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Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women, Victorian Women Artists*. London, Routledge, 1993, 275 p. 47 black-and-white illus. $26.95

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See table of contents

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DEBORAH CHERRY, *Painting Women, Victorian Women Artists*. London, Routledge, 1993, 275 p. 47 black-and-white illus. $26.95.

In 1985, Barbara Kruger's large billboard *We don't need another hero* went on display in London's Hammersmith. While Kruger's message intimated "not another" male hero, the concept has expanded to mean "no heroes," male or female and this concern informs much feminist writing of the 1990s. Deborah Cherry introduces the problematic nature of the "hero" early in her book. "While many agree that 'we don't need another hero'," writes Cherry, "traditionalist, social history and modernist versions of art history continue to fabricate a proliferating range of masculine 'greats'." (p. 4) Cherry's book investigates nineteenth-century British women as they lived and worked, as they situated themselves as professional artists, in a society which opened only small spaces for them outside of their designated ideal roles as wives, mothers, sisters or daughters in relation to a male or males in their lives. Not only is her command of the archival material thorough and exacting in the most rigorous tradition of social art history, but in addition, her presentation of the material is informed by her contemplative and comprehensive readings of recent theoretical debates which question the role of the active subject and the construction of that subject through or in language and society. As such it is a book to be cherished by feminists who do not want another hero but at the same time recognize the uncomfortable position we hold when we have never had many female heroes to begin with. And, if white middle-class women lack heroes, what about native American women, black women, "third world" women and so on?

On one of my bookshelves, which is organized in such a way as to locate my thoughts at any given moment in time, Cherry's book stands between an old, highly respected favourite, F. Engels', *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and a recent acquisition, Julia Emberley's *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writing, Postcolonial Theory. Painting Women* gives me a centre upon which to focus my thoughts and concerns about feminism and art history, about heroes and their lack, and about directions and elaborations. Weaving in and out of questions about *how* to write about women artists are debates about *which* women artists to write about; filtering through these debates are investigations into representation and authorship, production and consumption. My thoughts fold themselves into two "pleats,"[1] one of which takes in the woman as producer, as missing in history, as subject and representation, as consumer and producer; the other takes in European hegemony as responsible for misrepresentation of non-white female bodies, imperialism and colonization, repression and subjugation. Thus I arrive at Engels, Cherry and Emberley. Emberley's brilliant discussion and analysis of native women in a hegemonic white Canadian culture recognizes the situation of Canada's indigenous peoples as differing "both geopolitically and ideologically from that of the indigenous peoples of the so-called Third World." (p. 17) While Emberley acknowledges the relevance of postcolonial theory "to understanding the relations of cultural imperialism between dominant English/French-Canadian society and Native people's self-determination to achieve a land base and self-government," she also suggests that postcolonial theory "is not always representative of the conflicts which currently exist in this specific historical formation of colonialism." (p. 17) Relying upon theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Teresa de Lauretis, Emberley challenges our limits of knowledge about Canadian women and expands a discourse about "the Native," an often forgotten voice within feminism.

Engels also spoke for forgotten voices, those who inhabited nineteenth-century urban squalor under conditions analogous to the most horrific Canadian "Indian reserve." The women, men and children living in Manchester slums were colonized by a capitalist economic system that abused them even though they were white and British and therefore "like" the industrialists who used them in ways not too different from those found in colonialism. Emberley uses the term "internal colonialism" to define the continued subjugation of peoples within an independent state;[2] Engels uses the term exploitation. Cherry may be located in between the two as opening spaces for our own (white European) still-repressed history that must compensate for all its ("other") wrongs while, at the same time, not yet fully understanding the oppressions within its own history. She investigates the nineteenth-century assignment "of the feminine body to motherhood and wifehood" and female sexuality to "legitimate reproduction in marriage" while, at the same time, "white women workers and Black women were posited as twin threats to imperial hegemony." (p. 143) She articulates a space for white, middle-class women artists while at the same time structuring the relations between them and their "indispensable" domestic servants: "While they [women artists] produced pictures, servants maintained the interiors of the household and serviced its occupants." (p. 146) The interlocking of the spaces between domestics and producing artists surfaces within feminist interventions into art history often as an apology: if we write about historical women artists, then we must

acknowledge that they were often white and most frequently middle or upper-middle class. Should this, then, preclude our writing about them, particularly if our marxist or materialist voices lament a concern for class? Should we focus instead, as Griselda Pollock recently did, upon man and his exploitation of the female body?[3] But does not a critique of a masculinist exploitation, particularly if the masculinist exploitation is perpetrated by Matisse, Wyndham-Lewis or Gauguin, still add another volume to a shelf already laden with monographs, biographies and critiques? Can we, as feminist art historians, make more and varied critiques of Artemisia Gentileschi or Frida Kahlo or Marie Bracquemond? Is not a re-reading of their work as important as a re-reading of Rembrandt? As Vron Ware has stated in her recent book on white women and racism, "[t]his means working out the dynamics of race, class and gender in every situation that demands a political response—adopting what some have called 'strategic identities' which allow opposition to one form of domination without being complicit in another."[4] Within art history we have not exhausted an investigation into the "form of domination" experienced by white, middle-class women as producers of art, and this must be accomplished conterminously with work on the positions of non-white women as both producers of art and representations in a visual culture.

Cherry's insistence that "[c]onstructions of femininity by and for middle-class women were many, contradictory and subject to historical change" (p. 79) reminds us of the locations occupied by women artists: how both the way women deployed their pictures and the way they interacted as professionals always existed within a cultural and social history. Subject matter and style were intricacies of a vocabulary that had parameters: one "speaks" with a visual language that can be comprehended by the consumers of visual culture. Thus women took up a language that was/is "always already" in place. For the twentieth-century viewer of nineteenth-century art made by women, the desire to "read" across or through pictures which apparently reinforce a view of woman as helpmate or helpless presents a task of understanding or even exploring which might range from distasteful to irrelevant. Hence, the importance of Cherry's book for reclaiming women's history, re-reading visual representations made of women by women, and "reading against the grain" renditions of femininity that we may not wish to comprehend.

Emily Mary Osborn's *Nameless and Friendless* (1857) is such a picture. The demure, feminine, self-effacing woman juxtaposed against the stern, judgemental art dealer offers, at first glance, nothing for the self-sufficient woman of the 1990s. Cherry, however, intersects the obvious narrative of the picture with the discourses around a major controversy in the 1880s "about women's autonomy, economic rights and sexuality" (p. 79). She suggests that the picture rests "on the borderlines of class and at the margins of feminine respectability," and her insightful, thoroughly researched reading of the picture peels away layers of misattention and inattention. For Cherry, Osborn's picture tracks "the ways in which women's respectability, independence and professional practice were being jeopardized at the moment when increasing numbers of women were producing art for a living and were exhibiting and selling their works" (p. 81). Similarly, the self-portrait of Emma Richards (1853) chosen for the cover of Cherry's book reclaims woman as professional, serious and working within a valued tradition of picture painting while, at the same time, she remains respectable and feminine. Another portrait, that of political activist and editor Lydia Becker painted by Susan Isabel Dacre in 1886, broadens a field of knowledge about the feminine to include forthrightness and political acuity. As Cherry indicates, "[t]he representation of Lydia Becker's body rejects the current codes of fashionable styling, supine pose, hour-glass figure, lavishly trimmed costume" (p. 209). Rather, Becker's gaze is direct and her countenance unidealized: "the portrait produced woman as a sign of feminist resistance, inciting women's desires for representation and equality, not only in politics but also in the domain of culture" (p. 210).

These three pictures, by Osborn, Richards and Dacre, represent some of the history of women's expectations and desires, intrusions and hesitations, that Cherry charts and traces in her search for Victorian women artists. Her search is commendable in its refusal to abandon the middle-class woman artist while at the same time trying to permeate the margins and borders of middle-class Victorian existence; she investigates the producer and recognizes some of the gaps that lay untended. Rebecca Solomon's identity as an artist, for example, "was located in the interlocking networks of the Jewish community in London in the 1850s and 1860s" (p. 30). Nineteenth-century black women artists and Indian women artists are under-researched: Cherry admits that "[w]oman's access to art education was structured by inequalities of racial and sexual difference" (p. 60). It is, of course, also structured by our definition of "art," what we include and exclude from that category, how we select "artwork" and eliminate "other" work from the history of our visual culture. Cherry set her parameters within painting, and she was right to control her sphere.

Similarly, her bounded choice of white, middle-class women must be applauded not because it is racist, sexist and exclusionist (she is anything but) but because, like Engels and Emberley, she acknowledges the endeavors of the circumscribed.

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1 Denise Riley used the trope "pleating" in a lecture she gave at the University of Manchester, 21 June 1994.

2 Emberley quotes Paul Tennant's definition of "internal colonialism" within Canada (p. 131).

3 Griselda Pollock, "Painting, Feminism, History," eds. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips *Destabilizing Theory, Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge 1992), 138-76.

4 Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992), 254.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN AND GLENNIS STEPHENSON, eds., *ReImagining Women: Representations of Women in Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 334 pp. $24.95 (paper).

What are the claims of the postmodern text? In the notion of the fragment, first, the call for local, specific and contingent discourses to replace the ahistoricism of past meta-narratives, stories Roland Barthes refers to as myths. Second, and with the call to native texts, a breach from scientific models of critical enquiry whose earlier effect was to normalize institutional authority. Local geographies and mobile sites, then, give rise to the imperative of the postmodern text: the repositioning of authority via the contestation, among other things, of the author as source of Truth, a singular myth of origin that, continuing the tradition of the unified self, once legitimized all academic enquiry. Postmodernism's repositioning of authenticity engenders reception theory. And, focalized as speculation, in the best postmodern writing, the act of naming and translating gives rise to new patterns of disciplinary (in)coherence.

Postmodernity seeks to render culture and society problematic. This is the goal of *ReImagining Women*, a collection of essays whose critical programme is to think the differences of representational practice and to render a sense of what Jean-François Lyotard called "the institution in patches." Exploring critical texts, art works and theories, *ReImagining Women*, drawn from investigations into the lives and works of women visual artists and writers, traces, analyses, extends and contests the interstices between gender, language and the imagination.

It is difficult, even inappropriate, to synthesize the contents of this text, whose eighteen essays are as complex as they are fascinating, as subtle as they are distinct. An excellent introduction already specifies the discursive terms of the reader's engagement with the text, describing "representation" in general terms and in relation to women as subjects as follows:

> as a mimetic act; as a re-visionary act within dominant representational practices; a process of production and consumption; and a re-presentation radically otherwise, outside of and alternative to present representations of women. (p. 11)

Loosely, then, the text is concerned with woman as sign.

A significant portion of the book is given over to postcolonial theories of representation. Uzoma Esonwanne's "Feminist Theory and the Discourse of Colonialism," whose consideration of identity politics in relation to feminist practice offers new insights into political correctness as a motivated text, and Aruna Srivastava's "Imag(in)ing Racism: South Asian Canadian Women Writers," which explores the specific nature of racism as a lived positionality, emblematizes the interpretative method suggested by feminist and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, who reminds us that practices of interrogation constitute strategic acts of resistance through the simple act of writing a different voice. Jeanne Perreault's "'touch the matrix': Native/Woman/Poet" makes this position explicit as she articulates the sometimes difficult and frequently conflicted choices faced by subjects whose political identity and community alliances ("First nations people among whites, gays among straights, women among men," p. 293) claim divided loyalties. To their voices is added Kateryna Olijnyk Longley's consideration of the critical and strategic ways Australian women writers have negotiated their historical displacement as subjugated discursivities framed by colonial power. In these essays the ab-original voice is invoked as critical practice that continually, subversively, and resolutely contests orthodox institutional, social and cultural canons.

Other essays in the collection foreground in different ways the enmeshing of individual authors in the phenomenon being studied. Catharine Stimpson, for example, textualizes her own internalization of the culture's double image of women as pure and impure before suggesting that addicted mothers signify a "terrible, double impurity" (p. 317) that contemporary discourse attempts to administer and contain. Pamela Banting's investigation of Daphne Marlatt's erotics of rhetoric lays stress on the discursive subject, while Diane Chisholm considers the ways in which