which expanded the possible presentations to both the academic and the personal.

Many of the panelists participating in the conference had either prominent national or local reputations, had the financial means to attend a conference in Boston, and were engaged in work that promoted feminist concerns framed by critical discourse. The conference panel program was comprised of 16 panels and 70 presenters, representing a range of topics: women’s organizations and camaraderie to feminist scholarship and mentorship; issues of domesticity and performance to spiritual forays and ritual practice; fictional narratives to narrative memory; activism in the public sphere to ecofeminism; and dialogue between second-wave and third-wave feminists to economic strategies and critical analysis of the art world. Panel diversity, represented by race, age, class, and sexual orientation, was actively pursued, but not as fully achieved as had been desired.

Overcoming these constraints, the 2006 Conference received enthusiastic reviews. The conference reflected the extensive collaboration between the three conference co-chairs, the local membership, the New Hampshire and Central Massachusetts chapters, and members on the National Board. Our invited conference keynote speaker was Coco Fusco, an internationally acclaimed performance artist and author, and professor in the School of the Arts at Columbia University, New York. Fusco’s address fanned the heat of controversy, as she discussed her latest project,³ detailing an underreported scheme of sexual exploitation in a branch of women in the military. This address followed the truly unique and critically important WCA Annual Lifetime Achievement Award Honoree Ceremony. Awardees for 2006 included Eleanor Antin, Marisol Escobar, Elinor Gadon, and Yayoi Kusama.⁴ In addition, the conference included Femlink,⁵ a juried international festival of video shorts, five national and regional visual art exhibitions, pre-conference off-site academic panels, and a book fair. Significantly, for the first time at a WCA National Conference, audio-visual engineers and a team of interns produced a twenty-five hour audio-visual recording of the entire conference for posterity.⁶ Immediately prior to the start of the conference, we received an invitation from the publisher, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (UK). We were presented the welcome opportunity to create a manuscript of enhanced conference proceedings for book publication. We were well aware of our complementary styles, so it was natural that we decided to work collaboratively together on this project. Our call for essays was

inserted that night into the attendees and presenters conference program packets. With no conference abstracts in hand, we were essentially starting from scratch. Since the book was also wedded by design to the distinctive timeframe and location of our 2006 National WCA Conference, we had certain parameters to keep in mind as we sought our writers. To enlarge our pool of exceptional writers, we approached conference attendees, conference honorees, exhibition jurors and curators, pre-conference panelists, and numerous potential panelists, who were unable in the end to attend the conference.

Throughout the hot summer that followed our National Conference, cyberspace sizzled with the traffic of e-mails solidifying the essay abstracts. Essays encompassed an array of topics, emanating outward, from the personal to the public, from the historic to the fresh and new. Many essays also reflected the movement from individual to collaborative projects. *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism* takes on a political positioning, supporting a feminist framework. Our Table of Contents is divided into four sections: Leadership, Criticism, Collaboration, and The Work. Although every essay contains aspects of all four categories, we believe that this organization highlights key ideas within each essay. The four categories also name different methods of cultural intervention. In addition, *Blaze* also features 14 new histories about feminist organizations, journalism, second-wave and third-wave feminism, Chicana/Latina artists, and issues of representation, new media, ecofeminism, performance art, and the handling of the nude. These embedded histories are further animated by ideas about leadership, criticism and collaboration.

Blaze conjures up images of light, fury and transformation. The text goes to great length to examine the political underpinnings of various problems followed by transformative solutions that promote social change. In this way, our diverse book of essays, which became *Blaze* in the heat of that summer after the conference, forges new ideas about contemporary feminist issues in the arts.

¹ Detailed information on conferences is maintained by National Administrator Karin Luner on the National WCA Web site at <http://www.nationalwca.org/Framesets/conferframeset.htm>. Access date June 10, 2007.

² The mission of the WSRC is described fully at the Web site <http://www.brandeis.edu/centers/wsrc/>. Access date June 10, 2007.

³ Fusco's project is described at length on her personal Web site "Coco Fusco's Virtual Laboratory" at <http://www.cocofusco.com/>. Access date June 10, 2007.

⁴ Dena Muller and Susan King Obarski eds., *Women's Caucus for Art, Honor Awards for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts: Honor Awards 2006*. (New York: WCA Publishing, 2006), i.

⁵ Femlink is fully documented at its Web site <http://www.femlink.org/>. Access date June 10, 2007.

⁶ An edited two-hour disc of these panel tapes is described on the National WCA Web site. <http://www.nationalwca.org>. Access date June 10, 2007.

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Our appreciation first goes out to the many lively participants of the 2006 National Women's Caucus for Art (WCA) conference whose enthusiasm seeded this project. A large number of conference presenters became contributors to *Blaze*. Over the course of three years, many of our writers maintained close communication with us, becoming collaborators as well as contributors. The complexity of everyone's life became part and parcel of the work and the conversations about feminism.

Special thanks goes to the WCA board, which supported and funded the original initiative to tape and publish the disc of conference proceedings. Mark Buchanan and his fabulous team of conference video interns, as well as Joseph Douillette and Kerry Molloy from Eggrock Media, video editors extraordinaire, worked together to create the conference disc. We also want to recognize the efforts of members of the Boston WCA chapter; Laura Morrison, president of the New Hampshire chapter; and C.M. Judge, founding president of the central Mass chapter, who were instrumental in contributing to the success of the conference. The bookstore at Simmons College provided us with a conference book table to celebrate our many published presenters. All of these coordinated efforts set the stage for *Blaze* to emerge as a formal publication.

We would also like to acknowledge the support and interest extended to this project by past and present WCA presidents. Judith K. Brodsky, Noreen Dresser and Jennifer Colby provided timely input, as did Carol Becker, Ruth Weisberg, Paul Von Blum, and Phyllis Holman Weisbard.

We are especially indebted to Cynthia Runge, former president of the Boston chapter and 2006 WCA conference co-chair. Her legal counsel and expertise in international copyright law for artists and authors was indispensable. We have valued her support and relied on her talent since the very beginning. We also had the good fortune to hire Heather Dubnick as our proofreader, copyeditor, and indexer, whose detailed knowledge and resourcefulness was key in carrying the book through to completion.

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responses to all of our questions, helping us to move through the various phases of production with great ease.

From Karen Frostig:

Special appreciation goes to my college-bound son, Kabren Levinson, political technologist, musician, and artist. His faith in “the people” and “open source” systems reminded me again and again of where we are headed. My husband, Brent Levinson’s enduring presence and ongoing support helped sustain me through many long nights at the computer. Nanette Levinson’s boundless encouragement and willingness to read a short draft came at a critical moment. Suzi Gablik, my long-time mentor and friend, provided me with heartfelt guidance. I wish to thank my colleagues: Lisa Donovan, division director; Julia Halevy, dean of the graduate school of the arts and sciences; as well as the academic affairs committee, who generously awarded me with a fellowship for this project from Lesley University’s Center for Research Fellowship Program. I am also thoroughly indebted to Shulamit Reinharz, Founding Director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, who had the vision to create an environment where women mingle over scholarship and creative pursuits, and to include me in this vision as a research associate.

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From Kathy A. Halamka:

I want to thank my talented daughter, Lara Halamka, and her unending support and love that make this all possible. She always knows when her smile and a few words of encouragement were just what I need. It is for Lara, and this generation of young women artists, that this feminist dialog must remain prominent. Since the day we met, my husband, John D. Halamka, has always been my very best model for acting with thoughtful consideration, kindness, patience, and remembering the value of the golden rule. His love and compassion are my sanctuary.

My father, Harold E. Greene, has been a wellspring of quiet and unquestioned belief in me all my life. He has always been there to help in

any way possible, no matter how large or how small. So very much of my visual art and writing are in loving memory of my mother, Susan Eunja Greene. I will always admire her fateful decision to emigrate in the name of love, and make a new life here in the United States. And John E. and Dagmar Halamka have been unfailingly kind and supportive, thank you for sharing John D. with me all these years

My co-editor, Karen Frostig, has a marvelous ability to make the impossible, possible. She created true magic with her ideas for Blaze. Deeply intelligent and seemingly tireless, she managed to also have solo exhibits to showcase those considerable talents, while simultaneously crafting this book. Our work synergy makes it often seem as if we are thinking as one—the very best in collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

How has feminism matured over the years? What are the pressing agendas for today's feminists working in the arts? How do women make sense of an increasingly interconnected world, where local and national concerns interact with a new set of global realities?

Destabilization of systems and hybridization of ideas, both highlight this period as an unusually rich nexus of opportunity. Unorthodox processes abound, and risk has become a highly valued commodity. *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women, and Feminism*, emerges as a navigational text, celebrating past victories while charting new directions for today's second wave and third wave feminists.

In developing a feminist framework for *Blaze*, the editors asked writers to consider the different waves of feminism in relationship to their own evolving practice and scholarship, as artists, art historians, critics, curators, and arts administrators. We sought clarifying dialogue about the waves while being careful not to reinforce existing, nor to invent new, feminist stereotypes. The incendiary word, "blaze" connotes both hot and new, in addition to trail blazing. It signifies that the experiences of women and feminists are anything but static, tame, or marginal, while the term "discourse" grounded the text in a degree of formal, critical analysis.

We first established a number of specific objectives for this book. It was imperative that the book should honor the historic, as well as palpably discern the current pulse of the feminist art movement. We hoped our writers would map the loci of anger, yearning, fear, comfort, doubt, and concern that women artists, historians, and critics activate in their work. We were also specifically interested in examining how women defined success and meaning at this juncture in history, as well as how they contemplated changing cultural attitudes about the body, power, authority, and vulnerability. We warmly welcomed narratives that disrupted conventional timelines, and consciously looked for multiple threads of narrative, rather than a single account of any one period. Finally, we particularly hoped the book would shed light on new models of criticism, new methods of integrating theory with practice, and new forms of conceptualization, both of the problems and the solutions.

We provided writers with this vision for the book, and then encouraged *Blaze* writers to articulate their personal concerns, social agendas, and

political aspirations. It was important for the breadth of the essays to present a rich array of honest and thoughtful experiences.

Writers for *Blaze* come from all regions of the United States and represent seasoned, as well as emerging, voices. *Blaze* features celebrated authors, scholars and artists: former and current presidents of national arts organization, editors of leading professional art journals, founders and curators of new museums, galleries and artists' slide registries, and former and current university department chairs and professors. The text also includes new voices from artists, activists, and academics as first-time authors. We felt committed to this combination, which we believe emulates the current mix of second-wave and third-wave feminist artists and scholars shaping contemporary feminist discourse in the arts. Many of these writers feel equally at home in cyberspace, and they regularly work on international projects and collaborations.

The book spotlights 14 detailed and well-documented feminist histories that narrate a number of pertinent strands of activism regarding feminist art, scholarship, organizational development and community initiatives. In developing new historical narratives, it behooves writers and readers alike to ask themselves: Whose history is it? Who is empowered to tell this history? Have there been any omissions? These questions, first asked by feminists in the 1970s, also enrich the readings of contemporary feminist histories, deepening the critical analysis of these histories. These core questions reoccur in *Blaze* with persistence and relevance.

The context of the Women's Caucus for Art (WCA) conference, and this organization's enormously influential history, is given prominent attention within this book. Eleanor Dickinson's detailed report on the history of the WCA, Patricia Hills's close look at the development of the WCA Boston chapter, and Susan King's rich discussion of the exceptional WCA Honoree Lifetime Achievement Awards all provide readers with multiple viewpoints on a number of important historical moments within the life of this remarkable organization.

A number of new histories, freshly experienced, are also contained in *Blaze*. Jeanne Philipp creates an account of the history of new media and feminism. Joan Marter chronicles feminist art journalism over a 30-year period, noting the rise and fall of various important journals during that time, and some of which continues to thrive. Maria Elena Buszek and Dena Muller define and deliver charged portraits of second-wave and third-wave feminists. Patricia Rodriguez provides a critical review of institutionalized exclusions of Latina and Chicana feminist artists. She places the spotlight on surprising continuing exclusions. Cynthia Fowler comments on the disappearing nude, and the significance of its recent

return to prominence. Aviva Rahmani and Anna Shapiro produce examples of timely ecofeminist activism, contextualized within the broader feminist movement. Harriet Senie imparts a sobering and fresh feminist reading of New York City's public works memorials, and Christina Lanzl presents a partial history of Boston's public works projects, examining the power of collaboration. Finally, Anna Wexler and Janet Gillespie provide the reader with a historically derived, cross-cultural analysis of feminist performance art.

Within this confluence of vibrant histories, particular themes begin to emerge around issues of representation. Teaching and exhibiting, in addition to the rise of new divisions and alliances between the waves, play a key role. Other essays address topics derived from the feminist histories. For example, what does the explosive number of public works projects, launched by feminist artists in recent years, indicate about feminist concerns and interests in the public domain? Ann Rosenthal and Ruth Wallen provide further examples of ecofeminist activism and leadership, which reflects the timely values of global interdependency. Pam Allara, Ellen Driscoll, and Mags Harries discuss public works project development with a particular concern for its relationship to the marketplace, the gallery system, and tenuous regard within higher education. Noreen Dean Dresser and Laurie Elizabeth Talbot Hall use different perspectives to analyze economic implications for art-based professionals, picking up on pertinent issues related to arts' economies; and Ruth von Jahnke Waters shares with us her own insider's story as the first feminist founder of a regional museum of art.

Another subject receiving due attention in these essays is the importance of innovative approaches to scholarship. Jennifer Hall and Ellen Ginsburg join to introduce new models of collaboration and interdisciplinary research, creating a vital dialogue between art and science. Jennifer Colby looks closely at art-based feminist scholarship, while Elinor Gadon addresses the clear need for new forms of mentoring relationships between women. Susan Siskin and Cher Krause Knight discuss new pedagogies, and interactions with students, and Joan Ryan examines the peculiar and persistent effects of popular culture on aesthetic development, questioning the role of kitsch in the feminist realm and general art perceptions.

The issue of "invisibility," which has followed women persistently, comes home to roost in these essays from our third-wave feminists, Maria Elena Buszek and Dena Muller. They independently chose to open their essays with a short vignette: these vignettes ironically place both of the writers in an audience comprised largely of second-wave feminists,

asking, “Where are the third-wave feminists?” Buszek retorts that they are right there “next to you,” while Muller notes that the third-wave has developed methods of circumventing the old paradigms.

Problematic issues of invisibility can also surface concerning employment opportunities, or lack thereof. This tension creates a new generational divide. With hundreds of new PhD and MFA graduates receiving degrees each year, there are growing numbers of third-wave feminists pounding the pavements, looking for academic and curatorial positions as well as exhibition opportunities. Despite increases in college student enrollments, new positions and new lines for studio arts and art history professorships have been agonizingly slow to materialize in U.S. universities and colleges. In addition, many second-wave feminist academics feel that they are just entering their prime, and that retirement is still years away. A new waiting game is being played out between the waves.

Concurrently, the opposite trend is unfolding within the art market. With the market’s emphasis on fresh ideas and youth culture, the power of accumulated experience and knowledge of institutional history have lost their power and relevance. The horizontal thrust of web-based communications, and the dismantling of hierarchy and privilege, further amplify this trend. Museums and commercial galleries tend to show the same circuit of second-wave artists over and over again, while relative “no-name” third-wave feminists and other women artists not identifying as feminists, are being ushered into exhibition halls and hot new alternative spaces in droves, under the trendy catch phrase, “emerging artists.” As Patricia Hills remarked at the 2006 WCA conference, many second-wave feminist artists have been “erased” from history.¹ Are we entering a new paradigm of opportunity, whereby second-wave feminists hold the academic positions and third-wave feminists obtain exhibition preferences?

A twist on issues of invisibility can be found in Mira Schor’s essay about blogging, in Laurie Beth Clark’s essay about truth-telling and what one’s perception of truth might be, and also in THINK AGAIN’s collaborative project to examine links between the flow of international capital, minority women, and violence. It is timely to observe that by introducing blogging as a legitimate feminist practice, Mira Schor touches provocatively upon a host of related topics that trigger new divisions between women, sometimes correlated with age. These topics include different preferences for selecting communication formats, publication protocols, and patterns of organizational affiliations. In general, spunky third-wave feminists tend to “travel light” and are inclined to invent non-

restrictive rules, rather than subscribe to legal codes that curtail movement and impede collaboration. Preferring e-mail to “snail mail” (instant versus time-based), creative commons licenses to copyrights (sharing versus ownership), and listservs to formal memberships in non-profits (platforms versus organizations), these feminists tend to select flexible systems of affiliation, virtual or otherwise. Tallied returns, regarding advantages for each group, are still coming in. Spontaneous, specific, short-term alliances, versus in-depth, face-to-face, ongoing memberships, seem to be a matter of preference, and one not clearly determined simply by chronological age.

On a different track, some of the writers here, including Thea Paneth, Simone Alter-Müri and Denise Malis, CoachTV and C.M. Judge, link a discussion of intimate relationships with new models of collaboration. These intimate relationships are often familial in form, but the definition of family continues to expand. Geography holds little to discourage collaboration in our connected, cross-cultural modern world. L’Merchie Frazier, Catherine McGregor, and Mari Novotny-Jones look at performance and ritual practices, also within a cross-cultural framework. The physical, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions ripple through this group of essays. The emphasis here is on the inherent creative value of collaboration.

After reviewing the essays, the editors asked once again: “What characterizes this writing as feminist?” Previous historians have credited second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s with establishing the feminist art movement. Inspired by the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s, women were incensed by gendered issues of power and privilege. The paramount focus of these times was on the persistence of patriarchy, and the complete omission of all women from the history of art. Institutionalized sexism was revealed. These questions rose again: Whose history? Who is included and who is omitted? Who has the power to represent this history?

Third-wave feminists emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. This group differed from second-wave feminists by representing a broader reach of inclusiveness. Third-wave feminists identified with a variety of subgroups, and positioned themselves along a continuum of political engagement. A critical examination of power and exclusionary practices continued.

Where does this leave feminists at this moment in time? Are we at a new crossroads? Although the 2006 WCA conference was focused on local and national discussions of feminism, new alliances between the local and the global seem to be more pronounced a year after the conference, than in 2004, when the conference was first taking shape. This

is particularly true of transnational feminism and global social justice initiatives linked in spirit to third-wave feminist activism.

No longer exclusively focused on power struggles between men and women, feminists are now examining the power differentials between, and among, women. These conversations engage myriad groups of women: second wave to third wave; third wave to second wave; second wave to second wave; third wave to other women who do not even identify themselves as feminists. Similar to the situation at the start of the feminist movement, issues of representation and work claim center stage.

As we return to the longstanding issue of representation within the history of the feminist art movement, we seem to be at a new junction. Having accrued substantial power in recent years, second-wave and third-wave feminists demand that any history, written by or about women, must take into account, multiple voices, and multiple points of view. This contemporary feminist history, which represents 35 tumultuous years of passionate fury, sacrifice, and camaraderie between women, is also embodied in the complex history of the WCA.

In writing her report on the history of the WCA, Eleanor Dickinson relentlessly pursued factual data from all sources. Getting it right required extensive collaboration between large numbers of women who were active in the movement for many years. In the final reading, the persistent question “What characterizes this writing as feminist?” evolved into “What makes this book relevant to feminists today?” The artistic fervor of feminists working together across differences, captured so profoundly in the writing of the history of the WCA and manifested in the writing *throughout* this text, makes this book a feminist project. In this world filled with strife, it is this form of engagement—one that is closest to the hearts of many—that inspires continued activism.

¹ Patricia Hills, “Reflections: Art and Feminism in Boston, the 80s and Today” (panel presentation at the 2006 National Women’s Caucus for Art Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, 2006).

PART I: LEADERSHIP

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EARLY YEARS OF THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS FOR ART IN BOSTON

PATRICIA HILLS

The Founding of the Boston WCA

The idea of founding a Boston, Massachusetts chapter of the Women's Caucus for Art (BWCA) was first broached to me in 1981, when Patricia Johnston suggested that we start a chapter.¹ I thought that forming a chapter would be a splendid idea. Vermont had a chapter, but no organization in Boston brought together women artists and art historians.²

I felt it was about time for me to “get active” as a feminist in Boston, where I had moved to in 1978 to teach my own specialty—American art—at Boston University (BU). In 1972, while still a graduate student living in New York, I had attended the meeting of the College Art Association (CAA) in San Francisco, California, at the time the National WCA was launched with art historian Ann Sutherland Harris as first president. I recall standing in the back of a crowded overheated hotel ballroom and admiring Harris for speaking out on women's issues in academia, with Linda Nochlin, Muriel Magenta, Joyce Kozloff, and others commenting from the panel table. It was an exciting moment—when women artists, critics, and art historians saw the necessity for coming together to work for the common goal of redressing the gender inequities in the art studios, in museums, and in academia.³

By then—the early 1970s—I considered myself both a leftist and a feminist. I was not alone. Many of my generation of young, urban mothers working or attending school part-time, involving themselves in their communities, and above all struggling to find an identity other than that of “mother” or “wife” were radicalized by the Civil Rights Movement and the protests against the Vietnam War. Although never active in the New York WCA chapter, I had been in two New York consciousness-raising groups from 1970 to 1972; first with neighbors in my Upper West Side building—almost all mothers with professional husbands—then with

artists and other artworkers, some single and some parents, who met in our various Manhattan apartments.⁴ While still a graduate student at the Institute of Fine Arts, I had also been active in founding the New Art Association in New York, which grew out of the protests against the shootings of student anti-war demonstrators at Kent State on May 4, 1970. I also became active in the Museum Workers' Association, a loose organization formed in the mid-1970s when the Professional and Staff Association of the Museum of Modern Art went on strike.⁵

In retrospect, it is clear that the Boston University Art Gallery (BUAG), at 855 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, played an important role in the success of the BWCA in the early years. Soon after I had joined the BU faculty, I was given the departmental task of assessing the possibilities for the BUAG, previously under the control of the studio art department.⁶ When the Art History Department took charge of the BUAG, during the 1979–80 academic year, I was assigned to supervise art history graduate students and plan exhibitions.⁷

For the first fall exhibition after the restructuring of the BUAG, I proposed a show of the recent paintings of Alice Neel, whom I had known in New York. The show, *Alice Neel: Paintings of Two Decades*, opened on October 9, 1980. Neel came and delivered one of her funny, peppery, and egocentric two-hour slide shows. For the spring of 1981, gallery manager Amy Lighthill mounted two other exhibitions of the work of women: *Massachusetts Quiltmakers* and *Pacita Abad*. During 1981–82, 1982–83, and 1983–84, the BUAG mounted several juried exhibitions that included Boston-area women artists. The BUAG began to acquire a new kind of reputation—one good for women in the community.⁸

To return to 1981: When Patricia Johnston came to BU in September, she was determined to organize a WCA Boston chapter. She had returned to graduate school for doctoral work after having been on the board of the Southeast WCA and having organized exhibitions of women's art work as a university art gallery director and museum curator and registrar. She was eager to launch a membership drive.

On October 4, 1981, within a month after her arrival, Johnston wrote to the San Francisco office of the national WCA asking for names of national WCA members then living in the Boston area and information on forming a chapter.⁹ In February 1982, both Johnston and I attended the WCA Conference in New York and met with Muriel Magenta, the national WCA president, who taught studio courses at Arizona State University. Magenta followed up by writing to both of us in early May, urging us to move ahead: