

Feminist Object(ive)s: Writing Art Histories

Tuesday 21st May 2013, 12-6pm

The Treehouse, Berrick Saul Building, University of York

11:45-11:55 – Registration, BSB foyer

12:00 – Welcome from Kostas Stasinopoulos (University of York) & Amy Tobin (University of York) with group introductions.

12:30 – Session One: **Absences and presences writing art history with slippery figures**

'Nothing to see: making meaning from the writing of photography in the feminine'

Harriet Riches (Kingston University)

'Actionmyth, Historypanic: The entry of VALIE EXPORT's *Aktionhose: Genitalpanik* into art history.'

Hilary Robinson (School of Art and Design, Middlesex)

'Staying Anxious': Encountering Ulrike Meinhof in Silvia Kolbowski's *A Few Howls Again?*'

Henrietta Stanford (Courtauld Institute of Art)

Discussion chaired by Kuang Vivian Sheng (University of York).

14:00 – Lunch – not provided

14:50 – Session Two: **Reframed: sexuality, sensuality and Queer Histories**

'A Window for Stan Brakhage'

Sylvie Simonds (McGill)

'Lesbian Separatism and the Erotic in the work and reception of the films of Barbara Hammer'

James Boaden (University of York)

'Re-enacting Histories: Boudry/ Lorenz's *Salomania*'

Catherine Grant (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Discussion chaired by Clarissa Kennedy Jacob (Royal Holloway).

16:10 – 20 minute break with tea and coffee

16:30 – **Respondent session**, Vicky Horne (Edinburgh University), Amy Tobin, Kostas Stasinopoulos & Kuang Vivian Sheng.

Chaired by Catherine Spencer (University of York).

16:45 – **Roundtable discussion** and wine reception

18:00 – Finish

Abstracts and biographies

James Boaden - 'Lesbian Separatism and the Erotic in the work and reception of the films of Barbara Hammer'

I will primarily talk about Barbara Hammer's short film *Dyketactics* and the way in which it has been looked at as a lesbian separatist work. However, I will also consider how this has obscured its relation to other contemporary queer filmmakers working in the 1970s and also married it to an anti-erotic form of cultural feminism that is antithetical to its content. I will look at how contemporary filmmakers like AK Burns, AL Steiner and Liz Rosenfeld have recently recovered her work in order to rewrite this history and align her early work not only with later forms of lesbian erotica - such as the magazine *On Our Backs* - but also with the gay male pornography of Fred Halstead and Wakefield Poole, provoking quite complex questions about queer memory.

A Short clip of *Dyketactics* is available to view here: <http://vimeo.com/2911052>

James Boaden is lecturer in the History of Art department at the University Of York. His research focuses on American art from the mid-twentieth century, and looks in particular at the crossover between experimental film culture and the art world during that period. In 2008-2009 James was the research associate on the project AHRC funded project 'Queer Surrealism' within the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacies at the University of Manchester, and subsequently an external advisor on the project organising and contributing to a number of events.

Catherine Grant, 'Re-enacting Histories: Boudry/Lorenz's *Salomania*'

Taking a film by the filmmakers Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz as my starting point, this paper considers how re-enactment might be a productive model for feminist art histories. Questions that will be raised include how the re-enactment of historical gestures and dialogue might re-animate them in the present, and what it might mean to re-embody a previous moment. Drawing on research looking at artists and writers as 'fans' of feminism, this film will be considered as the product of 'fan-scholarship'; a creative and passionate research that brings out the queerness of the figure of Salome. Running through the film and associated materials is an attention to the pedagogical potential of watching and becoming Salome. Viewers are encouraged to continue the filmmakers' research, as a range of material is presented both within and alongside the film from the Hays Code to Yvonne Rainer's re-imagining of Salome's dance in her 1972 film *Lives of the Performers*.

Catherine Grant is a Lecturer in the Visual Cultures Department, Goldsmiths. She is the co-editor of the book *Girls! Girls! Girls!* (2011) which looks at the representation of girlhood in contemporary art. She has also written about being a "Fan of Feminism" in the *Oxford Art Journal*, and co-edited a special issue of *Art History* on "Creative Writing and Art History". She is currently researching re-enactment as a mode of contemporary art that embraces political and personal histories in order to re-imagine them for the present.

Harriet Riches, 'Nothing to see: making meaning from the writing of photography in the feminine'

In this short paper, I wish to discuss some of the issues raised in the study of historiography, particularly how details of women's active contribution to visual culture are often absent, but in which their presence is inscribed in the gendered language of its discursive production. I take as my focus an advertisement for the Rochester Optical Company's 'Premo Camera' that appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1894, to consider the problems associated with studying the objects, practices, or subjects that appear to be written out of history. A focus on what is revealed—and concealed—in the language photography was written, at this moment, invites the post-structuralist method of feminist historians such as Joan Scott and Denise Riley, whose emphasis on the gender and discourse has been criticized as neglecting the 'reality' of women's experience. By considering both its continuing relevance and also the problems associated with such a methodology, I hope to engage with Marsha Meskimmon's suggestion that we should focus on the processes through which women's cultural production has come to "make meaning" (rather than just focusing on reclaiming the visibility of the objects that they have produced). And in particular, Meskimmon's deployment of Rosa Braidotti's demand for the contemporary feminist to make new connections in those places where there is "nothing to see".

Harriet Riches is senior lecturer in the Art History and Visual Culture Department at Kingston University. Harriet completed her PhD on self-representation and the performance of the photographic medium in the work of Francesca Woodman at UCL and is now pursuing research focused on gender and the historical discourse of photography for a book project provisionally titled *Camera/Woman: Gender and the History of Photography* that addresses the relationship between the construction of femininity and the historiographical construction of the medium of photography from the 1850s to the present day.

Hilary Robinson – 'Actionmyth, Historypanic: The entry of VALIE EXPORT's *Aktionhose: Genitalpanik* into art history.'

The story is well-known: In 1968, VALIE EXPORT walked into a porn cinema wielding a sub-machine gun. Her hair munched up, and the crotch of her jeans cut out to expose her genitals, she walked among the customers, confronting them with the real version of what they were looking at on the screen. This has entered into the mythology of early feminist art, and the photograph taken of her at the time has become iconographic.

Except: it was not like this. Few of the points above are correct; most are not. The myths have multiplied to the point where one recent article eventually suggests that maybe the work never happened at all. Finding out the true history of this multi-layered work has been a fascinating journey. Errors have appeared in recent catalogues, have been repeated by respected writers, and have been circulated on the web sites of MOMA and of the Tate.

This paper will trace the history of the history of the work, disentangling the myth from what can be ascertained, add in newly-discovered information, and expose new layers of mythologizing – from recent accounts, and from Peter Weibel, EXPORT's partner at the time – for what they are. In total, the paper is a heartfelt plea for people to do real archival work. But it is also an examination of and argument for a work that is indeed a significant example of early feminist practice, and a proposal that the actual work itself and its history are more significant in its original politics and in the politics of its mythologizing, than the version in the myth.

Hilary Robinson is the Dean of the School of Art and Design at Middlesex University. She is the editor of 'Feminism-Art-Theory 1968-2000: an anthology' and has also published 'Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the politics of art by women' and 'Visibly Female: women and art today'. She is working on a new edition of the 'Feminism Art-Theory' anthology, and also on a history of the women's movement in art. Her other areas of interest include art criticism, performance art, and the impact of the arts and cultural industries on post-industrial cities.

Sylvie Simonds – 'A Window for Stan Brakhage'

Carolee Schneemann's kinetic theatre performance *Eye/Body:36 Transformative Actions* (1962-1963) has become one of the most iconic works of feminist art. A considerable amount of attention has been paid to the role of her body and the 'goddess' symbolism in this performance. However, the twelve painting constructions or 'environmental elements' which Schneemann posed with in such performances as *Windows to Stan Brakhage* (1962), *Colorado House*, (1962) *Fur Wheel*, (1962) and *Ice Box* (1962), are rarely examined. Instead, Schneemann's body has been theorized as the dominant focus of these works and her painting constructions have been reduced to mere background elements. As a result, these objects are rarely associated with the performance itself. Recent exhibitions such as *WACK!* (LA MoCA) have categorized and framed *Eye/Body* within the context of body art and late 1970s feminist art, however, this view of history isolates Schneemann's work and fails to account for the collaborative exchange that the artist had with male artists in the 1960s.

This paper broadens an interpretation of *Eye/Body* by examining Schneemann's painting constructions, as a form of artistic correspondence that she shared with the filmmaker Stan Brakhage. I examine this artistic exchange, which takes the form an artistic correspondence that I have identified as a series of 'visual rhymes.' These range from witty letters, essays and sculptural objects that Schneemann made for her performance *Eye/Body*, as part of her ongoing conversations with Brakhage. This collaborative relationship provides insight into the aesthetic and political development of what has been defined as Schneemann's 'kinetic theater' and exposes a far more nuanced and dynamic interpretation of *Eye/Body* than that presented within existing scholarship. I will argue the importance of this exchange to a wider discussion of gender politics in the 1960s.

Sylvie Simonds is a PhD candidate in Art History at McGill University. She has recently submitted her thesis 'A Counterculture Movement: Examining Carolee

Schneemann's kinetic theatre (1963-1970)' and is the current recipient of a McGill Principle Fellowship, Arts Insight Dissertation Completion Fellowship, and Arts Travel Award followed by a McGill Provost Award. The Bram Garber Foundation, The Getty Foundation and McGill University have also generously funded her research.

Henrietta Stanford – ‘Staying Anxious’: Encountering Ulrike Meinhof in Silvia Kolbowski’s *A Few Howls Again?*

“It is surely no mere happenstance that the art and politics of the 1970s have come back to haunt us”, observed Emily Apter of the growing tendency in recent - and we might add, particularly feminist-identified - art practice to approach the present political moment via an analogical relation to the “not-so distant” radical past. In Silvia Kolbowski’s 2010 video project, *A Few Howls Again?*, it is Ulrike Meinhof, the political essayist and founding member of the Red Army Faction - West Germany’s notorious urban guerrilla group, whose high female membership, and temporal overlap with second-wave feminism, would spark accusations of “emancipation run to excess” - who stages a return. Just in time, it seems, for the mass uprisings and social upheavals of the Arab Spring, Occupy movement, the August riots and Pussy Riot, she rises: her corpse revived by the vitalizing agency of language, and the erratic corporeal rhythms of a representational double, who lodges and calls forth the West German militant, or rather, the many effigies - the voices - that speak in her name. Meinhof’s arrival on the scene is, however, far from smooth: her ventriloquised corpse is weary, introspective, one might even say, *anxious*. In fact, *A Few Howls Again?* is awash with anxious affect; enmeshed in what Freud would identify as the temporal paradoxes of anxiety and its logic of retrospective anticipation, it places the “anxiety of powerlessness” at its core. In this paper, I will consider Kolbowski’s ‘resurrection’ of the ‘female journalist turned terrorist’ via a sustained analysis of the video’s anxious temporality, and reliance on ‘analogical thinking’, to reflect upon the ethico-political stakes of *staying anxious*.

Henrietta Stanford is a PhD candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her thesis title is ‘Affective Afterlives’: Encountering Ulrike Meinhof in the Work of Yvonne Rainer, Gerhard Richter and Silvia Kolbowski’. Situated at the interface of psychoanalysis, feminist, and political theory, my doctoral research is focusing on a sequence of projects all of which stage a return to the 1970s era of political violence, generational rebellion, and state repression in West Germany; and do so via a sustained engagement with the phantasmatic figure of the ‘female journalist turned terrorist’. In 2011, Henrietta was the Helena Rubenstein fellow on the Whitney Independent Study Programme.