

Fig. 1.1. Johan Zoffany (1733/4–1810), *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, 1772–7/8, oil on canvas, 123.5 × 155 cm. London: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

## ABOUT CANONS AND CULTURE WARS

The term *canon* is derived from the Greek *kanon*, which means 'rule' or 'standard', evoking both social regulation and military organisation. Originally, the canon had religious overtones, being the officially accepted list of writings that forms the 'Scriptures'. The first canonisation exercise was the selection of the Hebrew Scriptures, made by an emergent priestly class around the seventh century BCE, of which the historian Ellis Rivkin has argued that the choice was 'not primarily the work of scribes, scholars or editors who sought out neglected traditions about wilderness experience, but of a class struggling to gain power'.<sup>1</sup> Canons may be understood, therefore, as the retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalise this function. Canonicity refers to both the assumed quality of an included text and to the status a text acquires because it belongs within an authoritative collection. Religions confer sanctity upon their canonised texts, often implying, if not divine authorship, at least divine authority.

With the rise of academies and universities, canons have become secular, referring to bodies of literature or the pantheon of art (Fig. 1.1). The canon signifies what academic institutions establish as the best, the most representative, and the most significant texts – or objects – in literature, art history or music. Repositories of trans-historical aesthetic value, the canons of various cultural practices establish what is unquestionably great, as well as what must be studied as a model by those aspiring to the practice. The canon comprehensively constitutes the patrimony of any person wanting to be considered 'educated'. As Dominick LaCapra comments, the canon reaffirms a 'displaced religious sense of the sacred text as the beacon of common culture for an educated elite'.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, there has never been just one, single canon. Art historically, there are competing canons. During the great era of art historical activity in the nineteenth century, many artists as well as schools and traditions were rediscovered and revalued. Rembrandt, for instance, was reclaimed in the nineteenth century as a great religious and spiritual artist instead of being dismissed, as he had been in the eighteenth, as a sloppy painter of low subjects, while Hals, long avoided as a minor Flemish genre painter of no great skill or distinction, became an inspiration to Manet and his generation of modernists in search of new techniques of painting 'life'.<sup>3</sup>

Always associated with canonicity as a structure, however, is the idea of naturally revealed, universal value and individual achievement that serves to justify the highly select and privileged membership of the canon that denies any selectivity. As the record of autonomous genius, the canon appears to arise spontaneously. In 'What is a Masterpiece?' the art historian Kenneth Clark acknowledged the fluctuations of taste according to social and historical vagaries that allowed Rembrandt to be disdained in the eighteenth century or artists that we no longer value to have been highly rated in the nineteenth. None the less, Clark insists that 'Although many meanings cluster around the word masterpiece, it is above all the work of an artist of genius who has been absorbed by the spirit of the time in a way that has made his individual experiences universal'.<sup>4</sup>

The canon is not just the product of the academy. It is also created by artists or writers. Canons are formed from the ancestral figures evoked in an artist/writer/composer's work through a process that Harold Bloom, author of the major defence of canonicity, *The Western Canon* (1994), identified as 'the anxiety of influence', and I, in another mode of argument, the avant-garde gambit of 'reference, deference, and difference'.<sup>5</sup> The canon thus not only determines what we read, look at, listen to, see at the art gallery and study in school or university. It is formed retrospectively by what artists themselves select as their legitimating or enabling predecessors. If, however, artists – because they are women or non-European – are both left out of the records and ignored as part of the cultural heritage, the canon becomes an increasingly impoverished and impoverishing filter for the totality of cultural possibilities generation after generation. Today, the canons are settled into well-known patterns because of the role of institutions such as museums, publishing houses and university curricula. We know these canons – Renaissance, modernist, etc. through what gets hung in art galleries, played in concerts, published and taught as literature or art history in universities and schools, gets put on the curriculum as the standard and necessary topics for study at all levels in the educating – acculturating, assimilating – process.

In recent years the culture wars have broken out as new social movements target canons as pillars of the established elites and supports of hegemonic social groups, classes and 'races'.<sup>6</sup> Canonicity has been subjected to a withering critique for the selectivity it disavows, for its racial and sexual exclusivity and for the ideological values which are enshrined not just in the choice of favoured texts but in the methods of their interpretation – celebratory affirmations of a world where, according to Henry Louis Gates Jnr., 'men were men and men were white, when scholar-critics were white men and when women and people of colour were voiceless, faceless servants or laborers, pouring tea and filling brandy snifters in the boardrooms of old boys' clubs'.<sup>7</sup> Critique of the canon has been motivated by those who feel themselves voiceless and deprived of a recognised cultural history because the canon excludes the texts written, painted or composed and performed by their social, gender or cultural community. Without such recognition, these groups lack representations of themselves to contest the stereotyping, discriminating and oppressive ones which figure in that which has

been canonised. Henry Louis Gates Jnr. explains the political implications of enlarged canons that accommodate the voice of the Other:

To reform core curriculums, to account for the comparable eloquence of the African, the Asian, and the Middle Eastern traditions, is to begin to prepare our students for their roles as citizens of world cultures through a truly human notion of the 'humanities' rather than – as Mr. Bennett [Secretary for Education under Ronald Reagan] and Mr. [Harold] Bloom would have it – as guardians of the last frontier outpost of white male western culture, the keepers of the master's pieces.<sup>8</sup>

The 'discourse of the Other' must of necessity 'difference the canon'. Yet it reveals a new difficulty. However strategically necessary the new privileging of the Other certainly is in a world so radically imbalanced in favour of the 'privileged male of the white race', there is still a binary opposition in place which cannot ever relieve the Other of being *other* to a dominant norm.

Different kinds of moves have been necessary even to imagine a way beyond that trap. Toni Morrison has argued that American literature, whose canon so forcefully excludes African American voices, should, none the less, be read as structurally conditioned by 'a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence'.<sup>9</sup> By identifying this structurally negative relationship to African culture and Africans within the American canon of white literature, notions of excluded others are transformed into questions about the formation of Eurocentric intellectual domination and the resultant impoverishment of what is read and studied. This argument can be compared with that Rozsika Parker and I first advanced in 1981 in opposition to an initial feminist attempt to put women into the canon of art history. We used the apparent exclusion of women as artists to reveal how, structurally, the discourse of phallogocentric art history relied upon the category of a negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1990s, the issue of the total gender asymmetry in the canon, implicit in all feminist interrogations of art history, became an articulated platform through a panel organised by Linda Nochlin, *Firing the Canon*, in New York in 1990 and through the critical writing of Nanette Salomon on the canon from Vasari to Janson, cited at the head of Part 1.<sup>11</sup> Feminist critics of the canons of Western culture could easily critique the all-male club represented by Ernst Gombrich's *Story of Art* and the original editions of H. W. Janson's *History of Art* that featured not one women artist.<sup>12</sup> Feminists have shown how canons actively create a patrilineal genealogy of father-son succession and replicate patriarchal mythologies of exclusively masculine creativity.<sup>13</sup> Susan Hardy Aiken, for instance, traces the parallels between the competitive modelling of academic practices, the Oedipal stories narrated by canons, the rivalries that serve as the unconscious motor of intellectual or cultural development, all of which produce the coincidence of the 'noble lineage of male textuality, the parallel

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formation of canons and the colonizing projects of western Europe organised rhetorically around the opposition civilisation and barbarism'. She concludes:

These links between priestly authority, the implications of 'official' textuality, and the exclusionary and hegemonic motives within canon formation have obvious significance for the question of women and canonicity . . . Woman . . . becomes a profanation, a heretical voice from the wilderness that threatens the *patrius sermo*, – the orthodox, public, canonical Word – with the full force of another tongue – a mother tongue – the *lingua materna* that for those still within the confines of the old order must remain unspeakable.<sup>14</sup>

Is feminism to intervene to create a maternal genealogy to compete with the paternal lineage and to invoke the voice of the Mother to counter the text of the Father enshrined by existing canons? Susan Hardy Aiken warns: 'one might, by attacking, reify the power one opposes.'<sup>15</sup> Against the closed library, from which, in her famous feminist parable on the exclusivity of the canon, *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Virginia Woolf so eloquently showed women to be shut out, we might propose more than another bookroom. Instead we need a *polylogue*: 'the interplay of many voices, a kind of creative "barbarism" that would disrupt the monological, colonizing, centric drives of "civilisation" . . . Such a vision lives, as Adrienne Rich has taught us, in a re-vision: an eccentric re-reading, re-discovering what the canon's priestly mantle would conceal: the entanglements of all literature with the power dynamics of culture.'<sup>16</sup>

#### THEORETICAL MODELS FOR THE CRITIQUE OF THE CANON: IDEOLOGY AND MYTH

The critique of canons has been made on the basis of an inside/outside opposition. The canon is selective in its inclusions and is revealed as political in its patterns of exclusion. We might, therefore, approach the problem of the canon as critical outsiders with one of two projects in mind.

The first is to expand the Western canon so that it will include what it hitherto refused – women, for instance, and minority cultures (Fig. 1.2). The other is to abolish canons altogether and argue that all cultural artefacts have significance. The latter appears inherently more political in its totalising critique of canonicity. Strategically, however, I suggest we need a more complex analysis if we are not to end up in a position where insiders – representatives of Western masculine European canons – gird themselves to defend truth and beauty and its traditions against what Harold Bloom dismisses as the School of Resentment,<sup>17</sup> while former outsiders remain outsiders, 'the voices of the Other', by developing 'other' subdisciplinary formations – African American or Black Studies, Latino Studies, Women's Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, Cultural Studies and so forth. There can be no doubt how necessary and creative



Fig. 1.2. Faith Ringgold (b. 1930), *Dancing in the Louvre*, from *The French Collection*, 1991, acrylic on canvas with painted fabric. 183.7 × 200 cm. Private Collection

such commitment of scholarship, resources and acknowledgement is to areas hitherto ignored and understudied. But this cannot avoid the danger, so evident in fundamentally, and often overtly, racist and sexist class societies, that these initiatives may unwittingly reproduce the very segregation – ghettoisation – which excluded groups aim to challenge by demanding intellectual and educational equal rights for their own excluded minority.

Following Teresa de Lauretis, the opposition between inside and outside can be displaced. De Lauretis locates the critical project of feminism as a 'view from elsewhere' which is, however, never outside that which it is critically 're-viewing'.

For that 'elsewhere' is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history; it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as the spaces in the margins of

hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge-apparati.<sup>18</sup>

The movement is not from the spaces of existing representation to those beyond them, 'the space outside discourse', for there can be no such resource. Rather Teresa de Lauretis means 'a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system to the space not-represented yet implied (unseen) in them'.<sup>19</sup> This other scene, already there, which is as yet unrepresented, has, however, been rendered almost *unrepresentable* by the existing modes of hegemonic discourses. Working 'against the grain', reading 'between the lines', Teresa de Lauretis suggests that we have to take up the contradictions in which the represented and unrepresented concurrently exist.

Like Woman in phallogocentric culture, feminism is already posited as the difference, that is, as something other to, and outside, art history, in contradiction to its inevitable logic. Thus feminist art history is an oxymoron. In this book I shall be exploring how to use this position of *apparent* alterity – the view from elsewhere/voice of the Other/Mother – to deconstruct the oppositions inside/outside, norm/difference which ultimately condense on to the binary pair man/woman for which the others become related metaphors. The question is how to *make a difference*, by analysing this structuring of difference, which already implicates me as a writer in ways that only writing itself will expose. My title uses the active verbal form, *Differencing the Canon*, rather than the noun 'Difference and/in the Canon' 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.

Furthermore, I suggest that we need to recognise another aspect of sexual differentiation, namely, *desire* in the formation of canons and the writing of counter-histories. The tenacity of the defenders of the present canon is explicable only in terms of a profound investment in the pleasures its stories and its heroes provide at more than social or even ideological levels. I shall argue for 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.

Because of being structurally positioned as outsiders, feminists are susceptible to the desire to create heroines to replace or supplement those heroes our colleagues who are men find so affirming within the canonical structure. I am obliged to question both that desire and the very possibility of its realisation by looking again at the mythologies of the woman artist Western feminism has been fabricating. The introduction of this term, *mythology*, marks a shift of emphasis from the usual concerns of a social history of art, with its desire to reconfigure the conditions of artistic production in such a way as to get closer to the grain of historically sited social and cultural practices. In this book I am working from the side of reading and writing, reading the texts that different historical practices have left us and writing others that enter into a 'covenant

of reading' in a fully acknowledged search for the stories of women, my own included. The concept of myth seems for the moment as vivid and useful as the notion of ideology.<sup>20</sup> Bonding structuralist concepts of myth to Marxist theories of ideology, Roland Barthes identified the deep structures animating contemporary cultures that drew upon the character of myth itself to disown and to displace from view the ideologically fabricated meanings being produced. According to Barthes, myth is depoliticised speech, and its singular bourgeois form functions precisely to disown History, creating Nature – a mythic erasure of time and thus the possibility of political challenge and change.<sup>21</sup> In the writing of art's histories, the place of the artist, and of the woman artist, are overdetermined by mythic structures that naturalise a particular range of meanings for masculinity, femininity, sexual and cultural difference. Making a difference to the canon, itself a myth of creativity and gender privilege, cannot be achieved without a repoliticising scrutiny both of its deep structures – why are women Other to/within it? – and of its surface effects: the indifference to and exclusion of the work of artists who are women from the canon. Thus the question of desire – that enshrined in the canon as well as that which motivates a critique – runs parallel with analysis of the mythic structure which is encoded in the (sexual) difference the canon embodies.

Considering the canon as a mythic structure avoids the distracting arguments over who and what is or is not, should or should not be in which canon. Beyond the culture wars over its contents, which keeps us at the mythic level of a debate about quality, art, genius, significance and so forth, we need to pierce the naturalising carapace of myth to delineate the social and political investments in canonicity which make it so powerful an element in the hegemony of dominant social groups and interests and ask:

#### WHAT IS THE CANON – STRUCTURALLY?

More than a collection of valued objects/texts or a list of revered masters, I define the canon as a discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to the legitimisation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with Culture. To learn about Art, through the canonical discourse, is to know masculinity as power and meaning, and all three as identical with Truth and Beauty. So long as feminism also tries to be a discourse about art, truth and beauty, it can only confirm the structure of the canon, and by doing so corroborate masculine mastery and power, however many women's names it tries to add, or fuller historical accounts it manages to produce. There are famous women artists now: Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keefe. But a careful analysis of their status will find that they are not canonical – providing a benchmark for greatness. They are rather notorious, sensational, commodifiable or token, and will be as virulently attacked as they are lovingly adored. The stumbling block at all times for their acknowledgement within the canon lies in the unassimilable

question of sexual difference as a challenge to the very possibility of one 'rule' or 'standard' that is the canon.

Canonicity exists in many forms, the better to produce, at the cultural and ideological level, the single standard of the greatest and the best for all times. 'Tradition' is the canon's 'natural' face, and in this form cultural regulation participates in what Raymond Williams names social and political hegemony. In distinction to gross forms of coercive social or political domination, the Marxist term *hegemony* explains the way a particular social and political order culturally saturates a society so profoundly that its regime is lived by its populations simply as 'common sense'. Hierarchy becomes a natural order, and what appears to survive from the past because of its inherent significance determines the values of the present. Williams calls 'Tradition . . . in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits'. It is always, however, 'more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation'.<sup>22</sup>

Tradition is, therefore, not merely what the past leaves us. It must always be understood as *selective* tradition: 'an intentionally shaping version of a past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification'.<sup>23</sup> Tradition cultivates its own inevitability by erasing the fact of its selectivity in regard to practices, meanings, gender, 'races' and classes. What is thus obscured is the active process of exclusion or neglect operated by the present-day makers of tradition. 'What has to be said about any tradition', argues Williams, 'is that it is . . . an aspect of *contemporary* social and cultural organisation, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class'.<sup>24</sup> Versions of the past ratify a present order, producing 'a predisposed continuity' which favours what Gayatri Spivak names as 'the privileged male of the white race'.<sup>25</sup>

Specific strategies characteristic, or even definitive, of the discipline of art history in the twentieth century can be read as not merely constituting a selective tradition privileging white masculine creativity to the exclusion of all women artists and men of minority cultures. The specific forms of art history's discursive formations tell more than a story of art. They also articulate historically changing configurations between classes, races, sexualities and genders secured by the production of sexual and other differentiations of power within our culture. Discrimination against women artists, for instance, can be understood institutionally. We can combat it through political activism, campaigning for more women artists at the Whitney Biennial and so forth, as we did in the early 1970s. But let us recall the response to the Whitney Biennial of 1993, where a broad and comprehensive representation of artists from all American communities evenly divided by gender, class and sexuality was met by an extreme, conservative negation of the event in the press. The exhibition was deemed to be unrepresentative of *the* American culture and *the* tradition these canonical critics sought to legitimate exclusively. The backlash reveals that the belief that we could correct the imbalances is mistaken. In order to shift the lines of demarcation we must attend both to the level of enunciation – what is said in discourses and done in practices in museums and galleries – and to the level of



effect, that is, how what is said articulates hierarchies, norms, asserting elite white masculine heterosexual domination and privilege as 'common sense' and insisting that anything else is an unaesthetic aberration: bad art, politics instead of art, partisanship instead of universal values, motivated expression instead of disinterested truth and beauty.

Since the potency of hegemony is not pure domination and absolute exclusion, it works by trying to draw us in so as to construct an effective *self-identification* with the hegemonic forms: a specific internalised 'socialization' which is 'expected to be positive but which, if that is not possible, will rest on a (resigned) recognition of the inevitable and the necessary'.<sup>26</sup> Cultural struggle at the moment is focused specifically on a contest around the canons of literature, music, art. These challenges to the existing selective versions of historical and contemporary creativity, which are passed off as the singular and valid for all times and places, and which we call Tradition, have arisen from those communities who most acutely experience the effects of exclusions. Desiring to be artists, or scholars or teachers, we are conflicted by the forced internalisation, in what the standard curricula of study decree, of our own communities' absence from, marginality in, or negation by the sphere of cultural production and meaning-making. Out of the range of the excluded jointly protesting the canon comes a counter-hegemony, with its counter-identifications – or at least the beginning of those alliances through which the domination of one social group can be contested by those others it denies and debases. At present the resistance is fragmented into special studies, each pursuing its own agenda in the name of a radical identity politics. Concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony point in the direction of strategies whose aim is to foster alliance across the splintered fragments of the contemporary world. These must involve understanding of how difference currently works to organise segregation and division and even makes us desire the continuance of its frontiers.

At the same time, it would be counter-productive to seek to abolish difference for such an ideal of universalism without particularity retains an imperialist notion of imagined sameness and unity. Differences can co-exist, cross-fertilise and challenge, be acknowledged, confronted, celebrated and not remain destructive of the other in an expanded but shared cultural space. Instead of the present exclusivity of the cultural canon contested by fragmented special studies all premised on the binary oppositions of identity politics, insiders/outside, margins/centres, high/low and so forth, the cultural field may be re-imagined 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.

Given that we can define art history as a hegemonic discourse, we are forced then to ask: can feminists be 'art historians' – that is, professionals within its extended remit of curation, history and criticism? Or does that not of itself imply self-identification with the hegemonic tradition embodied in institutionalised art history, with the canonical as a systematic pattern of inclusions and exclusions which are generated

from and sustain deep structures of social and economic power? All hegemonic systems depend for their survival on some degree of pliability towards the forces or groups which contest and resist incorporation. These oppositions must either be included or disqualified. It is not yet clear whether feminism can be incorporated or whether it will itself develop forms that radically resist and provoke the hegemonic.

The notion of hegemony implies the constant negotiation of such inevitable conflicts through the induction of the subjects, both potential art historians and the art-loving public, into an identification with its selective version of the past. Certain activities or positions may be incorporated better to protect the underlying interests by concession and innovation. A bit of newness and controversy may actually keep the discipline alive and so will be permitted, but always at the margins. What speaks out loud, however – the underlying formations of power, laying art history as an academic exercise bare to a more critical reading of its effects and purposes – will be derided, positioned as aberrant. One strategy has been to say that, for instance, social histories of art or feminist studies are no longer *art history*. They are politics, sociology, ideology, methodology, or ‘women’s studies’ or, the worst, *Theory*.

Now, feminists face a new paradox. If we retreat to the more hospitable domains of interdisciplinary women’s or cultural studies, if we do not engage continually with art history as discourse and institution, our work will not disturb the canon and its discourses on art and artists. Yet we may need to keep a distance from the professionalised disciplinary modes of art history in order to develop our ability to raise the repressed question of gender within it. We cannot simply decamp. That would leave artists to the effects of art history’s canonising discourses, which, in real terms, may seriously damage chances of being able to work and live as an artist if you belong to a non-canonical social group.

As a selective tradition thus defined, the canon, therefore, poses further specific and complex problems for feminism which overtake the narrow focus of this Marxist analysis signalled here by the necessary recognition of hegemony as a social and political force in culture. Let me quote Freud on Marx:

The strength of Marxism clearly lies, not in its view of history or the prophecies of the future that are based on it, but in its sagacious indication of the decisive influence which the economic circumstances of men have upon their intellectual, ethical and artistic attitudes. A number of connections and implications were thus uncovered which had previously been totally overlooked. But it cannot be assumed that economic motives are the only ones that determine human beings in society . . . It is altogether incomprehensible how psychological factors can be overlooked where what is in question are the reactions of human beings in society.<sup>27</sup>

PSYCHO-SYMBOLIC INVESTMENT IN THE  
CANON, OR, BEING CHILDISH ABOUT ARTISTS

In her interpretation of Freud's aesthetics, Sarah Kofman provided us with a way of analysing what is invested in the canon at a level beyond the economic or ideological interests of dominant social groups. Canons are defended with an almost theological zeal that indicates more than the historical coincidence between the ecclesiastical use of the word *canon* for the revered and authenticated texts of the Bible and its function in cultural traditionalism. The canon is fundamentally a mode for the worship of the artist, which is in turn a form of masculine narcissism.

As a mere layman, Freud appeared to play down his own contribution to the understanding of art. For Kofman these disclaimers were, in fact, ironic.

But at the end of the text, as in 'The Uncanny,' the 'connoisseurs' are reduced to glib talkers caught up in subjective opinions, elevating their own fantasies about works of art to the status of knowledge, yet unable to solve the riddle of the text in question. Freud's plea to them for lenient criticism should thus be interpreted ironically. What Freud means is that the art 'connoisseur' criticizes without knowing what he is talking about, for he is talking about himself; only the psychoanalyst can disclose the 'historical truth,' if not the 'material' truth of what he says.<sup>28</sup>

For Freud, therefore, the 'public's real interest in art lay not in art itself, but in the image it has of the artist as a "great man"', even though this fact is often repressed.<sup>29</sup> To unravel the riddle of a text is consequently to do violence to the idealised image of the artist as genius – to commit some kind of 'murder' – hence the resistance, not merely to psychoanalytic work on art in general but to any kind of demystifying analysis such as that carried out by social, critical and feminist historians of art. In writings on art – his contemporaries were some of the so-called founding fathers of the discipline and canons of art history – as well as in general public interest in art, Freud identified a combination of theological and narcissistic tendencies. Freud established parallels between the history of humankind revealed in anthropology and the psychological history of the individual mapped by the discipline he was inventing. Thus ancient rituals and forms of religion such as totemism and deism appeared to correspond to stages of infantile psychological development operating in each individual.<sup>30</sup> Freud discerned the way in which what we might imagine to be a highly sophisticated social practice – art appreciation – can be informed by psychic structures that are characteristic of certain powerful moments of *archaic* experience in the history of the human subject which, in a sublimated form, are culturally perpetuated in social institutions and cultural practices such as religion and art.

The excessive valorisation of the artist in modern Western art history as a 'great man' corresponds with the infantile stage of idealisation of the father. This phase is,

however, speedily undermined by another set of feelings – of rivalry and disappointment – which can give rise to a competing fantasy and the installation of another imaginary figure: the hero, who always rebels against, overthrows or even murders the overpowering father. Sarah Kofman explains:

People's attitude towards artists repeats this ambivalence. The cult of the artist is ambiguous in that it consists of the worship of the father and the hero alike; the cult of the hero is always a form of self-worship, since the hero is the first ego ideal. This attitude is religious but also narcissistic in character and repeats that of the child toward the father and of the parents towards the child, to whom they attribute all the 'gifts' and good fortune that they bestowed upon themselves during the narcissistic period in infancy.<sup>31</sup>

This theme of the artist as incorporating both worship of the idealised father and narcissistic identification with the hero leads to another observation which should resonate for the reader thinking about canonical art history and its typical forms of monograph, biography and *catalogue raisonné*. If the artist functions as a heroic object of narcissistic fantasy, inheriting the adoration accorded to the father, this might explain the strong interest in biography, psychobiography and the way, in art history for instance, that so much of the work on art works functions to produce a life for the artist, a heroic journey through struggles and ordeals, a battle with professional fathers for the final winning of a place in what is always his – the father's – canon. It also takes us beyond the issues of sexism and discrimination, for the artist is thus a symbolic figure, through which public fantasies are given representational form. To an extent these fantasies, infantile and narcissistic, are not gendered exclusively masculine. But they do function to sustain a patriarchal legend.

Writing about an artist in a biographical mode is itself a doubly determined operation. On the one hand, it represents a desire to get closer to the hero, while, on the other, the work and the hero must remain sacralised, *taboo*, in order both to avoid the unconsciously desired murder of the father that the hero disguises and to keep up the theological illusion of art which similarly compensates for these conflicting desires. Thus Freud wrote in his study on Leonardo:

Biographers are fixated on their heroes in a quite special way. In many cases they have chosen their hero as the subject of their studies because – for reasons of their personal emotional life – they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. Then they devote their energies to the task of idealisation, aimed at enrolling the great man among the class of their infantile models – at reviving in him, perhaps, the child's idea of his father. To gratify this wish they obliterate the individual features of their subject's physiognomy; they smooth over the traces of his life's struggles with internal and external resistances, and they tolerate in him no vestige of human weakness or imperfection. They thus

present us with what is in fact a cold, strange, ideal figure, instead of a human being to whom we might feel ourselves distantly related.<sup>32</sup>

In her analysis of Freud's reading of biographers, for whom we could substitute art historians, Kofman noted the play of idealisation, identification and also the necessity to keep the artist as something apart, and special. Thus Freud carefully manoeuvres a space for the psychoanalyst to function as a mediator between the artist and the public. The biographer/connoisseur/art historian writes out of a constant ambivalence, a desire to bring the artist closer, and yet to maintain a distance, to manage admiration and rivalry in which the murderous desires unconsciously aimed at the father and displaced on to the admired hero are managed through the writer's mastery of the subject. The theological worship of the artist veils its underside, a narcissistic identification with an idealised hero. The application of psychoanalysis to art itself appears murderous because it tries to renounce these infantile investments in the figure of the artist/hero, to allow the artist to be examined and explained by psychic mechanisms to which we are all subject.

On the one hand, the work of art is one of the offshoots of what is repressed in the artist, and as such is symbolic and symptomatic. It can be deciphered from traces, minute details which indicate that the repression is not entirely successful; this failure is the only thing which opens a space of legibility in the work.<sup>33</sup>

For Freud there is no mystery to art; but there is the challenge of deciphering its meanings which arises not because the artist is different, but as a result of the artist's 'normality' – being like the rest of us.

The psychoanalyst acts as a mediator between the artist and the public, between father and son, because the son cannot bear to look his father in the face any more than he can confront his own unconscious . . . The contribution of psychoanalysis to biography is to have shown that the artist is no more a great man or a hero than we are. The 'application' of psychoanalysis completely reverses the stance of traditional biographies. 'Killing' the father means renouncing both the theological idealisation and the narcissistic identification which prompts the subject's desire to be his own father. Yet it also means respecting the superego, which alone makes possible the renunciation of the pleasure principle.<sup>34</sup>

Sarah Kofman positioned Freud, and indirectly psychoanalysis, as a 'new iconoclast', challenging the religious idealisation and narcissistic identification with the artist in order to pass beyond 'the childhood of art' into the realm of necessity where the idealising admiration for the artist is overcome by the 'adult' analysis of artistic works as texts to be deciphered. Demythifying analysis will, according to Freud, ultimately reveal not a mystical genius 'but a human being to whom we might feel ourselves



distantly related'. This insight is of particular importance to feminism as it battles with the canon. If we introduce into our readings in art history too much either about the personal life of the artist – traumas or specifically feminine experience for instance – or if we draw on our own life experiences to help understand what we are looking at, we might be dismissed for offering over-subjective readings that are insufficiently curbed by the necessary objectivity of rational historical distance. On the other hand, feminism can legitimately claim these Freudian insights to support the theorised attempt to balance historical scholarship with carefully presented insights developed from our lived histories about the significance of the psycho-symbolic in the making and reading of cultural texts.

Freud's proposed project, however, emerging at the same moment as art history itself came to disciplinary maturity, met, and still meets, with considerable resistance because:

Psychoanalysis inflicted on man one of his three great narcissistic wounds by deconstructing the idea of the autonomous subject endowed with self-mastery and self-sufficiency, indeed a subject who was his own creator. Narcissism, however, is essentially a death force, so to denounce it is to work in favor of Eros.<sup>35</sup>

Sarah Kofman's reading of Freud thus sets up two registers. One enables us to have some insight into what is at stake in canonicity, as a formalisation of this religious-narcissistic structure of idealising the artist. The other is the highly gendered terms of such a structure. Fathers, heroes, Oedipal rivalries not only reflect the specifically masculine bias of Freud's attention. They suggest that, structurally, the myths of art and artist are shaped within sexual difference and play it out on the cultural stage. Linda Nochlin's founding question 'Why are there no "great women artists"' – with this addition 'in the canon?' – can be turned through this analysis to expose the canon's deeply *masculinist* structures of narcissism and idealism.<sup>36</sup>

The question then is: could we invert it, and insert a feminine version? Mothers, heroines, female Oedipal rivalry, female narcissism and so forth? Would we want to? Or would we try to side with Freud in the move into an adult rather than an infantile relation to art by wanting to disinvest from even a revised, feminised myth of the artist, and address ourselves to the analysis of the riddle of the texts unencumbered by such narcissistic idealisation? Surely we would rather be on the side of Eros than of Thanatos, of love and desire in our writing, than of death that, in the form of avoided 'murder' of the father/mother through idealisation of the hero/heroine, constantly presses on art history.

Using Sarah Kofman's analysis of Freud's aesthetics, we can then turn the analytical spotlight on feminist desire, and women's investment in art and artists who are women (Fig. 1.3). I pose the question: What makes us interested in artists who are women? It appears to be a simple question with an obvious answer. But it was only feminism – not the fact of being a woman – that permitted and generated such a desire, and created, in its politics, theories and cultural forms, a representational support which

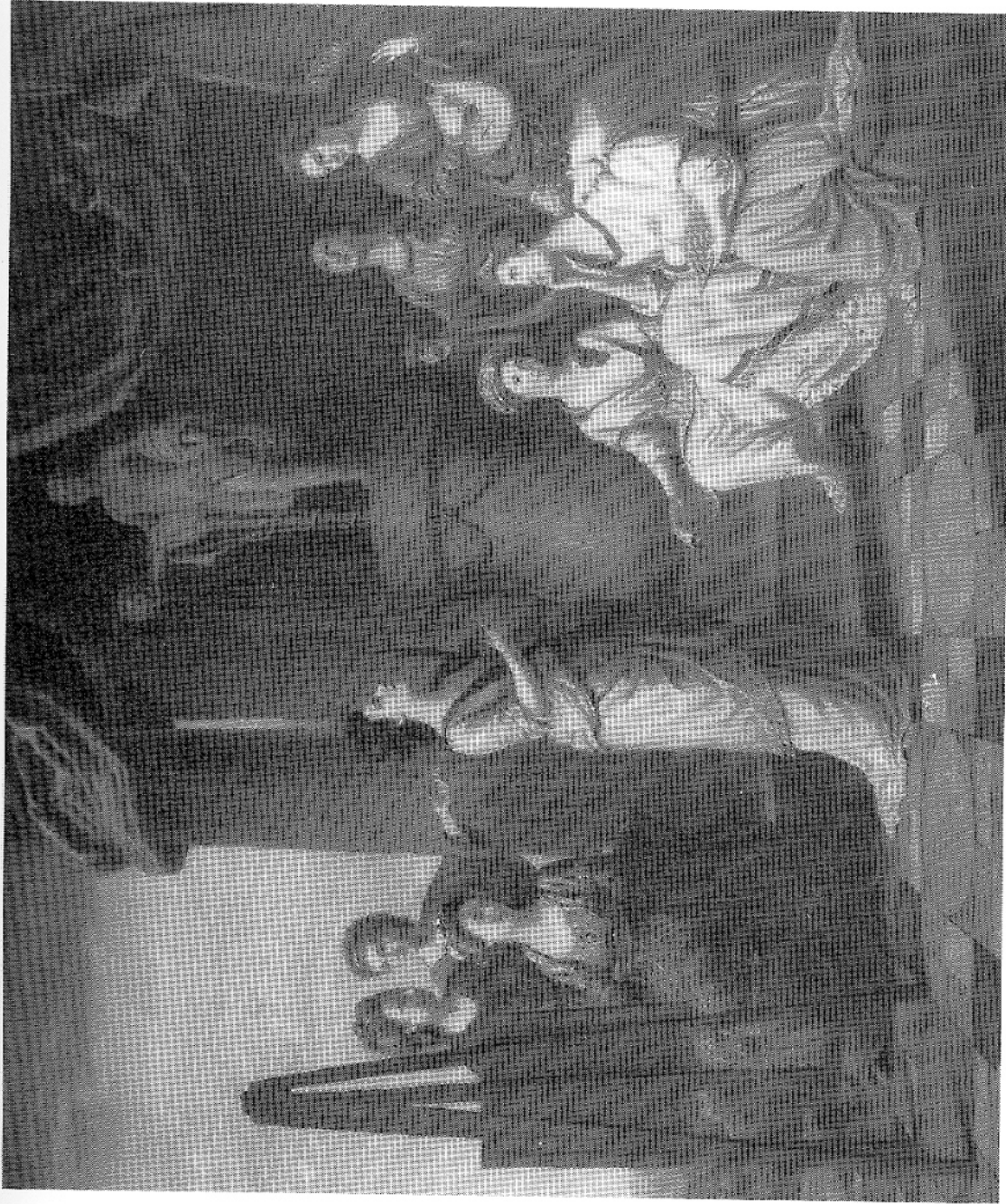


Fig. 1.3. Richard Samuel (fl. 1768–87), *Nine Living Muses*, 1779, oil on canvas, 130 × 152.5 cm. London: Royal Academy of Art. (Left to right, seated: Angelica Kauffmann, Catherine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu; standing: Elizabeth Carter, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Linley-Sheridan, Hannah More, Charlotte Lennox)

could release into discourse aspects of feminine (which is, nevertheless deeply, ambivalent) desire for the mother and thus for knowledge about women.<sup>37</sup> In the light of the above, however, any desire, feminist or otherwise, now seems more complex. Why, as a feminist, am I interested in artists who, because of the rigorous sexism of art history, offer no reward as culturally idealised, canonised figures? Can the neglected women artists of the past function for me as a narcissistic ideal? Do I want to set them up as semi-divine heroines? What are we doing if we try to make them perform as such – if indeed, within the current regimes of sexual difference, we can? What if I desire something else from these stories of women? That is to say, is it possible to do the work I want to do on women artists within a disciplinary formation underpinned by an unacknowledged mythic and psychic structure that actively obstructs the historical discovery of difference, that renders uninteresting remembered stories of women? The answer is probably not. Would a writing of art's histories through *feminist* desire make a difference of another kind: anti-mythical, non-heroic, yet able to analyse works of art for the traces of subjectivities that are not like me because of a common womanhood, but can speak to me 'in the (historically variable) feminine'?

I have long suggested that 'art history', in so far as it embodies and perpetuates this dual narcissistic and religious attitude toward the artist as its disciplinary core, cannot survive the impact of feminism – a practice that, of necessity, must deconstruct this core if it is to be able to speak of the artistic practices of women. But here I want to propose that we apply theoretical insights acquired from Freud's work on 'the connoisseurs' to feminist practice. There is a space precisely here for feminist intervention. Even though Freudian psychoanalysis ultimately privileges the place of the Father, seeing all cultural stories as modelled on masculine Oedipal anxieties, and, as here, making the Father/Hero central to his analysis of art history, it theoretically offers a way to expose the desires and fantasies which have so far made it inconceivable to imagine women in the canon. Women, as representatives of the Mother, are not Heroes. The story of the feminine relation to the Mother takes a wholly different course. That is why I shall begin the book reading the work of canonical artists for traces of the maternal.

Women art historians are susceptible to identification, idealisation and narcissistic fantasy since many of the psychic processes Freud analysed are common to both masculine and feminine subjects in pre-Oedipal formation, and, more importantly, because, in the absence of any other legends, myths and images, women construct hybridised subjectivities with the bricolage of what phallogocentric culture offers. Phallogocentric culture, however, is premised on substitutions and repressions – particularly of the Mother. If one of the key projects of psychoanalysis is to read for the traces of incomplete repression, one way forward is, therefore, to read against the paternal grain *for the Maternal*. We can read for the Mother across the board, in the work of artists who are men and women, though there we will discover specificities and differences which are not the one difference that phallic logic decrees. This provides a territory in which we can both deconstruct the 'great man' myth and then productively read the works of men artists beyond its limited, repetitious refrains,

while being able to speak of the myths, figures and fantasies that might enable us to see what women artists have done, to read for the *inscriptions in the feminine*, to provide, in our critical writings, representational support for feminine desires in a space which can also comprehend conflicting masculine desires, liberated from their theological encasement in the idealised image of the canonical artist. Furthermore, the differences between men which are currently recognised only in the suppression of all but one group's ideal-ego can be articulated without the anxiety that attends even Freud's writing when he has to broach the homosexuality of Leonardo.<sup>38</sup> Difference will no longer be the line of demarcation between the canonical and non-canonical, but will be the very issue that we will complexly address in the expanded and more comprehensive analysis of culture freed from the idolisation of the white Father and the white Hero.

NOTES

- 1 Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1971), p. 30.
- 2 Dominick Lacapra, 'Canons, Texts and Contexts', in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 19.
- 3 Théophile Thoré, 'Van der Meer of Delft', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 71 (1866), pp. 297-330, 458-70, 542-75; 'Frans Hals', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 24 (1868), pp. 219-30, 431-48; R. W. Scheller, 'Rembrandt's Reputatie Houbraken tot Scheltema', *Nederlands Kunsthistorische Jaarboek*, 12 (1961), pp. 81-118; S. Heiland and H. Lüdecke, *Rembrandt und die Nachwelt* (Leipzig, 1960); T. Reff, 'Manet and Blanc's *Histoire des Peintres*', *Burlington Magazine*, 107 (1970), pp. 456-8.
- 4 Kenneth Clark, 'What is a Masterpiece?', *Portfolio* (Feb./Mar. 1980), p. 53.
- 5 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Griselda Pollock, *Avant-garde Gambits: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992).
- 6 Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 7 Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Whose Canon Is It Anyway?', *New York Times Book Review* (26 February 1989), section 7, 3, reprinted in a revised version in *Loose Canons*, as 'The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition', pp. 17-42.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 9 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 5.
- 10 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art & Ideology* (London: Pandora Books, 1981, new edn 1996; now London: Rivers Oram Press).
- 11 Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (London: Athlone Press, 1991); Robert Von Hallberg, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984); Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and a special issue of *Salmagundi*, 72 (1986). Feminist challenges to the canon began in the 1970s. Linda Nochlin - who called the shots on questioning the art historical canon in her 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', in *Art & Sexual Politics*, eds Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York and London: Collier Macmillan, 1973) - organised a session at the 1991 CAA in New York called *Firing the Canon* at which I first developed these arguments. Nanette Salomon, 'The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission', in *(En)gendering Knowledge: Feminism in Academe*, ed. Joan Hartmann and Ellen Messer-Davidow (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 222-36; Adrian Rifkin, 'Art's Histories', in *The New Art History*, ed. Al Rees and Frances Borzello



- (London: Camden Press, 1986), pp. 157–63. See ‘Rethinking the Canon’, a collection of essays, *Art Bulletin*, 78, 2 (June 1996), pp. 198–217.
- 12 H. W. Janson was challenged about this omission and he stated that there had never been a woman artist who had changed the direction of art history and thus none deserved inclusion in his work. Salomon, p. 225.
  - 13 Susan Hardy Aiken, ‘Women and the Question of Canonicity’, *College English*, 48, 3 (March 1986), pp. 288–99.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 297.
  - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 298.
  - 16 *Ibid.*, p. 298.
  - 17 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1994), p. 3.
  - 18 Teresa de Lauretis, ‘The Technology of Gender’, in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 25.
  - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
  - 20 Roland Barthes, ‘Myth Today’, in *Mythologies*, [1957], trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin Books, 1973).
  - 21 ‘What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined . . . by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality.’ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
  - 22 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115.
  - 23 *Ibid.*
  - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
  - 25 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Imperialism and Sexual Difference’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 8, 1–2, (1986), p. 225.
  - 26 Raymond Williams, p. 118.
  - 27 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* [1933], *Penguin Freud Library*, 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 215.
  - 28 Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud’s Aesthetics*, trans. Winifred Woodhull (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 11.
  - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
  - 30 People always get anxious at this point, for it appears to suggest that certain peoples who still hold to these forms of religion are being called childish. The mistake is to assume that the infant stage is childish and, equally, that it is ever surpassed. Archaic experiences and their corresponding fantasies remain a rich resource in, and a powerful determinant on, adult behaviour. *Infantile* is a technical term and refers both to founding moments in individual psychological histories and to a continuing register of meaning and affect in the human subject.
  - 31 Kofman, p. 18.
  - 32 Sigmund Freud, ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood’ [1910], in *Art & Literature*, *Penguin Freud Library*, 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 223.
  - 33 Kofman, p. 15.
  - 34 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
  - 35 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
  - 36 In the first version of the famous essay, published in *Woman in a Sexist Society*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 480–511 this was the title. The later publication in *Art & Sexual Politics*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York and London: Collier Macmillan, 1973) bears the title: ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’
  - 37 I am drawing on Kaja Silverman’s arguments in her *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), p. 125, about the way feminism draws on the ‘libidinal resources of the negative Oedipus complex’, this latter referring to a female child’s Oedipal desire for the mother, as well as her identification with her in the formation of her own femininity. This desire, present in all women, is repressed by the culture. This comment



## ABOUT CANONS AND CULTURE WARS

does not mean that feminism discovered woman-centred sexual desire, but that it unleashed into a cultural current that element of the feminine unconscious to which a phallogocentric Symbolic denies representational support.  
Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' op. cit.



Fig. 2.1 Adelaide Labille-Guyard (1749–1803), *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils: Mlle Marie Capet (1761–1818) and Mlle Carreaux de Rosemond (d. 1788)*, 1785, oil on canvas, 210.8 × 151.1 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

## 2

# DIFFERENCING

## Feminism's encounter with the canon

Feminism's encounter with the canon has been complex and many-levelled: political, ideological, mythological, methodological and psycho-symbolic. I want to lay out a number of different strategies which correspond to the related but also contradictory positions of feminism's encounter with the canon since the women's movement in the early 1970s first entered the culture wars. These different positions represent tactical moments, each as necessary as they are contradictory, while the accumulation of our practices and thinking is beginning to produce a critical and strategic dissonance from art history that allows us to imagine other ways of seeing and reading visual practices than those locked into the canonical formation.

### THREE POSITIONS

#### Position one

*Feminism encounters the canon as a structure of exclusion.*

The immediate task after 1970 was the absolute need to rectify the gaps in historical knowledge created by the consistent omission of women of all cultures from the history of art (Fig. 2.1).<sup>1</sup> The only place where work by a woman might be glimpsed was in the basement or storeroom of a national gallery.<sup>2</sup> The recurring shock of discovery that there have been women artists at all, and so many and such interesting ones, which we as teachers, lecturers and writers regularly witness with each new class of students or new audience for our lectures on women artists, is proof of the reiterating need for this basic research. Evidence of women's uninterrupted involvement in the fine arts is still the fundamental step in exposing the canon's selectivity and gender bias. Yet, despite the expanding volume of research and publications on artists who are women, Tradition remains *the* tradition with the women in their own special, separated compartments, or added as politically correct supplements. In the Story of Art *women* artists are an oxymoron, an incomprehensible addition, available in our post-feminist days, for those women disposed to be interested to read about such marginalia. The real history of art remains fundamentally unaffected because its

mythological and psychic centre is fundamentally or exclusively to do not with art and its histories but with the Western masculine subject, its mythic supports and psychic needs. The Story of Art is an illustrated Story of Man. To that end, and paradoxically, it needs constantly to invoke a femininity as the negated other that alone allows the unexplained synonymy of man and artist.

Yet, as the phrase 'Old Mistress', first used in 1972 by Ann Gabhart and Elizabeth Broun, so tellingly suggested, the exclusion of women is more than mere oversight.<sup>3</sup> There is no equivalent term of value and respect for great *mistresses* of art comparable to the old *masters* who form the very substance of the canon. Structurally, it would be impossible to re-admit excluded women artists like Artemisia Gentileschi or Mary Cassatt to an expanded canon without either radical misunderstanding of their artistic legacy or radical change to the very concept of the canon as the discourse which sanctions the art we should study. The canon is politically 'in the masculine' as well as culturally 'of the masculine'. This statement does not in any way belittle the vitally important work that has been done in producing the research, documentation and analysis of women artists in anthologies, monographs and comprehensive surveys. The terms of the selective tradition render completely revising the neglect of women artists an impossible project because such revision does not grapple with the terms that created that neglect. So, after over twenty years of feminist work rectifying the gaps in the archive, we still face the question: How can we make the cultural work of women an effective presence in cultural discourse which changes both the order of discourse and the hierarchy of gender in one and the same deconstructive move?

### Position two

*Feminism encounters the canon as a structure of subordination and domination which marginalises and relativises all women according to their place in the contradictory structurations of power – race, gender, class and sexuality.*

In response to not only exclusion but systematic devaluation of anything aesthetic associated with women, feminists have tried to valorise practices and procedures particularly practised by, or connected with, women that lack status in the canon, for instance art made with textiles and ceramics.<sup>4</sup> Patricia Mainardi wrote in 1973:

Women have always made art. But for women the arts most highly valued by male society have been closed to them for just that reason. They have put their creativity instead into needlework arts which exist in a fantastic variety, and which are in fact a universal female art form transcending race, class and national borders. Needlework is the one art in which women controlled the education of their daughters and the production of art, and were also the critics and audience . . . it is our cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Work on quilting, weaving and embroidery by women has exposed the troubled nature of the Western canon's attempt to valorise its fine art culture above all others by a hierarchy of means, media and materials. It has become more culturally advanced to make art with pigment and canvas, stone or bronze than with linen and thread, wool or clay and pigment. Feminists, however, have argued that textiles are both the site of profound cultural value beyond mere utilitarian usage and the site of the production of meanings that traverse culture as a whole: religious, political, moral, ideological. Thus the canonical division between intellectual and manual art forms, between truly creative and merely decorative practices, has been challenged on behalf of not only Western women but non-Western cultures in general. By showing the ways in which the art of embroidery, once the most valued cultural form of medieval ecclesiastical culture, was progressively deprofessionalised, domesticated and feminised, feminist art historians have exposed both the relativity of cultural valuations and the intimacy between value and gender.<sup>6</sup>

Such cultural practices that are typically downgraded because they are (mis)-identified with the domestic, the decorative, the utilitarian, the dexterous – that is with what patriarchal logic negatively characterises as quintessentially 'feminine' – appear as merely instances of difference, and paradoxically confirm (rather than afflict) the canonical – normative – status of other practices by men. This is a prime instance of being trapped in a binary where reverse valuation of what has hitherto been devalued does not ultimately breach the value system at all. None the less, feminist discourse on and from the position of marginalisation, interrupting art history by a political voice challenging hierarchies of value, does have subversive force. It gets entangled with the underlying structure I insist on drawing out: art is often a debate in disguised form about gender. So the basis of the revaluation of patchwork quilts and weaving is the shifted appreciation of the work and creativity of the domestic sphere, or of traditions of working-class female aesthetic choices and challenges. Inside the categorical division of the genders there is a realignment of what is aesthetically valued through determining more complex relations between art and the social experiences of its classed and gendered producers.

The difficulty remains, however, that, in speaking of and as women, feminism confirms the patriarchal notion that woman is the sex, the sign of gender, perpetually the particular and sexualised Other to the universal sign Man, who appears to transcend his sex to represent Humanity. This interest in art that stays close to the practices of everyday life also keeps this art tied to the realm of the Mother. The tropes of Other and Mother, always powerful resources for resistance, none the less trap us in a regressive compartment of a patriarchal narrative and mythicisation of Culture as the realm of the Father and the Hero. Thus to speak openly of the repressed question of gender is to confirm the dominant culture's worst suspicions that, if women are allowed to speak, all they can speak of is (their) sex.



### Position three

*Feminism encounters the canon as a discursive strategy in the production and reproduction of sexual difference and its complex configurations with gender and related modes of power.*

Deconstructing discursive formations leads to the production of radically new knowledges which contaminate the seemingly 'ungendered' domains of art and art history by insisting that 'sex' is everywhere. The canon becomes visible as an enunciation of Western masculinity, itself saturated by its own traumatised sexual formation. The key difference from position two is this. In the same gesture as we confirm that sexual difference structures women's social positions, cultural practices and aesthetic representations, we also sexualise, hence de-universalise, the masculine, demanding that the canon be recognised as a gendered and an *en-gendering* discourse.<sup>7</sup> Not a matter of reverse sexism, this third strategy overcomes sexism and its straight inversion by naming the structures which implicate both men and women because they produce masculinity and femininity relatively, suppressing, in the same move, the complexity of sexualities that defy this model of sex and gender. The feminist interruption of the naturalised (hetero)sexual division identifies the structures of difference on which the canon is erected by examining its mechanisms for maintaining only *that* difference – woman as Other, sex, lack, metaphor, sign, etc.

This third position no longer operates within art history as an internal contestant or corrective to the discipline. Its purposes are not equity. It does not aim at only more women in the art history books or at better coverage for decorative as well as fine arts (position one). Nor, however, does it operate outside, or in the margins, a voice for women's absolute difference, valorising the feminine sphere (position two). It implies a shift from the narrowly bounded spaces of art history as a disciplinary formation into an emergent and oppositional signifying space we call the women's movement which is not a place apart but a movement across the fields of discourse and its institutional bases, across the texts of culture and its psychic foundations.

The play on the word 'movement' allows us to keep in mind the political collectivity in which feminist work must be founded and, at the same time, it enables us to refuse containment in a category called feminism. Feminism will not just be one more approach in the chaotic pluralisation to which a threatened art history desperately turns in the hope of maintaining its hegemony by tactical incorporation. The notion of movement is also associated with that of the eye as it reads a text: re-vision in Adrienne Rich's terms. Reading has become a charged signifier of a new kind of critical practice, re-reading the texts of our culture symptomatically as much for what is not said as for what is. Meaning is produced in the spaces between, and that is what we are moving across canons, disciplines and texts to hear, see and understand anew. It is precisely through these movements between disciplinary formations, between academe and street, between social and cultural, between intellectual and political, between semiotic

and psychic, that women were able to grasp the interrelations between the dominant formations around sexuality and power which inform but are mystified by the outward and visible signs of a discipline's or practice's particular habits and professional procedures.

Thus from the novel space and connections between women practising in many fields created by the formation of the women's movement, feminists intervene in art history to generate expanded forms for art's histories.<sup>8</sup> I study some of the same objects as the canonical art historian – Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Manet – as well as those ignored by art history: Artemisia Gentileschi, Mary Cassatt, Lubaina Himid. I use some of the same procedures and analyse some of the same documents. But I work in and on another domain of study which produces a different object. Michel Foucault defined a discourse not by the given things it studies but through the objects discourse produces. Thus, art history is not merely to be understood as the study of the artistic artefacts and documents left deposited in the present by time. Art history is a discourse in so far as it creates its object: art and the artist. From the 'space off' of feminism, I do not confirm the mystical status of the art object nor the theological concept of the artist that are the central projects of art historical discourse. The terrain I explore is the socio-symbolic process of sexuality and the constitution of the subject in sexual difference, itself within the field of history, as it shapes and is shaped in a history of aesthetically crafted visual representations. The phrase 'the subject in difference' moves us beyond some fixed idea of masculinity or femininity towards the dynamic process of subjectivity as socially, historically constituted at the level of the psycho-symbolic which is the level at which cultures are inscribed upon each sexed, speaking person.

History is traditionally conceived in terms of rapidly changing, event-led developments. The *Annales* school of French historians, however, turned their attention to the impact, on social and cultural life, of factors that have a long duration, like climate, geographical location, food production, established culture and folklore. Many things which, because of their extended temporality, seem to be unhistorical can thus be differently understood as, none the less, historical. Julia Kristeva has taken up this challenge in thinking about the issues of sexual difference and their inscription through psychic formations that have such long histories – like the phallogocentric order in the West – that they come to appear as natural and unchangeable givens.<sup>9</sup> Freud's theories of subjectivity and sex are often deemed to be universalist and ahistorical for the same reasons. Clearly sexuality and subjectivity have histories on several planes and temporalities – changing under the force of immediate social, political and economic upheaval, while, at other levels, remaining more constant.<sup>10</sup> Feminism – a product of a modernist historical conjuncture dating actively from the mid-nineteenth century – has a *longue durée* in that we are still, at the end of the twentieth century, attending to its unfinished business: the modernisation of sexual difference that has gone through several phases from philosophical to political and now on to the corporeal, the sexual, the semiotic and the psychological. But that attempted modernisation could also be read as a new chapter in the history of ancient structures of sexual difference. Feminist

theory in its contemporary complexity rooted in its historical legacies is now able to imagine and fashion a challenge to the *longue durée* of the deep structures of patriarchal or phallogentric systems the world over that have reigned so long that they have come to appear as a 'fact of nature'. This is why one major partner in feminist interventions in historiography and art history is psychoanalysis. It has become the provisionally necessary theoretical resource within modernity that enables us to operate on the cusp of these intersecting if often extended temporalities of sex, subjectivity and difference.

According to psychoanalytical discourse, each subject, each sex, each identity passes through processes and structures of differentiation that are, however, figured in cultural representation from language to art, as separate positions, as fixed sexes, as distinct identities that need no production. Moving away from the representation of innate, anatomically or biologically determined difference to the ever unstable and unravelling processes of psychological and semiotic *differentiation*, with the always dynamic play of subjectivity, creates the space for a feminist differencing of canonicity, which is an element in the larger politics of differencing current orders of sexual difference.

If this engagement with histories of the subject and theories of its sexing enables us to destabilise the illusory image of the masculine subject, it also undoes any comparable myth of femininity, the idea that femininity is or has an essence, that it is the opposite of masculinity, that the feminine is in any way less conflicted or desiring. For the feminine subject, by definition, must be just as much a complex, ambivalent, contradictory and precarious subjectivity as the masculine. At times both share comparable processes in their archaic formation. Yet they are subject to marks of distinction where a culture already erected on the difference of sex anticipates as yet unformed subjects with fixed and fixing expectations. These cultural signs of a particular system of sexual difference feminist analysis takes as its cue for its contest with phallogentrism. Yet far from simply repudiating all signs of femininity and feminine difference as the effect of a phallogentric system, feminism also recognised in the variations, labelled feminine, of the trajectories that lead to the (unstable) sexing of subjectivity, the sources of pleasure in and for the feminine and the articulation of specifically oppositional feminine desires.

There are, of course, femininities in the plural rather than femininity *tout court*. The encounter between feminist readings and the canon must disorder the familiar regime of difference, but neither in the name of liberal sameness (we are all human beings) nor in terms of an absolute and fundamental difference (men versus women). (What men? and what women?) The project of a feminist critique is undertaken in the name of those who suffer most the effects of a regime of difference which demands its price of all the subjects it constitutes. Those living under the sign of Woman, marked 'feminine', have a special investment in the deconstruction of phallogentrism, and a particular purpose in the expanded understanding of all subjectivities and their social conditions to which feminist re-readings contribute. The term 'feminine' can thus be radically understood to signal both the negated other of the phallogentric model – an

absence – and the as yet uncharted potentiality of what is beyond the phallogentric imagination – an enlargement. The feminine is, therefore, both a ‘difference from’ the norm and the signifier of a potentially *differing* structure of subjectivity.

Feminist interventions must involve a materialist and social conception of what Gayle Rubin has called ‘the political economy of sex’.<sup>11</sup> Equally, by addressing the social also by means of subjectivity as process, we need to attend to an interrelated but irreducible domain theorised by psychoanalysis – the psycho-symbolic domain.<sup>12</sup> The subject of this theory is split, conscious and unconscious, and is formed through its involvement with the use of symbols, namely language, that radically separates it from its own never fully known materiality. The subject is an accumulation of losses and separations which cast it adrift from the mother’s body and space, creating, in that division, retrospective fantasies about wholeness, unity and undifferentiation. It is here that the terror of difference first marks the masculine subject with an anxiety towards the other, signified by the feminine. The division from the process of its becoming a subject which is marked by accession to the Symbolic domain of language, each culture shaping that in specific ways, generates another signifying space, which always accompanies the speaking subject. This Freud named the unconscious. The unconscious is the active determining location for all that is repressed from the long and arduous journey the individual undertakes to become a subject, within sex and language. What is not admitted to consciousness by the regulated order of the culture, its Symbolic order, is reshaped by its transformation into the other signifying regime that characterises the unconscious, known to us only through dreams, slips of the tongue and in incomplete repression surfacing within aesthetic practices. In turn, the repressed becomes a kind of structuring unconscious of the subject – who, as a result of both the cultural unconscious embodied in the language to which the subject accedes, and because of its individual unconscious produced by its singular familial and social history, lives in a paradoxical condition of perpetually not knowing what it is, yet filled with illusions and representations which fabricate an identity that remains ignorant of its real conditions of existence.

#### ABOUT DIFFERENCE AND *DIFFÉRANCE*

Difference, sociologically defined as gender difference, and more recently conceived as a psychic and linguistic position through psychoanalysis as sexual difference, has played a vital role in feminist theory. Difference signifies division between ‘men’ and ‘women’ resulting in a hierarchy in which those placed within the social category of the female gender or assigned the psycho-linguistic position as feminine are negatively valued relative to the masculine or ‘men’. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has invented a new term, *différance*, to draw out two meanings in the French verb *différer*: ‘On the one hand, [*différer*] indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of *spacing*, and *temporalizing* that puts off until “later” what is presently denied.’<sup>13</sup> This is closer

to the verb *to defer* in English, and the point is that language, whose meanings are produced by differences (rather than by positive terms), tries to set up distinctions necessary for there to be meaning, while structurally undermining any fixity of meaning, since all meaning relies on what is not said, that is, on all the other signifiers in the system as a whole, or in a set, that lie in waiting, negatively supporting the signifier that has been uttered or written.

Man and Woman – two terms that mutually affirm a difference by appearing to be the fixed poles of a natural opposition – are but two relative signifiers in a chain down which meaning is constantly deferred. Man can mean nothing without that other term whose co-presence in the very meaning of either term undermines the kind of fixed value or meaning that Man tries to assert and contain. *Différance* is not a concept that replaces difference. It defies it, exceeding and disturbing the ‘classical economy of language and representation’ that is the instrument of hierarchy and social power. Man is a moment in a chain of signs that always includes as its differentiating, meaning producing others: Woman, Animal, Society, or whatever difference is the axis of the given statement. The signifier Man seems to promise the presence, self-constituted and fixed, of some entity. In fact, there is no presence but an implied and negative relation to a range of signifiers, themselves no more firmly attached to an essence. The binary opposition which structures so much of modern, bourgeois culture is Man versus Woman: two separate and distinct items, categories, beings. Deconstruction suggests that what we have instead is a system whose effect is *binary division* while it is in fact a *signifying system* that arbitrarily creates distinctions which are always co-dependent, co-extensive and shifting.

The signifiers Man and Woman are not arbitrary at the level of language alone. They make a difference, inscribing socially and culturally determined value on to what is thereby differentiated. This is done not by merely linguistic markers of given difference but by signifiers that serve to differentiate *prima facie* in particular ways. Semiotics thus identifies the overtly ideological character of the appeal to nature, that is, to given, visible or deducible differences, deconstructing these assumptions to expose an always socially and politically motivated regime of differentiations.

The signifiers Man and Woman, moreover, mark spaces in a continuum of meanings that depend upon the whole system for the values that are attributed to these particular terms. Woman belongs in a set that includes nature, body, passivity, victim, lethal sex, timelessness and so forth, while Man relates to notions of mind, the social, the rational, the historical, activity, authority, agency, self-determination etc. These sequences are political and historical, and thus they can be and have dramatically changed. Contesting the uses of the signs and articulating them differently – a battle of representation – is both possible and, from the feminist perspective, necessary.<sup>14</sup>

Joining semiotics and psychoanalysis in her own neologism, *semanalysis*, Kristeva, like Derrida, although from a different premise, that of the psychoanalytically defined division of the subject, stresses the *process* of meaning in language over its structure.<sup>15</sup> Language is not a sign system; meaning is rather a *signifying process* constantly moving between and being moved by the tensions between the *semiotic* – Kristeva’s



special term for the disposition towards language found in rhythm, sound and their traces of a relation to the body and its drives – and the *symbolic*, that which makes of these dispositions formal articulations, attempting to regulate and establish a unity, a momentary fixity for meaning and its social communication.<sup>16</sup> Language becomes a double space once the subject is positioned as part of it, bringing the material and psychic body (what Freud called the drives and their representatives) into play with the social constraints of its processes and potentialities (the family, modes of production etc.), bringing fantasy relations (the unconscious) into play with the function of social exchange and the establishment of authority. This model always implies the means of change – a transgression of the frontier of the symbolic by irruptions from the excess of the semiotic with its privileged relations to the archaic moments of the drives and the maternal space/voice/gaze. Kristeva positions art – literature, poetry, dance, music, painting – as a privileged and yet non-regressive means of renovating but also sometimes revolutionising the symbolic and the social, that is, radically changing the social order of meaning, because it makes possible new concatenations of signifiers and subjective relations to them.

But since it is itself a metalanguage, semiotics can do no more than postulate this heterogeneity: as soon as it speaks about it, it homogenises the phenomenon, links it with a system, loses hold of it. Its specificity can be preserved only in the signifying practices which set off the heterogeneity at issue: thus poetic language making free with the language code; music, dancing, painting, rendering the psychic drives which have not been harnessed by the dominant symbolisation systems and thus renewing their own tradition.<sup>17</sup>

Concerned rather abstractly with linguistics and its subjects, Julia Kristeva identified femininity, as a linguistic position, with semiotic transgression and renewal while not equating it with women. Perceived as an intellectual lapse, her position has inspired much criticism, for the absence of a feminist avowal of the implications of her theory. Julia Kristeva has since, through her own more active engagement with psychoanalysis, substantiated her interest in femininity as the psychic domain of women as well as the *other* of the phallic symbolic system. But to move from the abstract linguistic frame linking femininity and revolutionary poetics to a more concrete engagement with women is to betray precisely what is important in her early formulations. That femininity – which we may well be forced to live under and even subsequently embrace – is not equatable with a term, woman, or with the social collectivity, women, which is always a fixing of only some of that possibility to a place in a system which is ultimately supportive of meanings for the term, man, that negate femininity and its potentialities.

On the radically other hand, Julia Kristeva dares to insist upon a body for the speaking subject, a body that is never a nature, and never has a fixed identity. It is a Freudian body, radically heterogeneous and fantastic, the site of mobile drives and signifying resources which the symbolic tries to harness to its repressive but socially

productive purposes. The body at this point is not thought of in terms of gender – and could never be. But, as her work progresses into psychoanalysis, Kristeva can see how the child's experience of its undifferentiated body is shaped in relation to fantasies of sexually marked bodies – the maternal and the paternal bodies. The shaping of the speaking subject involves a patterning of its body through identification with, and relation to, culturally differentiated rather than physically different bodies. Sexual difference comes to the child from outside through its *incorporation* of images and signifiers of that between which the culture (a) makes a distinction, but (b) sets in a mutual relation. Thus the parental figure of the infant's early life, dominated as it will be by a maternal, nurturing body, voice and presence while including an archaic father, is divided culturally, at the Oedipal stage, only when the incest taboo creates the necessity of the child's aligning itself with only one aspect of its parental generation – linguistically marked by the terms 'mother' and 'father', which stand for the sexual and gender role division that is thus instituted as masculine and feminine.

Because this process – which is hypothetically narrated as a passage from birth to the accession to language and Oedipalisation, sexing and sexualising – is always occurring in the presence of a fully formed symbolic system, and is always grasped only in retrospect, and always in the present as the repressed contents of the unconscious which is formed by accession to the Symbolic, we have to imagine, difficult as it is, that the body of the child is both undifferentiated and always already part of that process of *différance*. Thus without evoking a natural, given, innate femininity, we can and must imagine the female child experiencing its emergent body and its psychic shaping in preparation for its insertion into language and the symbolic of the culture in ways that can be spoken of using sexually differentiated terms. Not given, but always in the process of becoming, there are possible becoming-female bodies and there we can think of both effective as well as affective femininities.

Thus the pre-history of the child who will be called to see herself as woman is not the mirror image of that term because she was *born* woman. But that pre-history is always on the way to *becoming a subject* in the feminine, and there will be a specific excess for that proto-feminine subject because that *becoming* occurs under the always already active phallogentrism, itself structured by the femininity it attempts to negate as absence. Thus the equation between femininity and the transgressive excess that can contest the present order is at once a structural property, as Julia Kristeva's early work proposes, and a more experiential process which feminism actively takes up. But, if we adopt that possibility of speaking of femininity and its privileged relation to revolution without keeping the linguistic-structural aspect in mind, we will fall right into the phallogentric trap of binary oppositions, fixed difference, as if feminism or aesthetic practice is to be resourced only from what 'women' are. Femininity then will signify only as an unnecessary synonym for Woman/women, when the whole thrust of this difficult theoretical passage through semiotics, deconstruction and psychoanalysis tries to define the magnitude of the distance and difference between 'being women' and 'becoming in the feminine'. On that difference hangs our politics and the possibility for real change.

In the final parts of this book I will draw on yet another feminist psychoanalytic theory that attempts to realign the symbolic order by an acknowledgement of a non-essentialist structuring of the subject in relation to the invisible specificity of the feminine body and its effects in fantasy on the psychic formation of subjectivity, sexuality and art. This is the theory of the Matrix advanced by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger,<sup>18</sup> who argues that Julia Kristeva's theoretical revisions are still engaged with a phallic account of the coming of sexed subjectivity. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger defines the feminine as the basis for a stratum of subjectivity in which there is a minimal difference – distance and relatedness – from the inception, and not only after or in the anticipation of castration. From a phallogentric model in which the subject is formed by the always traumatising encounter with the principle of difference via a series of threatening separations which are veiled by anxiety, and in the masculine subject, disavowed via fetishism and the castration complex, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger delineates an archaic co-emergence of part-subjectivities 'in the feminine'. These are derived from the fantastic imprint of the invisible specificity of feminine sexuality on both feminine and masculine subjects-in-becoming. The concept of the Matrix, realigning subjectivity from under the solitary sway of the Phallus as sovereign signifier, is a revolutionary theorisation that marks a historic break within the canon of psychoanalytic discourse that has made femininity almost unthinkable. It shifts even more productively the relations of feminism and psychoanalytic theory on to the terrain of aesthetic practices where Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger identifies a correlation between creativity and sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

#### THINKING ABOUT WOMEN . . . ARTISTS

If we use the term *women* of artists, we differentiate the history of art by proposing artists and 'women artists' (Fig. 2.2). We invite ourselves to assume a difference, which all too easily makes us presume that we know what it is. Furthermore, art becomes its deposit and expressive vehicle. Julia Kristeva's view of aesthetic practices as a transgressive and renovative force, sometimes captured by the system and reified as something akin to religion or transcendence, at other times revolutionary in its poetic transformations, is based on her definition of a signifying process. Aesthetic practices shift meaning, undo fixities and can make a difference. In the work by artists we name women, we should not read for signs of a known femininity – womanhood, women like us . . . – but for signs of femininity's structurally conditioned and dissonant struggle with phallogentrism, a struggle with the already existing, historically specific definitions and changing dispositions of the terms Man and Woman within sexual difference. We can read for *inscriptions of the feminine* – which do not come from a fixed origin, this female painter, that woman artist, but from those *working* within the predicament of femininity in phallogentric cultures in their diverse formations and varying systems of representation.

There can, therefore, be no way of, and no point in, 'adding women to the canon'.



Fig. 2.2 Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1805), *Design*, 1779, grisaille, 130 × 147 cm. London: Royal Academy

There are, however, productive and transgressive ways to re-read the canon and the desires it represents; to do deconstructive readings of the disciplinary formation that establishes and polices the canon; to question the inscriptions of femininity in the work of artists living and working under the sign of Woman, who were formed in historically and culturally specific femininities. And finally there are ways to question our own texts for the desires they inscribe, for the investments which we feign through telling the stories of our own ideal egos: the women artists we come to love and need to love in order to find a cultural space and identification for ourselves, a way to articulate ourselves – to make a difference to current systems that manage sexual difference as a negation of our humanity, creativity and safety.

I am searching for ways to be able to write about artists who are men and artists who are women in order to go beyond the concept of binary gender difference. By journeying through the defiles of psychoanalysis, I find myself tracking both coincidence

and divergence between the two. The sign of an always sexually differentiated and differentiating convergence of masculine and feminine interest is the 'mother', a sign in psychic fantasy and an aspect of signifying space whose 'murder', or perhaps repression, has been consistently identified as a structural necessity for, and a founding myth of, patriarchal societies. One of the faces of modernist culture is the construction of artistic identity that is not only virile but autogenetic, claiming creativity for its masculine self through a radical displacement of the maternal feminine in imageries of prostitutional and lesbian bodies. As obsessively recurrent as the image of vacant Madonna and kingly Son were to Renaissance culture, the figuratively non-maternal body of the sexualised woman, the prostitute, functions in the modernist canon from Manet to Picasso and De Kooning. Yet, as I shall argue in the next two chapters, the maternal haunts the culture that the modernist sons attempted to create. A feminist 'view from elsewhere' within the discursive-political field, scrutinising early modernism, reveals the 'ambivalence of the maternal body' in the stylistic rhetorics and formal 'innovations' for which that avant-garde fraction has been canonised. The mother is a space and a presence that structures subjectivities both masculine and feminine; but differently.

The trajectory of the book follows, case study by case study, the questions of feminist differencing of the canon by the desire for some way to acknowledge and speak of the maternal in all its ambivalence and structural centrality to the dramas of the subject, the narratives of culture and the possibilities of reading within culture 'inscriptions of/in/from the feminine'. Without in any sense privileging maternalism or motherhood, feminist theorisations of the feminine and analysis of representations made within its psychic economies have to rework and think through the mother: voice, image, resource, absence and matrixial borderspace (Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger). To identify and yet disrupt the matricidal murder characteristic of Western modernist culture, in the work of Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec, to explore the fantasy and loss of the maternal in cultural formations and individual subjective trajectories in the paintings of the Italian seventeenth-century artist Artemisia Gentileschi, and to recognise it in the work of American modernist Mary Cassatt, work that already offered a counter-modernism in the very same spaces as its canonical *confrère*, Degas, to read for feminine co-emergence across the discourses of class and race in Manet: these form the project.

But while the figure of 'the mother' functions as one organising concern, that of 'the sister' is also explored through the study of differences between women and the possibilities of alliance (Fig. 2.3). Sisterhood was such a vital slogan of the women's movement of the 1970s and it was shipwrecked on the reefs of unacknowledged racism and class relations. But the project of feminism, while no longer complacently assuming a collectivity called women, must in the nature of its project work ceaselessly to create a political collectivity. The ambivalence and antagonism between women cannot be wished away in some euphoric idealisation. For once we explore the issues of the maternal and of feminine loss, we will have actively to generate new relations between women: elective affiliations. The concluding chapter of Part 3, on Lubaina





Fig. 2.3 *Edmonia Lewis* (1843? – after 1909), photograph. Washington, D.C.: National Archives of American Art

Himid's project *Revenge*, and the final chapter of the book, *A Tale of Three Women*, develop this other necessary work of differencing all canons, including those that, as a white feminist art historian, I may seem to be setting up.

As a whole, the book struggles with some of the complexities of contemporary feminist theory and its cultural politics. We cannot let our work be reduced to a mere 'approach' or a new 'perspective' waiting to be dismissed as outmoded. It is an engagement in the field of representation, power and knowledge that must touch all fields and all topics. I write in the role of an interested reader of culture and a motivated analyst of representation. A difference that I can introduce into the canon is the difference of that specific, invested, historically and socially overdetermined position from which I read, and then write, what I hope will in turn be read as a contribution to the continuous production of provocative polyvocal feminist interventions in art's histories. The driving force is desire for change, desire to find stories that will sustain those called or prepared to identify with women, that will enable us to discover what it is to be the historical 'subject of [a long-term] feminism'.

## NOTES

- 1 This is the major discovery and argument of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art & Ideology* (London: Pandora Books, 1981; new edn 1996; now London: Rivers Oram Press).
- 2 The first article I ever wrote as a 'feminist' in 1972 was a study of the paintings by women artists in the open basement galleries of the National Gallery in London. I entered a correspondence with Michael Levy, the then Director, as to why all the paintings by women were kept below stairs. This included Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair*, the first painting by a living artist to be admitted to the National Collection. Admittedly, it is not the original version, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Admittedly, Rosa Bonheur was assisted by another artist, her companion Natalie Micas, in painting this reduced version for Ernest Gambart, the dealer, who was to make an engraving of the work. These reasons were used against the public showing of the only painting of this major, decorated nineteenth-century artist. A large pastel portrait, *The Man in Grey*, by Rosalba Carriera was also downstairs; and a Berthe Morisot, part of the Lane Collection, was in Dublin at the time. Michael Levy felt I would be misrepresenting the gallery if I did not take all these factors into account.
- 3 This was the title of their exhibition at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. For discussion see Parker and Pollock.
- 4 One of the classic texts of this moment is Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1979), re-exhibited in 1996. For a review of responses to this project and its meanings within feminism see Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) and Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (London: Penguin Books, 1996); Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Astragal, 1979).
- 5 Patricia Mainardi, 'Quilts – The Great American Art', *The Feminist Art Journal*, 2, 1 (1973), reprinted in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 331.
- 6 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984). See also 'Crafty Women', in Parker and Pollock.
- 7 Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1987).
- 8 This concept was originally developed in the introduction to my book *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 9 Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time' [1979], in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 187–213.
- 10 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), would be a prime example of the development of the historicisation of sexuality and the location of psychoanalysis within a historical framework.
- 11 Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157–210.
- 12 For a useful discussion of the social importance and theoretically distinct status of what Freud theorised, see Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1982) esp. ch. 8: 'Psychoanalysis and Social Relations', pp. 140–63.
- 13 Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 129.
- 14 This argument is cogently placed in historical context by Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Woman' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
- 15 Julia Kristeva, 'The System and the Speaking Subject', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1973, pp. 1249–52, reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 24–33.

- 16 It is confusing that she uses this term, *symbolic*, in a way that differs from its use by Lacan, with a capital, Symbolic. For Kristeva *semiotic* and *symbolic* are characteristics of signifying systems, not the names, like Imaginary and Symbolic, of actual registers of meaning and psychic dispositions. The Symbolic is a realm or order which contains both symbolic and semiotic elements, although it cannot exhaust the semiotic. See Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 9–12.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 18 For an example of this theorist/artist's writing on art and the Matrix see Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, 'The With-In-Visible Screen', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of and from the Feminine*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Boston: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 89–116.
- 19 The literature on Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's theories is now quite extensive. Key works are 'Matrix and Metamorphosis', *Differences*, 4, 3 (1992), pp. 176–207; *The Matrixial Gaze* (University of Leeds: Feminist Arts and Histories Network Press, 1994); 'The Red Cow Effect', in *Beautiful Translations ACT 2* (London: Pluto Press, 1996); 'The With-in-Invisible Screen'.