

Abstracts and Contributors

THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICS OF T.J. CLARK

Fiona Allen and Simon Constantine

In May 2011, T.J. Clark presented a paper entitled 'A Left with no Future', which criticized the current strategies of the left, questioned the relevance of revolutionary politics and advocated a return to the notion of human nature. Following his 2006 work *The Sight of Death*, a seemingly de-historicized, hermetic and meditative study of two paintings by Nicolas Poussin, these propositions appeared to mark a break with his earlier works, which had placed the categories of class, ideology and spectacle at the centre of art historical practice. But to what extent can these developments be seen as a refusal of the radical political project of the 'new art history'?

Through an analysis of 'A Left with no Future' and *The Sight of Death*, this paper will argue that Clark's oeuvre can be understood as an ever-evolving, but ultimately unified political project which seeks to understand how art historical scholarship might intervene in contemporary politics. While Clark's earlier works considered how the art and politics of historical revolutions could inform contemporary struggles, the political inertia and increasing commercial enclosure of the 1980s and 1990s forced him to consider how art history could not only speak, but also 'speak back' to the present. Consequently, the process of slow looking undertaken in *The Sight of Death* enabled Clark to challenge the mechanical and instantaneously meaningful imagery produced by commerce, mainstream politics and contemporary art and overcome the resulting regression of social history of art into a crude form of instrumentalized political analysis. For Clark, this challenge has the potential to result in a more human 'socialism,' which would not repeat the mistakes of revolutionary vanguardism.

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REPRESENTATION AND TOKENISM IN THE 'NEW' ART HISTORY

Rina Arya

The 'New Art History' is ideologically progressive and brought about a critical evaluation (and re-evaluation) of the study of Western art and artworks. This revolutionary approach has been responsible for the ensuing dialogue between art and critical thinking. It has also enabled artists, art historians and art students to remain engaged with a host of issues that they might not have been concerned with if the parameters of the discipline had not been placed under scrutiny.

However, the 'new' approach also raised problems, the impact of which has adversely affected critical judgment. One of these is the relative critical marginalisation of the artwork as the expression of a given ideology. The focus on political representation by groups that had been marginalised by more traditional art historical approaches has meant that the artwork was considered more as a vehicle for ideas and values rather than in terms of its status as an artwork. This has led to the critical lack of appraisal and in some cases the devaluation of the art object.

In considering the representation of hitherto marginalised groups, the 'new' art history may have provided platforms for expression but it also depoliticised these expressions by presenting unhelpful categories of difference, such as feminist art, black art, post-colonial art, to name but a few. Membership of these groups was on the basis of expressing the minority trait that was a sufficient condition for group allegiance. This was a practical way of identifying the issues at stake, but it was

also reductive, tokenistic and uncritical. I want to examine these issues in relation to the umbrella term 'black art' in order to show why it is not a useful category and how it has led to racial stereotyping. I will also pick up on the earlier idea about the poverty of the critical appraisal of the artwork to ask whether if one are part of a minority group anything can be passed off as art by virtue of the fact that it either explicitly communicates something about one's minority status or if it conveys the importance of having a platform for representation.

Rina Arya is a Reader at the University of Wolverhampton. Her primary area of research is art theory. She has published articles on Francis Bacon, Georges Bataille and art and theology. Her monograph, *Francis Bacon: Painting in a Godless World* (2012) is published by Lund Humphries.

WHAT IS POST-FORMALISM?

Whitney Davis

Whitney Davis is Professor of History & Theory of Ancient & Modern Art at UC Berkeley. His research interests include Paleolithic, prehistoric, and archaic arts; rock art; the Classical tradition and neoclassicism in Western art since the later Middle Ages, and especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France, Germany, and Britain; the development of professional art history and its distinctive models, methods, and rhetorics, in interaction with archaeology, philosophical aesthetics, comparative anthropology, and other disciplines; art theory in visual-cultural studies, especially problems of pictorial representation in relation to computation and notation; aspects of modern and contemporary art history, especially its expression (or not) of non-normative sexualities; the history and theory of sexuality, especially homosexualist traditions in psychology, sexology, and anthropology and the early history of Freudian psychoanalysis; world art studies; and evolutionary and cognitive approaches to the global history of visual culture.

He is the author of *The Canonical Tradition in Ancient Egyptian Art* (1989); *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (1992); *Drawing the Dream of Wolves. Homosexuality, Interpretation and Freud's Wolf Man* (1996); *Replications: Archaeology, Art History and Psychoanalysis* (1996); *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (2010) and *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (2010).

THE MYTH OF THE ENGAGED SPANISH AVANT-GARDE

Noemi de Haro García

What was the impact of 'new art history' on Spanish academy? For some its influence arrived late and was only partial. In my opinion this has much to do with the fact that art and culture were chosen to be the symbols of the democratic and normalized Spain of the transition. They were subject to the effective "pact of forgetting" that silenced all traumas and disagreements, the former militants were disenchanted by how things turned to be. All previous discourses and debates were erased, and substituted by a traditional one based on aesthetics and art's independence: the discourse of modernism, which had been present under francoism too.

The 'engaged avant-garde' produced between the end of the fifties and the sixties is the only episode of the history of art established during the transition that recognises some kind of left-political art under francoism. Maybe that is why it has rarely been critically analysed. For a decade, and especially triggered by the right wing politics of José María Aznar, some scholars in art history and visual studies started looking back to the past to reactivate it politically. The project *Desacuerdos*, or the work of some members of that project at the Museo Nacional Reina Sofía are visible and interrelated examples of this. But the chronology of *Desacuerdos* started in the seventies,

and if the impact of the Reina Sofía's rooms devoted to the sixties and seventies is to affect to critics, art historiography and audiences in a similar way it did in 2009, then something more has to be done. Research in the field of visual and cultural studies regarding the Spanish case has often a very interesting ideological and engaged scope but usually focus explicit and consciously on popular culture.

This paper I will analyse the construction and use of the mythical image of the 'engaged avant-garde' of the fifties and sixties. I will point out how the present political reactivation of Spanish cultural practices has been influenced by this myth, and thus the narration of engaged practices such as Equipo Crónica's has not been questioned. In spite of that, I will propose that all these experiences can help to challenge and transform the inherited discourse of Spanish art produced in the Cold War years.

Noemi de Haro García is a lecturer at the Universita Autónoma de Madrid. Her research is concerned with Francoism and anti-Francoism in Spanish art. She is the author of *Grabadores contra el franquismo* (2010) and co-author (with Antonio Urquizar Herrera) of *La escritura visual de Córdoba* (2006).

IS FEMINISM NOW (ART) HISTORY?

Joanne Heath

It is now some forty years since Linda Nochlin, in her foundational essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' first proposed that the feminist project entailed more than the simple re-instatement of forgotten women artists to existing histories of art, but rather posed a fundamental challenge to the very constitution of those histories. It would, however, seem that, over the intervening period, something of the radically transformational potentiality acknowledged by Nochlin and other scholars associated with the emergence of a feminist critique of the discipline of the history of art been lost. Increasingly cut off from its activist beginnings, yet accepted into the academy as a necessary part of any methodology course, feminism now seems to be in danger of being reduced to one in a plurality of theoretical approaches from which students can pick and choose elements at will.

The past decade has, moreover, witnessed a marked trend towards historicisation, rather than speculation on a continuing future, within feminist art history itself. As the key interventions of the 1970s and 1980s have themselves become subject to historical investigation, revision and critique by an emergent generation of younger scholars, so too has the issue of generational difference/rupture come increasingly to the fore. This paper argues against the tendency to confine the work of those scholars now most clearly associated with the emergence of an explicitly feminist engagement with art historical practice in the 1970s and 1980s to the annals of (art) history. Transcending the 'anxiety of influence' that has thus far dogged attempts to produce a retrospective account of feminism's impact on art practice, theory and history over the past forty years, it rather positions the feminist project as a continuously unfolding mode of intellectual enquiry whose transformational capacity continues to pose a vital challenge to the discipline even 'after the new art history'.

Joanne Heath recently submitted her doctoral dissertation in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. Her research moves between psychoanalysis and modernism at the moment of their historical co-emergence, and examines how these cultural fields were transformed by two key developments: the emergence of psychoanalysis in relation to hysteria, and the growing involvement of women as artists in the field of modernist painting. Her essay on the question of 'Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum' was published in *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference* (ed. Alexandra Kokoli) in 2008, and her contribution to

this conference forms part of her on-going interest in the history and historiography of feminist art practice, theory and history since the 1970s.

WORLD ART STUDIES: A RADICAL PROPOSITION?

David Hulks

This paper argues that new art history's radical critique of traditional art history just wasn't radical enough. Art history at the beginning of the 20th century was ambitious, lively and innovative. The main impediment to a global theory of art history however was a kind of ethnocentrism that for many art historians was simply an article of faith. Enthralled by the 'Greek miracle' and the classicism of the Italian Renaissance, it was almost impossible to imagine art history in cross-cultural, global terms. Post-marxist art history shot some holes in this enterprise, but it ran scared of proposing viable alternatives. It is becoming clear, however, that a new movement is beginning to take shape that is already making the 'new art history' look decidedly old. The world art studies movement, contrary to rumour, is not entirely devoted to essentialist neuroscience, nor does it seek to remake evolutionary claims. New courses currently being set up in the United States in fact show very much the opposite tendency. What then would a truly radical world art history programme look like? How would it address the main stumbling block of Eurocentrism? The answers to these questions are only now beginning to emerge, and challenge articles of faith that even new art historians still hold dear. This paper will argue that a truly new art history will only emerge if colleagues have the courage to attempt once again a macro-historical point of view. Instead of burying the 'old' art history, it needs to be mined for pioneer radicals who similarly had the courage to challenge 'Europocentrism' thereby to propose new world-art-historical perspectives. This paper suggests out how world art studies will dramatically change and improve a discipline that has become fragmented and surprisingly unambitious.

David Hulks is former Henry Moore Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow in Sculpture at the University of East Anglia, currently an Associate Fellow of the School of World Art Studies & Museology.

NATIONAL VERSUS CRITICAL: ESTONIAN ART HISTORY AFTER THE TURN OF 1991

Krista Kodres

In early 1990s, Estonian art history and other humanities entered into a completely new situation that concerned not only politics but also the cultural and epistemological fields. However, encounters with different new discourses, including 'new art history', were slow and were hardly critically reflected until the end of the decade.

The political and ideological need to establish a new national identity discourse for the whole society, and the necessity to culturally integrate it with global (Western) civilization from the other, shaped and still continues to shape the general environment for the practice of art history. However, it was not until 2008, when the Estonian Society of Art Historians organized a conference titled 'Quo vadis, Estonian Art History?' that the course of domestic developments since 1991 was addressed in the panel discussion 'New Art History and Estonian Art History Writing.'

This paper aims to discuss the state of affairs of Estonian art history as one of the Post-socialist art histories. Competing discourses of 'national versus global' and 'national versus critical' are viewed as actors that crucially constitute art historical narratives in Estonia and other countries of the former socialist block. Thus it examines the possibilities of critical and self-reflexive art history. Why do Estonian art historians tend to privilege the cultural rather than the critical perspective? Are there

any critical voices to be discovered, and what are they critical about? Do they contribute to the more complex understanding of local and regional art, art histories and the societies in which they are embedded?

Krista Kodres is Professor in art history at the Institute of Art History of the Estonian Academy of Arts. Her research interests focus on Estonian art in the early modern period, and on the art of the Baltic region. She is also concerned with issues in the methodology of art history, with particular reference to the context of the post-socialist states of central and east-central Europe. Publications include *Art and the Church: Religious Art and Architecture in the Baltic Region in the 13th-18th centuries* (2008, co-edited with Merike Kurisoo); *Eesti kunsti ajalugu* (History of Estonian Art. Volume 2. 1520-1770, 2005); *Lühike Eesti kunsti ajalugu* (A Short History of Estonian Art) (1999, with J. Kangilaski and S. Helme).

IS NEW ART HISTORY NEW ENOUGH? A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Jenni Lauwrens

Since its emergence as an academic discipline, art history has always received some degree of 'friendly fire', as both art historians (and artists) negotiate its aims, protocols and disciplinary borders. In particular, the awkward and tenuous relationship between art history and visual culture studies has undoubtedly led to institutional debates and curriculum re-organisation not only in the Anglo-European countries and North America but even as far a-field as South Africa. Clearly, due to the cultural impact of globalisation as well as the continuous rise of new visualisation technologies in the emerging information society, art history's allegiance to many of its traditional disciplinary assumptions is under siege on many fronts.

One of the prominent themes that have arisen from theoretical work in both visual studies and new art history is the weight given to the sense of sight in understanding the relationship between art and visual culture and the observer. This paper investigates the extent to which art history still clings to the Kantian notion of the ideally distanced observer, whose detached vision allows for critical and aesthetic appreciation of art. Can it be postulated that art history is and has always been mainly ocularcentric in its emphasis on the act of looking at art? If this is so, why is this stance problematic? I question whether this philosophical position is useful to understanding aesthetic experience. I argue that new art history's latest challenge is to surrender its allegiance to the 'trained eye', and acknowledge the role of touch, hearing, taste and smell in the experience of art instead. This paper investigates the ways in which two South African artists, namely Willem Boshoff and Berco Wilsenach, explore the aesthetics of touch in specific works in order to render the gaze of the Cartesian subject inefficient to understanding their work.

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UNEXPECTED TURNS: THE AESTHETIC, THE PATHETIC AND THE ADVERSARIAL IN THE LONG DURÉE OF ART'S HISTORIES

Griselda Pollock

Griselda Pollock is professor in the History of art at the University of Leeds. Her interests include Nineteenth to twenty-first century international visual arts; feminist, queer and postcolonial cultural theory and analysis; cinema and culture; trauma and aesthetics; the Holocaust and cultural memory; femininity, representation and modernity; gender and the museum. She is currently working on an AHRC 4-year research project *Concentrationary Memories: The Politics of Resistance* with Max

Silverman exploring totalitarianism, aesthetic opposition and the seepage of the totalitarian into popular culture.

Recent books include: *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image* (2010, co-edited with Anthony Bryant); *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference* (2007, co-edited with Victoria Turvey Sauron); *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (2007); *Differencing the Canon. Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999).

AN AESTHETICS OF BUREAUCRACY AND ADMINISTRATION? ART HISTORY AND THE DISCOVERY OF SYSTEMS THEORY

Matthew Rampley

My paper considers a development in Germany after the failure of the radical art history of the 1970s: the turn to systems theory. Notwithstanding its appearance in the second edition of *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, systems theory, and in particular, the work of Niklas Luhmann, is little known to art historians in Britain and this paper explores some of its tenets and ways in which it has been applied to art history. However, rather than offering a simple exposition of an unfamiliar body of thought, the paper analyses the political significance of this turn. The work of Luhmann has caused no small amount of controversy amongst social theorists, and its adoption by art historians has also been met with ambivalence; Luhmann's ideas, specifically, his voluminous writings on art, have been labelled as nothing more than an 'aesthetics of administration.' What, therefore, *is* systems theory, and what does it mean in art history? And in what senses does its adoption by art historians signify a political crisis of confidence in the discipline?

Matthew Rampley is professor of art history at the University of Birmingham.

'RADICAL' ART HISTORIES IN FINLAND

Renja Suominen-Kokkinen

This paper discusses the changes that have taken place in the discipline of art history in Finland during the last decades of the 20th century and the early 2000s, while considering in broader perspective its current prospects under the pressure of new contents and social and economic situations. A major paradigm shift took place in Finnish art history in the mid-1980s with the first steps in feminist research in the discipline. Subsequent developments have also contained significant conflicts in which concerns and focuses stemming from feminist art history have sought their own central issues, in areas ranging from corporeality and media to psychoanalysis.

Unlike some Swedish universities, the departments of art history at the four Finnish universities that train students for doctorates in the field (Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Turku, and Åbo Akademi University in Turku) have kept the old administrative designations of the discipline. This, however, does not mean that these institutions have not reformed contents or led discussion and debate boldly into new areas and to new issues.

In Finland's universities, the main role of art history is to train students for work in art museums and research careers in academia are available to only small numbers of graduates. Despite such prospects, the most recent questionnaire survey of the field provided surprisingly positive results, expressing confidence that the role of art history will survive. This, however, entails specific problems, which I discuss in detail in my paper.

Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, PhD, is Adjunct Professor (*Docent*) in Art History at the University of Helsinki. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on early Finnish women architects (1992), and has published widely on the architect couple Aino and Alvar Aalto. In 2007 she published the book *Aino and Alvar Aalto – A Shared Journey* on their joint work. She also edited in 2007 the book *The Shaping of Art History in Finland* and has recently been involved in other historiographical projects on Finnish art history.

SUSTAINING LESSONS LEARNED AFTER THE NEW ART HISTORY: TOWARD META-THEORY

Ian Verstegen

The British variety of the New Art History was extremely successful and an informed body of Marxist and feminist thinking undergirded a body of thoughtful work, which still resonates in the academy. Its main shortcoming is that, as a typical humanistic exercise: its results are too strongly tied to its practitioners; its problems are too closely tied to their generation; in a new environment, there is nothing to sustain it.

The generation of 1968 was trained in a hegemonic Althusserian doctrine. Marxism was actively debated, including questions of structure versus agency, base and superstructure. One could debate the structure of Feudalism and Capitalism. Due to a coincidence of theoretical commitment and period concentration on the modern/contemporary era, however, Marxist and feminist approaches were no longer labile *theories* but become mere *methodologies*.

Once the culturalist turn occurred and the mooring of signs in social conditions was severed under the banner of identity, it was impossible to recover the meta-theory that allowed the application of different theoretical responses to different conditions. Marxism became a talisman, to be produced in times of trouble, but ultimately only a name among others.

I support the social and feminist history of early New Art History but propose in addition a dynamic approach that uncouples theoretical and methodological commitments, and forces consideration of the applicability of ideas to different regional areas and historical periods. But this move is really impossible until one frankly accepts realism, and the referential detachability of facts about culture and society.

As long as one remains with a positivist or irrealist postmodern model of science, one cannot see that mechanisms interact differentially and sometimes remain unactivated. What's good for the nineteenth century may not be good for the Renaissance and vice versa. What we need to recover, then, is not how to apply a theory but *when*. We need to get back to a sense of realism in which different models of social or feminist history were judged for their adequacy in capturing the world. Then, and only then, can these approaches live on and transcend being merely historical episodes.

Ian Verstegen is director of graduate studies at Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia. He is the author of *Arnheim, Gestalt and Art: A Psychological Theory* (2005) and *Federico Barocci and the Science of Drawing in Early Modern Italy* (forthcoming).

WHAT IS A POLITICAL ART HISTORY NOW?

Shearer West

The 'new art history' served as a positive catalysing force for a discipline which, in the 1970s and 1980s, was overdue for revision and rethinking. This conference seeks to investigate where we are

now with a historiography that is no longer in its revolutionary youth, but (arguably) deep into comfortable middle age. The prospectus for the conference suggests that the interlinking of political and intellectual agendas has been recently 'undermined' by a hegemonic and 'depoliticised' scientific discourse, and by the 'instrumentalising' tendencies of current public debate. The polemical implication here is that what has been a noble campaign is now threatened by the malignancy of contemporary political agendas.

I will argue instead that art history in the 21st century potentially can benefit by engaging with changes in the political landscape, but only by undergoing yet another paradigm shift and not simply building incrementally on the developments of the past 40 years.

Shearer West is Head of the Division of Humanities of the University of Oxford. She is the author of *Portraiture* (2004); *Visual Arts in Germany 1897-1940. Utopia and Despair* (2001) and *Fin de Siècle. Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty* (1994).