

Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London, Routledge, 1999, xviii+345pp., I I I black-and-white illus.

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ines aspects of contemporary “Queer sexuality” with the “flamboyant and dynamic aid” provided by the example of French Rococo silk woven textiles (217). It is the originality of the parallels drawn between fabric and sexuality that makes MacInnis’ points appealing and thoroughly convincing.

Kiku Hawkes’ essay “Skanda” explores the language of textiles as a material form of oral tradition passed along matrilinear lines. This personal account based on her experience as a mother and a daughter made me consider my own relationships, with both people and textiles. Hawkes claims that the language of textiles is vivid and mysterious, an evocative etymology of ancient knowledge and tradition. Woven into each piece are “loyalties and love, political upheaval and intrigue, beatitude and passion” (233). She intersperses lists of materials with text in a unique and engaging style, asking the reader to listen to the sounds of tulle, taffeta, gauze, organza, percale, pique, linen, triple mousseline. This enticing piece recalls favourite outfits, the particular occasions they were made for, and especially the women who made them – mother, grandmother, close friend. And now, as I pass my hands along the rows of dresses hanging in boutiques, searching for my own wedding dress with my mother, I do hear the sounds of each of the fabrics. This is indeed a language and tradition retold to me by the women in my life.

This very individual reaction to *Material Matters* may seem surprising, but this book has the potential to stimulate theoretical debates as well as personal reflection. In their introductory remarks, Bachmann and Scheuing claim textile is a unique medium – ubiquitous, banal, luxurious, celebrated and diverse – accessing a range of human experiences from the private to the public spheres. Everyone has experiences with cloth on multiple levels. In this collection of works, such an everyday practice no longer appears as the obscure background of social activity.⁹ All of the essays in this collection are excellent work offering a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories and perspectives

from which to penetrate this obscurity and articulate the importance of this everyday experience.

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Notes

- 1 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York, 1984), 5.
- 2 Zierdt’s piece is a hand-woven textile, measuring two by four metres, consisting of horizontal strips that translate the first four paragraphs of the Unabomber’s Manifesto into a pattern.
- 3 Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London, 1981), xviii.
- 4 I am thinking in particular of Susan Leigh Star’s “From Hestia to Home Page: Feminism and the Concept of Home in Cyberspace,” *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, eds (London, 1996), 30–46.
- 5 The three “dressworks” are: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan’s *Arborite Housedress*; Anne Ramsden’s storefront installation *Dress!*; and Buseje Bailey’s little girl’s dress in *The Viewing Room*.
- 6 Born in 1963, Windrum grew up in a fundamentalist evangelical Christian family in Lethbridge, Alberta, where his father was a Baptist minister. Since 1989, he has lived in Toronto, Ontario. Out as a gay man, he has been involved in AIDS activism in the arts community (93–94).
- 7 For example, Windrum’s *Summer Camp/this is paradise* (1992); hand-embroidered phalluses on Calvin Klein briefs, size 32, worn on mannequin legs.
- 8 Perron discusses Joan Caplan and Mary Lou Riordon-Sello’s two-part project *Current Connection – On the Elbow River and Current Connection – At the Deane House* as well as Karen Elizabeth McLaughlin’s *Remnants: A Videotext, Part I* (1992).
- 9 This concept of the “politics of the everyday” comes from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984).

GRISELDA POLLOCK, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories*. London, Routledge, 1999, xviii+345pp., 111 black-and-white illus.

Griselda Pollock, a seasoned participant in the “culture wars,” returns to the fray with a new strategy for engaging the chief opponent of female and minority group artists – the canon of Western art. Beginning with a keen critique of the canon as a gendered and gendering institution intent on excluding those who differ from its hegemonic structure of European male power, Pollock goes on to evaluate the feminist responses to it. These fall into two categories: attempts to annex women artists to the existing canon and projects which valorize feminine

endeavours creating a separatist world of female artists and female art forms. Cognizant of the need filled by, yet serious limitations in either the theoretical sophistication or political effectiveness of these approaches, and aware that a concerted challenge to the practice of canon formation and perpetuation must be launched, Pollock offers a third way.

Her strategy, which she calls *differencing*, involves two actions. The first is to reject the phallogocentric concept of binary gender difference while simultaneously using this very structure of difference as a means by which to locate, within the dominant culture’s visual and/or written texts, traces of the unacknowledged other. Pollock chooses the verb form *differencing* so as “to stress the active re-reading and reworking of that which is

visible and authorised in the spaces of representation in order to articulate that which, while repressed, is always present as its structuring other" (8).

Pollock's second move is to examine the desire that motivates the construction of canons and alternative histories and ensures their perpetuation. She argues that there is a "psycho-symbolic dimension to the hold of the canon, its masculine ideals and not so much its intolerance of femininity as a masculinist boredom with and indifference to femininity's pleasures and resources as a possible and expanded way of relating to and representing the world" (8). To get at this dimension of desire, Pollock employs Freudian psychoanalytic theory variously interpreted by Sarah Kofman, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan.

By treating the selective tradition of the canon as a discursive formation which can be re-read for the encoding of the feminine in the interstices of its texts, rather than at the margins, Pollock avoids the difficulty of being an outsider looking in and of assigning women a position on the edges of culture. Moreover, instead of being constrained to reiterate the "unrelenting critique of masculine culture," Pollock's project of differencing enables her to "read some art by artist-men with a merciful irony, which is also self-irony, in order to establish the way consciously *feminist*, as well as unconscious *feminine*, desire can reconfigure canonical texts for other readings" (xiv). She is thus at liberty to examine canonical works with a greater awareness of the deep fears, fantasies and desires that imbue them. But more than this, if, following Freud, masculinities and femininities are not construed as fixed points but rather as fluid categories exhibiting both divergent and convergent qualities, the art of both male and female artists may be understood differentially, not as overdetermined representations of difference.

Conscious of the feminist error of assuming a universal sisterhood that transcends the particularities of class, colour and ethnicity, Pollock demonstrates the applicability of differencing to imperialist discourses as well. By engaging difference as it is played out in cultural texts while also rejecting the polarity of phallogocentric discourse, she is able to focus on more than one category of otherness at a time. This serves her ultimate aim in the book – to "re-imagine" the cultural field "as a space for multiple occupancy where differencing creates a productive covenant opposing the phallic logic that offers us only the prospect of safety in sameness or danger in difference, of assimilation to or exclusion from the canonised norm" (11).

The book is organized into five parts, the first of which presents Pollock's meticulously delineated and intricately woven theory which she articulates in prose that is heavily laced with specialized terms. Those who have more than a passing familiarity with Freudian psychoanalytic concepts and semiological

discourse will likely find their way through this section with comparative ease. Others may find it a demanding read.

The remaining four parts are comprised of a series of case studies – in imitation of the clinical model of psychoanalysis – to which Pollock applies her theory, with further elaborations pertinent to the individual cases. Half of the studies are "reviews" of art produced during a critical period in the fixing of the canon – the rise of modernist culture in France. The rest deal with Baroque and contemporary works.

In chapters three and four Pollock introduces difference into the canon by examining works by Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec respectively. Drawing upon Sarah Kofman's interpretation of Freud's aesthetics, in which the "artist functions as a heroic object of narcissistic fantasy, inheriting the adoration accorded to the father," Pollock reads these artists' works against the grain to expose the indications of unconscious desire embedded in them (14).

Van Gogh has often been cast in the role of a misunderstood Christ figure, virtually devoid of sexuality. However, Pollock's analysis of his drawing, *Peasant Woman Stooping, Seen from Behind* (1885), creatively reveals his repressed sexual desire for working-class women. By rotating the image of the peasant woman and tilting her back, Pollock presents the reader with a seated woman upon whose ample lap Van Gogh, the child of a distant bourgeois mother, would have derived comfort and pre-Oedipal pleasure. This figure, read from two different angles, represents for Pollock "the ambivalence of the maternal body" which can be seen inscribed on the canon in the contrasting conventions of the labouring woman (in city or country), the nude and the portrait of a lady (41). Pollock's theory of differencing depends greatly upon the place of the mother in psycho-symbolic formation. "The mother is a space and a presence that structures subjectivities both masculine and feminine; but differently" (35).

Toulouse-Lautrec represents a similar case in which gender is inflected by class. Using photographs of his parents "as heuristic devices to figure Freud's theory of the Oedipal drama as the matrix of *modern* heterosexual masculinity," Pollock deconstructs the images of *Jane Avril au Jardin de Paris* and *Moulin-Rouge: La Goulue* (Study, 1891) (91). Again, the son's unconscious Oedipal desire for his distant aristocratic mother can be read from the frequent representations of her low opposite, the urban working-class woman. "It is that mother who must be seen as the structuring absence which creates the necessity for the incessant re-engagement with the bodies of her 'other' and the stylistic deformations from bourgeois realism which then become the formal hallmark of his modernist oeuvre" (67).

Furthermore, on the basis of a striking similarity of pose between the image of Jane Avril and a photograph of *Comte Alphonse de Toulouse-Lautrec Dressed as a Highlander*, Pollock

convincingly argues that Toulouse-Lautrec's "stylistic gambit" of the dancer's "black-stockinged and cocked leg" is a fetishistic indication of his identification with his father (72). Thus, the analysis of Toulouse-Lautrec's work reveals how the relations of power and sexuality which have come to characterize the Western cultural canon were played out in the experience of a particular individual. Pollock dismisses art history's myth that Toulouse-Lautrec's work is "the expression of a tortured, disabled genius" on the basis of photographs and descriptions of him, and thoroughly grounds his psychic experience in the social and historical context he shared with others of his time (90). This insistence on seeing art, artists and canon formation as socially and historically embedded pervades Pollock's work.

In chapters five and six Pollock gives a critique of other feminist approaches to the canon, revealing the implications of repressed or misdirected desire. The desire to know about artists who are women is, according to Pollock, a product of feminism, not of simply being a woman. "Only feminism . . . permitted and generated such a desire, and created, in its politics, theories and cultural forms, a representational support which could release into discourse aspects of feminine (which is nevertheless deeply ambivalent) desire for the mother and thus for knowledge about women" (16,18).

In "The Female Hero and the Making of a Feminist Canon" the temptation to satisfy feminist desire by adopting the canonical practice of heroizing artists is shown to yield unsatisfactory results. Mary Garrard's feminist interpretation of Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings of *Susanna and the Elders* and *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is raised as an example of the danger of reading works by women as direct expressions of their personal histories. Pollock prefers a Freudian analysis which spotlights "traces of incompletely repressed psychological subjectivity, in the feminine, signified not expressed in its complex negotiations of the signs, meanings, fantasies and affects we might call with Kristevan subtlety, aesthetic practices" (98). As she deftly demonstrates, victims of traumatic experiences such as the rape and trial suffered by Artemisia are often too overwhelmed with pain to deal with the trauma; it may be expressed in symptoms that bear little resemblance to the triggering experience. Furthermore, Pollock warns against confusing the heroic figures of Judith and Susanna with the artist – these topoi are freighted with metaphoric meanings shaped and articulated in accordance with the artistic practices and historical specificities of seventeenth-century Italy. Thus, to assume that the paintings of Judith and Susanna are cathartic outworkings of Artemisia's pain is highly questionable.

What Pollock argues for is an historically contextualized analysis of the works which permits us to see how the painter produces a visual critique of the genre. As an example of this, she cites the excessive proximity of the viewer and the elders in

Artemisia Gentileschi's *Susanna* which disrupts the usual voyeuristic distance of such scenes. The *Judith* images, with their direct quotations of Caravaggio's head of Holofernes and Orazio Gentileschi's triangular composition of the figures, can be read alternatively as "a working through the place of being a daughter-painter – a woman in a genealogy of father figures, who have much to offer and yet must be vanquished for fear they deny the daughter her creative space" (123).

I take exception to Pollock's claim that "the mythos of Judith was reworked to elaborate a specifically sexual dimension to the events clearly stated in the Apocryphal text as having political not sexual meanings" (116). In addition to her political altruism, the descriptions of Judith's preparation for her encounters with Holofernes emphasize her sexual attractions. She "made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her" and "arrayed herself in all her woman's finery."¹ Perhaps Pollock's representation of the Judith story as an unalloyed "topos of woman and political, altruistic and nation-saving execution" reveals her own feminist desire at work (116).

Disturbed by Virginia Woolf's suggestion that the lot of culturally marginalized talented women is self-annihilation, and piqued by Lucy Snowe's resistant reading of a female nude painting in *Vilette*, Pollock raises the question: "how will we read female bodies painted as imaginative constructions and projections of a feminine producing subject? Can we see difference?" (138). In "Feminist Mythologies and Missing Mothers," where she considers Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings of *Cleopatra* and *Lucretia*, she appears to go against her own dictum that "images need to be read at a distance from the artist – for the articulating distance that representation created for the subject who was the artist" (111). The painter's loss of her mother is traced on the bodies of Cleopatra. In Pollock's interpretation of the *Lucretia*, the moment the artist has chosen to depict is that of anguish directly following upon rape rather than the more characteristic rendering of suicide. Pollock construes the atypical handling of this subject to be a belated reference to Artemisia's experience. She justifies this apparently contradictory move by stating that "Bereavement, maternal loss and post-traumatic survival are not the usual stuff of patriarchal gossip" (164). This is not an altogether convincing claim, especially as the *Lucretia* image, thus read, would yet again embroil the viewer in the discussion of the rape and its sequelae.

Although modernist art has borrowed greedily from non-Western representational systems, this has not resulted in a more inclusive canon. Indeed, it has contributed to a "geo-ethnic" segregation which privileges the products of Western artists while devaluing those of non-Western backgrounds. In chapter seven, *Revenge*, a series of paintings by African-born artist Lubaina Himid, is offered as an example of differencing which exposes colonial abuses and establishes a place for "the

colour of art history” by re-inserting “the present into a historical field by means of a critical quotation from art’s histories to signify the historical formation of the present” (172).

Having mourned the losses perpetrated by enslavement, Himid moves on to a re-presentation of her culture through revenge. This revenge does not “involve personal reprisals on individuals – but a mobilizing anger against those historical forces which create racism, imperialism, class and gender opposition” (191). *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced* (1991) employs direct references to a work by James Tissot, *Portsmouth Dockyard* (1877), which is encoded with “unadorned juxtapositions of sexual desire and imperialist celebration” (175). Himid’s image replaces the Highland soldier, the symbol of desire and empire at the centre of Tissot’s composition, with a stack of chart-books in the process of being destroyed and thrown into the open ocean by the two (now) African women seated on either side. Other works in the *Revenge* series present similar historically located resistances to geo-ethnic and gender mapping.

Applauding Lubaina Himid’s boldness in laying claim to the canon’s most exalted art form, history painting, Pollock calls white women to join with black women in a covenant of revenge modelled upon the cross-cultural bond effected by the biblical figures of Ruth and Naomi. The type of “relationship-in-difference” that Pollock envisions is based on Bracha Lichtenberg Etinger’s psychoanalytic theory of the multi-layered structure of subjectivity “in the feminine” called the Matrix. In this construct, “difference is always already a dimension of subjectivity; it is not introduced as a violent severance ultimately signified by castration” (194). Although Pollock’s preference for a theory that breaks free of phallic logic and dispenses with the imagery of violence is understandable, it is difficult to affirm or reject the Matrix’s cogency based solely on the limited description of it in this book.

The final section of the book asks “Who is the Other?”. Chapter nine is presented as a series of letters that explore our relationship to “the other woman” as seen through the medium of “uncanonised” etchings by the modernist painter Mary Cassatt (215). The differences between women – mothers and daughters, bourgeois and working class, old and young – and their desire are highlighted so as to “make the place of the Other more complex and diversified, less bound only to the legend of sexual difference” (217).

On the basis of these works, Pollock makes a persuasive “case that Mary Cassatt’s images are not merely genre scenes of modern bourgeois feminine life;” they are not simply an undifferentiated feminine *oeuvre* which shared opposing walls with Degas in the joint exhibition of their works mounted by suffragist Louisine Havemeyer in 1915 (217). Rather, they are “the site of her engagement with what we now take to be the central

problematics of metropolitan modernist culture in the later nineteenth century,” that is, class and gender (226).

Pollock identifies in the relationship between bourgeois and working women a bond of desire represented by working women’s untrammelled access to both indoor and outdoor space; the maid or dressmaker mediates the outside world to the enclosed bourgeoisie. Cassatt’s etchings of working-class women are examples of “differencing that makes a difference.” They neither participate in the masculinist equation of working-class women with a low other, nor do they represent them as objects of bourgeois curiosity.

Her images of mothers and children defy the nature-bound *maternité* works of painters like Renoir with a confidence in the filial relationship – a sense of the comfortable otherness of the child and of the *jouissance* (intense though evanescent joy) of the mother. Similarly, the paintings and etchings of her own mother engaged in intellectual and creative pursuits evoke the creativity in women that goes beyond giving birth – the creativity that Cassatt herself claims.

Perhaps because of its more relaxed style or maybe because it touches on the desire for the mother that Pollock posits, this is one of the most satisfying chapters of the book.

“A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least, with Manet” demonstrates the ways in which differencing may be used to subvert the inscription of women in class and race terms. The women are Berthe Morisot, a white bourgeois painter, Jeanne Duval, the mixed-race companion of Baudelaire, and Laure, a black model – all of whom figured in paintings by Manet. Using Mieke Bal’s theory of feminist reading termed “hysterics” (attending to the rhetoric of an image rather than to the plot, viewing from the victim’s perspective), Pollock seeks to give voice to the repressed experiences of these women who figure in *Repose* (1870), *Baudelaire’s Mistress Reclining* (1862), and *Olympia* (1863–5) (254). In her readings of Manet’s images Pollock plays “with the tropes of *Orientalism* and a related, *Africanist* discourse, playing off their metaphoric evocation of relations between white and black, Europe and its others, against the problematic incision of both on the bodies and through the representations of classed and ethnically marked femininities” (254). She adroitly shows the slippages both within and between these images, indicating where Manet disrupted the Orientalist tropes and endeavouring to accustom her own mind’s eye to “see in the dark” (255).

The close of this chapter also acts as the conclusion of the book. In her aim to come to terms with the “complex imbrication of race, sexuality, gender and class in all [aspects] of modernity” Pollock reiterates her conviction that “we must desire that knowledge of the other and the other knowledge of ourselves, and let difference reconfigure the canon that is both inside each self as well as outside in the institution we call art’s

histories” in order to change the way tradition pre-shapes history (306).

Whether Pollock’s theory of differencing will fulfil its promise to expand the canon rather than add to an already proliferous list of competing discourses remains to be seen. Nevertheless, her book succeeds in demonstrating that it is possible to conceive of a means of feminist engagement with the canon that goes beyond mere opposition to occupy a position that is both within culture and critical of its constructions. Other feminist theorists, such as Linda Alcoff, have sought solutions to the problem of exclusion using comparable models; the strengths of Pollock’s model are its theoretical intensity, its broad applicability and its self-critical stance.²

Throughout the book Pollock places her own story along-

side other stories of desire that emerge from her analysis of a diverse selection of paintings and prints. The brief epilogue underscores how feminist desire, in this instance Pollock’s own longings for her deceased mother, is the impetus behind the enterprise of differencing the canon.

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Notes

- 1 Jdt. 10:3–5; 12:15 RSV.
- 2 Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs*, XIII, 3 (Spring 1988), 405–36.

DEBRA PINCUS, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, xvii + 257 pp., 126 black-and-white illus., \$80 (U.S.).

The doges of late medieval Venice occupied a position inherently different from other European rulers. As was often the case elsewhere, their office soon came to symbolize the very state itself; but unlike the King of France or the Emperor of Byzantium, the Doge of Venice could not pass on his title to his children, nor even participate in the process of choosing his successor. The dogeship was not hereditary, and any hint of dynastic ambition was greeted with great suspicion by the other families of the Venetian nobility. In some ways, then, the office of doge was closer to that of a powerful bishop or a pope. Complicating any assessment of this office is the observation that it did not remain static over the course of the Middle Ages. To the contrary, it changed substantially, with a series of increasing restrictions on the powers which could be exercised, as revealed in the changing nature of the *promissione*, or oath of office, which each new doge was required to swear upon his election.

The tombs of the earliest Venetian doges, mostly situated in monasteries like San Zaccaria or San Giorgio Maggiore, have not survived. But from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, a series of ducal tombs can be seen, in whole or in part, in the state church of San Marco, as well as in the churches of the two most important of the late medieval mendicant orders, the Dominicans at SS Giovanni e Paolo (or San Zanipolo, as the Venetians call it) and the Franciscans at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. These tombs, from those of Doge Jacopo Tiepolo (d. 1249) to Doge Michele Morosini (d. 1382), constitute the overt theme of this handsome book. But its true subject is the dogeship itself, as this position evolved over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and as its changes were manifested in

both the location and the form of the funerary monuments of Venice’s political figureheads. Interest in the ducal tombs is not some new phenomenon: already in 1484 they were commented on by the visiting German friar, Felix Fabri, and they have also been the subject of a classic book by the Venetian historian Andrea Da Mosto.¹ But what is new here is the idea of using the tomb monuments as evidence for tracing the evolution of this political office. As Pincus notes on her first page, the ducal tombs can be seen to constitute “a class of historical documents” which were important in the construction of ducal identity, and consequently they can be used in conjunction with other kinds of historical evidence to further our understanding of the nature of the dogeship during its formative years. No previous study has similarly sought to elucidate the public political function of the Venetian ducal tombs, as well as to relate this to their physical context.

Following a brief introduction to the history of the dogeship, this survey begins with the earliest ducal tomb which has survived: the sarcophagus of Doge Jacopo Tiepolo (1229–1249) on the façade of San Zanipolo. This was a time of great ambition for the city and its nobility, basking in the dramatic expansion of political and commercial power which had resulted from the infamous Fourth Crusade. But it was also the moment when both the Dominicans and Franciscans began to establish their presence in the city, and the land for the construction of the church had been granted to the Dominicans by Doge Tiepolo in 1234. Thus, there was a special connection between this doge and this site. The sarcophagus itself is examined in a formal way, and a detailed analysis is made of its carved motifs. Pincus argues that the body and lid of the sarcophagus are re-worked pieces dating ultimately from late antiquity, and that the later medieval carvings were deliberately intended to blur its age, the intention being “to summon up a sense of the past” in keeping with current Venetian political pretensions. In an appendix, a