

volumes describing the genesis and content of the installation. The following extract is taken from the revised edition which she prepared to accompany a commemorative showing of *The Dinner Party* at the University of California at Los Angeles Armand Hammer Museum in 1996. [GP]

Source: Judy Chicago, from *The Dinner Party*, Penguin Books, 1996, pp. 3–4

[. . .]

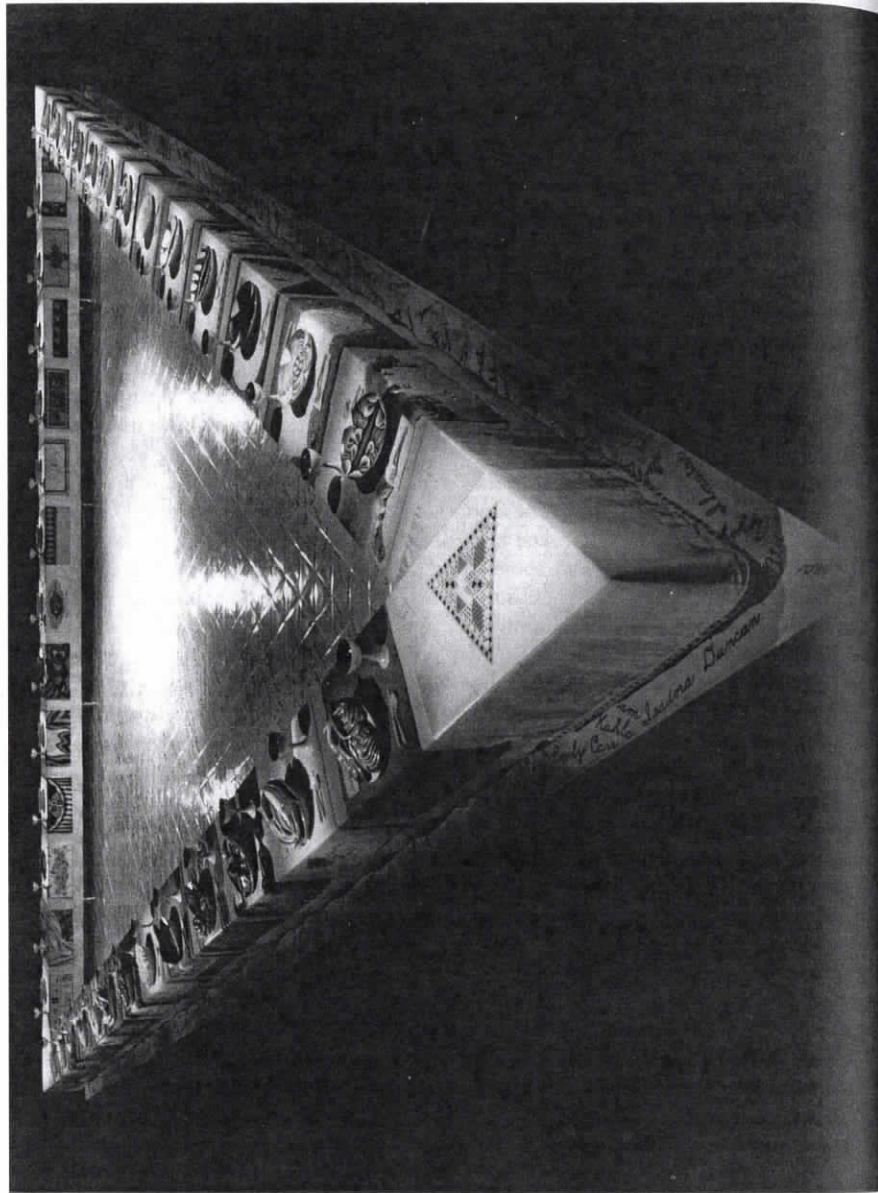
The Dinner Party (plate xv) is a work of art, triangular in configuration, that employs numerous media, including ceramics, china-painting, and needlework, to honor women's achievements. An immense open table covered with fine white cloths is set with thirty-nine place settings, thirteen on a side, each commemorating a goddess, historic personage, or important woman. Though most are largely unknown, their names should, in my estimation, be as familiar to us as the male heroes whose exploits we absorb from childhood through art, myth, literature, history, and popular entertainment. *The Dinner Party* suggests that these female heroes are equally worthy of commemoration, as are those hundreds of others whose names are inscribed upon the *Heritage Floor*. This lustrous porcelain surface serves as the foundation for *The Dinner Party* table and the many important human accomplishments it symbolizes.

The Dinner Party visually describes the historic struggle of women to participate in all aspects of society; its aim is to end the ongoing cycle of omission in which women's hard-earned achievements are repeatedly written out of the historic record, sometimes within years of their attainments. This process results in generation after generation of women struggling for insights and freedoms that, even when fiercely won, are too often quickly forgotten or erased once again.

My idea for *The Dinner Party* grew out of the research into women's history that I had begun at the end of the 1960s. I had undertaken this study in an effort to discover whether women before me had faced and recorded their efforts to surmount obstacles similar to those I was encountering as a woman artist. When I started my investigation, there were no women's studies courses, and the prevailing attitudes toward women's history can best be summed up by the following story. While an undergraduate at UCLA, I took a course titled the Intellectual History of Europe. The professor, a respected historian, promised that at the last class he would discuss women's contributions to Western thought. I waited eagerly all semester, and at the final meeting, the instructor strode in and announced: 'Women's contributions to European intellectual history? They made none.'

I was devastated by his judgment, and when my later studies demonstrated that my professor's assessment did not stand up to intellectual scrutiny, I became convinced that the idea that women had no history – and the companion belief that there had never been any great women artists – was simply prejudice elevated to intellectual dogma. I suspected that many people accepted these notions primarily because they had never been exposed to a different perspective.

As I began to uncover what turned out to be a treasure trove of information about women's history, I became both empowered and inspired. My intense interest in sharing these discoveries through my art led me to wonder whether



xv) Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979, © Judy Chicago. Photograph © Donald Woodman.

visual images might play a role in changing the prevailing views regarding women and women's history. I had always been attracted to medieval art, which taught history, myth, and values to the populace through easily understandable visual symbols. Though contrary to the tenets of modern art, which promote a visual language that is far from accessible to most people, this earlier model appeared particularly appealing, primarily because it suggested a way of reaching a broad audience, an objective that seemed essential if I were to contribute to any meaningful transformation of consciousness. This ideal appeared eminently possible in the climate of the early 1970s, when the women's movement was at its height, a time when no dream – even one so vast as influencing the world through art – seemed impossible. [. . .]

iv) Amelia Jones, 'The Sexual Politics of *The Dinner Party*: A Critical Context' (1996)

Amelia Jones is a feminist art historian who teaches at the University of California, Riverside. In 1996 she curated an exhibition entitled *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* at the University of California, Los Angeles Armand Hammer Museum. Although *The Dinner Party* was the focus of the exhibition, it included over one hundred works by fifty-five feminist artists, covering the period from the 1960s onwards. By placing Chicago's installation alongside other feminist works, including many more recent pieces, Jones sought to demonstrate the range of issues and questions raised by Chicago's work which have continued to be of interest to feminist art practice and theory. The following extract is taken from Jones's essay in the exhibition catalogue entitled 'The Sexual Politics of *The Dinner Party*: A Critical Context'. In this text she highlights some of the debates, conflicts and critical strategies within both feminist and modernist art history for which *The Dinner Party* has become 'a central icon'. (Notes omitted and re-ordered.) [GP]

Source: Amelia Jones, 'The Sexual Politics of *The Dinner Party*: A Critical Context', in Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 84–9

Since its premier at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* has engendered vehement responses, both positive and negative. In 1980 John Perreault described the piece as 'magnificent,' stating: 'It is an important work; it is a key work. Certain conservative journalistic critics may call it kitsch to their dying day, may puritanically rage against its sexual imagery, may imply over and over again that it can't be good art because it's too popular; but I know it's great. I was profoundly moved.'¹ Kay Larson, conversely, insisted that *The Dinner Party* 'manages to be brutal, baroque, and banal all at once,' and Hilton Kramer intoned, notoriously, that "The Dinner Party" reiterates its theme . . . with an insistence and vulgarity more appropriate . . . to an advertising campaign than to a work of art.²

In spite of these conflicted readings – or perhaps because of them – *The Dinner Party*, which has been in storage since its last exhibition in Melbourne,

Australia, in 1988, has come to be seen as a central icon of a certain period of feminist art. It has been positively viewed, by Perreault and populist feminists such as Lucy Lippard, as paradigmatic of feminism's triumphant and uplifting celebration of female artistic expression. It has been negatively evaluated by modernist critics such as Kramer as epitomizing a loss of 'artistic standards.'³ Feminist commentators have criticized it as exemplary of 1970s feminism's supposed naïveté, essentialism, universalism, and failure to establish collaborative alternatives to the unified (and masculinist) authorial structures of modernist art production. Indeed, the very intensity of these responses to *The Dinner Party* and the extreme polarization of opinion seen in evaluations of the piece testify to its importance as a cultural monument with which all historians of contemporary art, and perhaps especially feminist art historians, must come to terms. *The Dinner Party* and the issues it raises are central to an understanding of the politics of modernist, postmodernist, and feminist art theory and art history.

The reception of *The Dinner Party* highlights unexpected intersections among critical models thought to be opposed: for example, some feminist responses to the piece converge uncomfortably with conventional modernist evaluations. Here I would like first to outline the parameters of modernist critiques of the piece and then to explore its position within feminist arguments in order to highlight what it can teach us about the ideological assumptions motivating critical thought about contemporary art. The history of *The Dinner Party* reception can tell us a great deal about the politics of art criticism and of feminism itself, foregrounding, in particular, the complexity of the feminist project, which attempts [. . .] both to construct a coalition of women and to contest the exclusions that such a unification of subjects entails.

Returning *The Dinner Party* to a complex historical and political matrix is a crucial step in attempting to understand the 'sexual politics' of feminist art theory and practice and, by extension, the politics of identity in the 1990s. Today there appears to be little understanding of the complexities of 1970s feminism and its historical context. The results of this loss of history are damaging: younger generations of feminists have little access to the wealth of insights that were painfully developed in the art and theory of this period and waste time reinventing what has already been extensively theorized,⁴ and writers such as Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe have capitalized on this lost history by dismissing earlier feminisms in order to pose themselves as the avatars of a 'postfeminist' (and, I would argue, misogynist) viewpoint.⁵ Furthermore, this erasure has encouraged the tendency of mainstream, non-feminist historical accounts of the 1970s to ignore the feminist advances that took place during this period; to emphasize male movements and conceptions of radicality over the explosively disruptive effects of feminist art, theory, and activism.⁶ The charged reception of *The Dinner Party* has much to teach us about the complexities of feminist and contemporary art history. [. . .]

The goal of this essay is to consider these diverse responses, returning to *The Dinner Party* with an analytical but respectful eye; its basic assumption is that, whether one likes the piece or not, it is a crucially important work that has

catalyzed volatile but extremely important discussion. As David Evett argued in a 1981 review that is unusual within *Dinner Party* criticism for its measured tone, the piece 'is among the most important later twentieth-century American works of art, not necessarily because it is a better work than others of a comparable form and scale, but because, like *Nude Descending a Staircase* or *Guernica*, it has been able to force a great many viewers to consider and reconsider their basic assumptions about what art can and ought to do.' Among other things, then, *The Dinner Party* can enable us to take seriously our own feminist art history, as much as we may not like its fledgling assumptions. Celebrated and excoriated at once by writers with vastly different ideological perspectives, the piece has become a central – if often invisible – monument within the history of contemporary art. For the moment, as Evett put it, 'we have to deal with *The Dinner Party*.'⁷

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE DINNER PARTY: MODERNIST ART HISTORY

Hilton Kramer's account of *The Dinner Party*, which sticks obsessively on its populism, confirms the transgressiveness of the piece within the conservative codes of modernist art discourse. The hysteria with which modernist art critics have accused *The Dinner Party* of being kitsch testifies to its enormous threat to these ostensibly disinterested discourses, which take their authority from the assumed inherence of artistic value. Through its overt celebration of craft and its explicit politicization of the history of Western culture, the piece blatantly subverts modernist value systems, which privilege the 'pure' aesthetic object over the debased sentimentality of the domestic and popular arts.

The Dinner Party revises the history of Western culture by naming and symbolizing in visual form 1,038 women from various historical periods. Nine hundred and ninety-nine of them are named on luminous porcelain floor tiles, and the thirty-nine honorees at the dinner table itself are symbolically represented through elaborate needlepoint runners, in large part worked in techniques drawn from the period in which each woman lived, and ceramic plates with centralized motifs and vulvar imagery.⁸ Chicago's integration of media associated with women's labor in the domestic sphere (needlework, ceramics, and china painting) into this monumental artwork produces an explosive collision between aesthetics (the public domain of the high-art museum) and domestic kitsch (the private domain of women's space, the home).⁹

The judgments of modernist art criticism in its hegemonic form, as epitomized by the later writings of Clement Greenberg, are predicated on the notion that visual art must, in Greenberg's words, 'confine itself to what is given in visual experience and make no reference to any other orders of experience.'¹⁰ From the perspective of Chicago and other feminist artists and artists of color working in the 1960s and 1970s, Greenberg's insistence on the autonomy of art (especially as his more complex arguments were reductively deployed by writers such as Kramer) was perceived as motivated by a reactionary apoliticism that supported the status quo, excluding from the privileged domain of 'high art' elements of popular culture and work by women and other groups of people marginalized by elitist institutions of high art.

Greenberg's formalism came to be seen as synonymous with modernism's conservative privileging of masculine values and white, male artists.

In Greenberg's late, formulaic view of high art, the 'essence' of modernism lies in the artwork's 'purity' and 'self-definition,' its truthfulness to its medium; from the mid-nineteenth century onward, 'all ambitious tendencies in painting were converging . . . in an antisculptural direction.' The modernist work of art must 'exclude the representational or the 'literary,' must be abstract, must be 'a question of purely optical experience.'¹¹ This formalist argument developed out of Greenberg's much earlier, and well-known, formulation of a dichotomous view of culture that posed a pure modernism in opposition to degraded 'kitsch.' In a 1939 essay he demanded that a strict boundary be maintained between 'avant-garde' (high modernist) art and low culture, or 'kitsch.' Kitsch, for Greenberg, is 'debased and academicized' culture; it is 'ersatz culture,' the 'epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our time.' Kitsch is all that formalist, modernist art is not: it is popular, loved by the masses; it is literary; it is associated with women's tastes and with domestic crafts.¹²

Clearly Greenberg's seemingly 'disinterested' criteria for judging works of art – inherited by Kramer – has a distinct gender bias. Kramer's response to *The Dinner Party* is paradigmatic of a modernist, and still masculinist, mode of critical evaluation that could view the piece only as a threat to post-Enlightenment definitions of artistic 'quality.' Notions of 'quality' and 'greatness,' as 1970s feminist artists and art theorists had already begun to argue when *The Dinner Party* appeared on the scene, always harbor ideological investments.¹³ Thus, Kramer's histrionic rejection of *The Dinner Party* – as displaying a vulgarity 'more appropriate . . . to an advertising campaign than to a work of art,' as associated with the 'abysmal taste' of 'kitsch' – can be seen as the response of a critic whose system of values is being threatened. *The Dinner Party* is a blast in the face of modernist criticism: it is literary; it is aggressively handmade using 'feminine' crafts techniques; it is painting and embroidery made blatantly sculptural. Through its flamboyant activation of kitsch – the prohibited desire of modernism – *The Dinner Party* explodes the boundaries of aesthetic value so carefully policed by modernist criticism. (One can thus imagine the source of Kramer's anxiety as he contemplated the sickly-sweet, pastrylike lace lips of the Emily Dickinson plate, beckoning him unabashedly.)

It is difficult, however, to align *The Dinner Party* with the radical feminist goal of merging high and low so as to collapse the masculinist hierarchy of value that dichotomizes 'avant-garde' and 'kitsch,' especially if one reads the piece through Chicago's own public statements about her introduction of craft into the high-art realm.¹⁴ She has made it clear, in fact, that she wants *The Dinner Party* to be viewed as high art, that she still subscribes to this structure of value: 'I'm not willing to say a painting and a pot are the same thing,' she has stated. 'It has to do with intent. I want to make art.'¹⁵ Chicago was ambivalent about whether china painting could be considered an aesthetic pursuit. She wrote that the women in her china-painting class were 'primarily housewives interested in filling their spare time,' whereas she herself had been a "serious" art student' from the time she was young.¹⁶ Rather than attempting to break down the distinction between high and

low, Chicago has openly acknowledged her continued investment in upholding such an opposition.

Here again, *The Dinner Party* teaches us something about conflicts endemic to feminist art theory: Chicago is by no means the only feminist to have maintained a desire to have her work exhibited and discussed within high art institutions and discourses while attempting to critique them at the same time. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, this contradiction is common to almost all feminist practice from 1970 to the present.¹⁷ At the same time it is clear from Kramer's response that, in spite of Chicago's investment in a hierarchical and ultimately masculinist modernist conception of 'high' art, *The Dinner Party* clearly disrupted modernist value systems.

Kramer's opinion was echoed in the evaluations of other conservative writers. Robert Hughes wrote in *Time* magazine that *The Dinner Party* is 'mainly cliché, . . . with colors worthy of a Taiwanese souvenir factory. In terms of taste, *The Dinner Party* is no better than mass devotional art.' Hughes alludes here to both kitsch and the presumably stupid devotion of the uneducated masses. Maureen Mullarkey, writing in *Commonweal*, excoriated the 'vapid prettiness of the imagery,' which in her view aligned *The Dinner Party* with *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. Chicago's plates, she argued, are the 'Hummel figurines of the feminist movement.'¹⁸ Both Hughes's Taiwanese souvenirs and Mullarkey's Hummel figurines represent degraded kitsch culture (and, especially in the latter case, are linked to feminine tastes). Suzanne Muchnic of the *Los Angeles Times* was even more direct, labeling the piece 'the ultimate in 1970s kitsch.'¹⁹

It is clear that Chicago's decision to use many different techniques and styles of needlework as well as china painting to 'call . . . attention to women's unrecognized heritage' challenged the prevailing modernist structures of critical judgment. For it is precisely its use of women's crafts, combined with its style and content, that aligned *The Dinner Party* with kitsch in the eyes of conservative critics. A photograph accompanying a *People* magazine article headlined 'Sassy Judy Chicago Throws a Dinner Party, but the Art World Mostly Sends Regrets' depicts the artist sitting in front of the piece and sticking out her tongue (presumably at Kramer, who is cited in the article); this is a particularly apt visualization of her self-defined, contradictory position – both at odds with and on top of the modernist critical system.

[. . .]

NOTES

- 1 John Perreault, 'No Reservation,' *The Soho News*, 22 October 1980, 19.
- 2 Kay Larson, 'Under the Table: Duplicity, Alienation,' *Village Voice*, 11 June 1979, 51; Hilton Kramer, 'Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" Comes to Brooklyn Museum,' *The New York Times*, 17 October 1980.
- 3 See Hilton Kramer, 'Does Feminism Conflict with Artistic Standards?' *The New York Times*, 27 January 1980, sec. 2, in which he implies, of course, that it does.
- 4 As Lucy Lippard has pointed out, in much of the new feminist work from the 1990s, 'it feels as though the wheel is being reinvented by those who don't know the feminist art history of "transgression"'

- The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* [New York: New Press, 1995], 3–28). I am indebted to Lippard, who has been the single most consistent champion of 1970s feminist art for the last two decades, for sharing her thoughts and an early version of this text with me.
- 5 For Paglia's offensive 'postfeminist' views (such as her dismissal of 'endlessly complaining feminists' [9]), see her essays in *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). Roiphe, a twenty-something postfeminist, most clearly demonstrates the dangers of this lost history in her exco-riation of what she calls 'fashionable feminists' and 'rape crisis feminists'; see her disturbing *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993). Given the striking parallels between their positions and those of traditional patriarchy, it is no surprise that both women have been given enormous media attention.
 - 6 A perfect example of this erasure is the revisionist accounts of the history of the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (known as CalArts), as a site for the development of radical postmodern practice in the early 1970s – accounts that completely ignore the motivating presence of the Feminist Art Program run by Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in the early 1970s. The 1987 exhibition *CalArts: Skeptical Beliefs* epitomized this. Only one passing reference is made to the Feminist Art Program in the seven essays in the catalogue, and none of the artists from the program was included in the exhibition (see *CalArts: Skeptical Beliefs*) [Chicago: Renaissance Society, University of Chicago; Newport, California: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1987]. See also Mira Schor's 'Amnesiac Return,' *Tema Celeste*, no. 37–38 (Autumn 1992): 16–17. Schor, who participated in the CalArts Feminist Art Program, is an active feminist artist and art writer who has been an important voice in the documentation of this partial history.
 - 7 David Evert, 'Moveable Feast,' *Northern Ohio Live*, 4–17 May 1981, 27, 29. I am indebted to Rosalind Bickell for sharing with me her provocative paper examining the controversial position of *The Dinner Party* in art discourse, 'Intervention on the Sacred: The Politics and Poetics of *The Dinner Party*' (1991).
 - 8 The thirty-nine embroidered runners for each of the honored 'guests' at the party have been seen as particularly successful elements of the piece even by those who are repelled by the plates. Kramer, for example, allows that in the runners 'we occasionally encounter some details of real artistic interest' ('Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party"'). A notable exception to the appreciation of the runners is Tamar Garb's acerbic evaluation of them as exemplary of *The Dinner Party*'s hypocritical attempt to pose a subversive, alternative female tradition to modernism through the use of traditional female skills while at the same time 'satisfying Modernism's hunger for innovation' and presenting the work within conditions of viewing 'in keeping with the notion of the art museum as shrine' ('Engaging Embroidery,' *Art History* 9 [March 1986]: 132).
 - 9 The needlework loft was run by Susan Hill, who cowrote (with Chicago) the second Dinner Party book, *Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980).
 - 10 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1965), in *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1966), 74. See also Mary Kelly's important critique of Greenberg, 'Re-Veiling Modernist Criticism' (1981), in which she cites this essay, in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), 92.
 - 11 Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' 68–69, 70, 71.
 - 12 Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939), in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 10. Greenberg specifically notes that the appreciator of kitsch culture is 'more usually' a woman, in 'Present Prospects in American Painting' (1947), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2. *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 161. Greenberg's polemic, of course, has its own specific historical subtext, one that explains the vehemence with which he justifies his oppositional framing of kitsch as the 'bad' other of avant-garde practice. Writing in 1939, he was responding to the overwhelming effects of fascist totalitarianism in Europe. His excoriation of kitsch, then, was motivated by a desire to theorize the ways in which bourgeois capitalism, with its debasement (or 'kitschification') of culture, contributed to the kind of political totalitarianism (with its consumerist strategies of mass manipulation) that supported Germany's fascist regime during this period. On these issues, see Francis Frascina's 'Introduction,' T.J. Clark's 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art,' and Michael Fried's 'How Modernism Works,' in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 3–20, 47–79. I am grateful to Anne Wagner for encouraging me to look again at these analyses of Greenberg. While this historical context is crucial to understanding the bases of Greenberg's argument, I am interested here, rather, in the way in which this argument is articulated, i.e. in the fact that, like many theories of culture throughout the modernist period (from

- Nietzsche to Adorno), Greenberg posited a dichotomous model of culture that defined debased, unsuccessful, or otherwise 'bad' art in feminine terms. See my discussion of this phenomenon in *Postmodernism and the EnGendering of Marcel Duchamp* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16–21.
- 13 See Carol Duncan, 'When Greatness is a Box of Wheaties' (1975), in *The Aesthetics of Power Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121–32.
- 14 On the use of craft to 'feminize' art practice and subvert modernism, see Norma Broude, 'Miriam Schapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art' (1980), in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 315–29; and idem, 'The Pattern and Decoration Movement,' in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 208–25.
- 15 Cited in Lucy Lippard, 'Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party,"' *Art in America* 68 (April 1980): 124. See also Chicago's privileging of art over craft in 'Judy Chicago,' interview with Dinah Dosser (1983), in *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art Today*, ed. Hilary Robinson (New York: Universe Books, 1988), 44; and in Caroline Seeborn, 'The Dinner Party: Turning Women's Crafts into Art,' *House and Garden*, April 1981, 199. Diana Kercham comments that, while Chicago uses traditional crafts, she 'makes a rigid distinction between fine arts and crafts, and places her own career on the fine arts side of the fence' ('On the Table: Joyous Celebration,' *Village Voice*, 11 June 1979, 49). Laura Meyer examines Chicago's ambivalence about her use of crafts in 'The "Essential" Judy Chicago: Central Core Imagery vs. the Language of Fetishism in Womanhouse and *The Dinner Party*' (M.A. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1994); see also her essay in this catalogue.
- 16 Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 8–9.
- 17 For example, see my critique of the contradictory privileging and heroizing of artists such as Barbara Kruger for their supposed deconstruction of conceptions of artistic genius in my book review, 'Modernist Logic in Feminist Histories of Art,' *Camera Obscura* 27 (1991–92): 149–65.
- 18 Robert Hughes, 'An Obsessive Feminist Pantheon: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* Turns History into Agitprop,' *Time*, 15 December 1980, 85; Maureen Mullarkey, 'Dishing It Out: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party,"' *Commonweal* 108 (April 1981): 210–11. Interestingly Mullarkey, like Hughes, associates the piece with religious imagery (another connection that implicitly feminizes and, within modernist logic, devalues it): 'The combination of opportunism, evangelical intent, and entrepreneurial drive and technique . . . make it as American as Billy Sunday' (210). One way of looking at this particular critique is that it helps these critics explain away the enormous popularity of the piece: dismissing its appeal by linking it to the blind devotion inspired by religious zealots, they downplay questions of their own elitism (for feminists, perhaps especially important questions).
- 19 Suzanne Muchnic, 'An Intellectual Famine at Judy Chicago's Feast,' *Los Angeles Times*, 15 April 1979. For mostly outraged responses to Muchnic's diatribe, see the letters to the editor published in the April 29th issue and the unpublished letter by Suzanne Lacy in the Judy Chicago archives.

v) Linda Nochlin, from 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1975)

Linda Nochlin is the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor of Modern Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and her work in feminist art history has had an important influence on the discipline. Nochlin wrote this essay 'during the heady days of the birth of the Womens' Liberation Movement' in 1970, and it first appeared in *Art News* in January 1971 (Vol. 69) as part of an edition which addressed women and art. It has since come to be seen as a seminal text which helped to form the ideological agenda of feminist art history. In this extract (the first part of the essay) Nochlin argues that the question: 'why have there been no great women artists?' is itself based on a set of uncritical assumptions about what

'great art' is. She shows that before we can adequately answer the question we need to unpick some of the gendered assumptions which underpin it. Later sections of the essay (not reproduced here) go on to explore 'The Question of the Nude', and the idea of art as 'The Lady's Accomplishment', demonstrating the historical and cultural nature of the idea of the (male) artist, rooted in social, educational and aesthetic conventions. (Notes omitted and re-ordered.) [GP]

Source: Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1975), in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Thames and Hudson, 1989, pp. 145–58

While the recent upsurge of feminist activity in this country has indeed been a liberating one, its force has been chiefly emotional – personal, psychological, and subjective – centered, like the other radical movements to which it is related, on the present and its immediate needs, rather than on historical analysis of the basic intellectual issues which the feminist attack on the status quo automatically raises.¹ Like any revolution, however, the feminist one ultimately must come to grips with the intellectual and ideological basis of the various intellectual or scholarly disciplines – history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc. – in the same way that it questions the ideologies of present social institutions. If, as John Stuart Mill suggested, we tend to accept whatever *is* as natural, this is just as true in the realm of academic investigation as it is in our social arrangements. In the former, too, 'natural' assumptions must be questioned and the mythic basis of much so-called fact brought to light. And it is here that the very position of woman as an acknowledged outsider, the maverick 'she' instead of the presumably neutral 'one' – in reality the white-male-position-accepted-as-natural, or the hidden 'he' as the subject of all scholarly predicates – is a decided advantage, rather than merely a hindrance or a subjective distortion.

In the field of art history, the white Western male viewpoint, unconsciously accepted as *the* viewpoint of the art historian, may – and does – prove to be inadequate not merely on moral and ethical grounds, or because it is elitist, but on purely intellectual ones. In revealing the failure of much academic art history, and a great deal of history in general, to take account of the unacknowledged value system, the very *presence* of an intruding subject in historical investigation, the feminist critique at the same time lays bare its conceptual smugness, its meta-historical naïveté. At a moment when all disciplines are becoming more self-conscious, more aware of the nature of their presuppositions as exhibited in the very languages and structures of the various fields of scholarship, such uncritical acceptance of 'what is' as 'natural' may be intellectually fatal. Just as Mill saw male domination as one of a long series of social injustices that had to be overcome if a truly just social order were to be created, so we may see the unstated domination of white male subjectivity as one in a series of intellectual distortions which must be corrected in order to achieve a more adequate and accurate view of historical situations.²

It is the engaged feminist intellect (like John Stuart Mill's) that can pierce through the cultural-ideological limitations of the time and its specific

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