

much of what constitutes this body of feminist criticism is excellent,⁶ the paucity of published writing on women artists is at odds with the sheer numbers making and exhibiting significant work. It is also unrepresentative of the commitment to in-depth analysis of the works and lives of women artists testified to by postgraduate dissertations in university and college libraries. *Dialogues* is a vigorous and welcome contribution to this material.

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Notes

- 1 This means that women artists represented Ireland in the Venice Biennale before women artists represented the US, UK, France or Germany, as the Guerilla Girls' installation at the 51st Venice Biennale pointed out. For more on Reid and McGuinness, see Fionna Barber's 'Excavating Room 50: Irish Painting and the Cold War at the 1950 Venice Biennale', in Fintan Cullen and John Morrison, eds, *A Shared Legacy. Essays on Irish and Scottish Art and Visual Culture*, Aldershot, 2005, 207–224.
- 2 Crucially, ethnic minority women and women of colour in Ireland are interrogating how patriarchal discourses of Irish national identity doubly disavow women from minorities, and as activists and critics have been foregrounding the experiences of minorities and issues of discrimination and racism for decades. See, for example, Ronit Lentin, 'Constitutionally Excluded: Citizenship and (some) Irish women' in Nira Yuval Davis and Pnina Werbner, eds, *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, London and New York, 1999; Ronit Lentin, 'Racializing (our) Dark Rosaleen: Feminism, citizenship, Racism, Anti-semitism', *Women's Studies Review*, 6 1999, 1–19; Gretchen Fitzgerald, *Repulsing Racism: Reflections on Racism and the Irish*, Dublin 1992. For a poetic interrogation of constructs of 'Irish woman', see Ailbhe Smyth, 'The Floozie in the Jacuzzi: The Problematics of Culture and Identity for an Irish Woman', in Hilary Robinson, ed., *Feminism-Art-theory. An Anthology 1968–2000*, Oxford, 2001.
- 3 Hilary Robinson, 'Irish/Woman/Artwork: Selective Readings', *Feminist Review*, 50, summer 1995, 89–110.
- 4 Joan Fowler, 'Contemporary Women Artists: Practices and issues into the future', *Irish Women Artists: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, Dublin, 1987.
- 5 Paula Murphy, 'Re-reading Mainie Jellett', *Mainie Jellett*, Dublin, 1991, 36.
- 6 An overview is beyond the scope of this review, but see, for example, Fionna Barber's publications from the early 1990s to the present, including, 'The Instability of Otherness: Gender, Irishness and Identity', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Autumn 2001, 89–105; Fionna Barber, 'Hybrid Histories: Alice Maher. Interviewed by Fionna Barber', *Art History*, 26:3 2003, 406–421. See also Sabina Sharkey, 'Of Salt, Song, Stone and Marrow-bone: The work of Anne Tallentire', in Valerie Connor, ed., *Anne Tallentire*, Dublin, 1999; Moira Roth, 'Two Women: The Collaboration of Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, or International Conversations Among Women', *Sounding the Depths*, Dublin, 1992; Hilary Robinson, 'An Irigarayan Reading of Irish Visual Culture', *Irish Studies Review*, 8:1 2000, 57–72; Catherine Nash, 'Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland', in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds, *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, New York, 1994.

A BIFURCATED HISTORY (AND SO IT GOES ON)

Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity by Lisa E Bloom, New York and London: Routledge, 2006, 188pp., 66 b. & w. illus., £60.00 hdbk, £16.99 pbk

Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity is a ground-breaking book. Lisa Bloom aims to delineate a trajectory of arts practice that acknowledges the range of

sources and material with which artists work. This is a history of feminist art in the United States that includes previously elided Jewish narratives. In re-examining feminist art from the perspective of Jewish identity, Bloom adds fresh insights into the work of key artists from the 1970s, through a thesis that she has been developing over a number of years.¹ Her interests include issues of black and Jewish difference and their impact on the reception and development of art-historical discourse.²

In this new book she extends and expands these themes. Bloom assembles a narrative of identity in art that is heterogeneous, writing across three specific time-frames and two geographical locations.³ The emphasis on heterogeneity is central to Bloom's main argument: that although feminist art practices of the 1970s opened the door to new ways of making, new approaches to writing and new subjectivities, elisions occurred that have not taken full account of the times and contexts of making. It is only through acknowledging the complexities of practice that the internal contradictions that have arisen due to historical omissions can be corrected. Elisions still occur, argues Bloom, because of the privileging of an outmoded 'euro-centric cosmopolitanism' that does not actually represent contemporary practices that are reaching out to counter hierarchies of oppression, conflict and prejudice. It is these new practices that will 'make a different kind of cosmopolitanism imaginable through artwork that puts emphasis on particularity, hybridity and openness to difference'.⁴ Although it may, to most, look like there is already an 'emphasis on particularity, hybridity and openness to difference', *Ghosts of Ethnicity* reveals some of the limits of that assumption in concrete terms, through empirical research and analysis of art work.

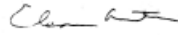
The book traverses three important junctures in the so-called Western avant garde: Greenberg and the 1950s, 1970s feminism and contemporary feminist practices. Although the focus is the United States, divergent influences and trajectories within this continent are highlighted through Bloom's insistence on giving separate treatment to the east and west coasts from both periods of her study on feminist art. This is especially useful to a non-US audience where such geographical differences often become conflated into one hegemonic entity.

The first four chapters are historical, tracing a lineage from Greenberg and the relationship between his perception of self as a Jew and ideologies of the artist's role in society. Bloom explores the escape from particularity that exemplified Greenberg's position, the shadow this cast over feminist practices, and the ongoing requirement to be unfettered by belonging. Most recent scholarship has quite rightly critiqued this position, but Bloom, while acknowledging the shifts that have been made, suggests that this narrative continued into the 1970s and had a bearing on feminist artists such as Judy Chicago, Eleanor Antin, Martha Rosler and Mierle Laderman Ukeles and the critiques of work by feminist artists in general.

Judy Chicago is a counterpoint to the other artists in the book: although she challenges the Greenbergian discourse in her craft-based approach, in her working methods Chicago enacts a genius discourse that elides differences and power relations between women while foregrounding herself and her own practices. Bloom suggests that Chicago's reasons for name change, looked at in detail here, reveal acquiescence towards patriarchy and a willingness to assimilate that dovetails with her aims of universalizing womanhood. By contrast, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Martha Rosler make work about domestic labour that bears witness to the differentiations in power relations that arguably emerge through an understanding of their own difference.

ENCOUNTER #1

At the February 20th meeting, I shall take on the job of ombudsman. This will necessitate my pointing out to each member of the group, and in any manner I choose, a particular failing she displays in relation to the others. These may be of an ephemeral sort such as personal bugginess taken out on someone else or of a more serious nature like, say, a rip-off of the entire group. I must always keep in mind that my statements are intended to bring about more satisfactory behaviour from the others and are never to be used for egoistic purposes of my own. I must complete these 8 tasks before the group normally disperses otherwise I must keep the session going by whatever means I can until I do complete them.

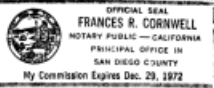

Eleanor Antin

STATE OF CALIFORNIA } ss.
COUNTY OF San Diego

On this 19th day of February in the year one thousand nine hundred 72, before me Frances R. Cornwell a Notary Public in and for the said County of San Diego, personally appeared Eleanor Antin

personally known to me to be the person, whose name is _____ subscribed to the within instrument, and she acknowledged to me that she executed the same.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my Official Seal, at my office in the said County of San Diego, the day and year in this certificate first above written.



Frances R. Cornwell
Notary Public in and for the County of San Diego, State of California.

NOTARY OFFICE SUPPLIES, SANTA CRUZ-FORM NO. 4

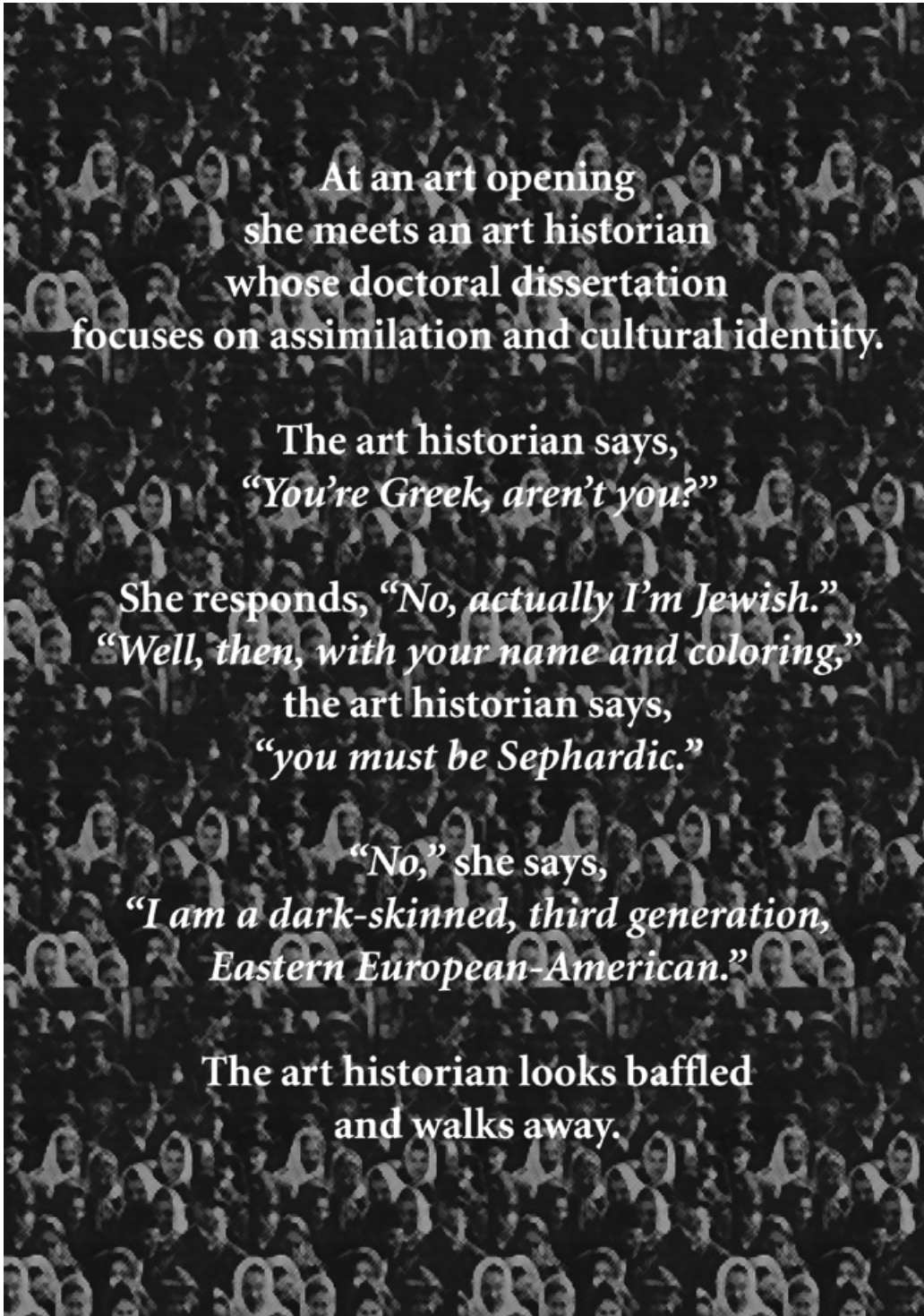
1 Eleanor Antin, *Encounter 1*, 1972, in 4 transactions, typewritten text and ink on paper.

They do not make universalizing claims; nor does Eleanor Antin, who is Bloom's exemplary artist. Antin explained and explored power relations between women in a way that was not popular at the time, either in situations where women were meant to be equal, such as in feminist artist meetings, the subject of *4 Transactions* (1972, plate 1), or within presumed harmony of family life in the *Domestic Peace* series (1971). The critiques of Antin's work also exemplify critical preferences for a Greenbergian trajectory as Bloom suggests that *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) has received most attention because it is the one piece by Antin that conforms to a reading of a generic gendered body, problematizing the history of the nude in Western painting but excluding obvious references to issues of belonging. Her analysis here introduces some new readings, referencing Eugenicist photography and issues of 'visibility and legibility' as a Jew resulting in 'a willful failure to assimilate as a generic subject'.⁵ Bloom concentrates on lesser-known works by Antin and Rosler, while making the point that these works are erased from the cannon in order to allow for a seamless

understanding of feminist art as having a single issue agenda. For example, Bloom concentrates on works that disrupt the image of the utopian West coast feminism in the East coast imaginary: works such as *Service: A Trilogy on Colonization*, which looks at the power division between women who belong to a different race or class from Rosler, or work that deals directly with her own unease with the dominant Christian culture, such as the series of holiday cards entitled *From Our House To Your House* (1974–78), or a work such as *She see in Herself a New Woman Every Day* (1977). Again, implicit in Bloom's argument here are the reasons for the choices of which work gets written about: *She see in Herself a New Woman Every Day* reflects explicitly on Rosler's problematic relationship with her mother; the bifurcated relationship Jews have with otherness and the majority Christian culture; with class. In other words, this is work with a multi-faceted sense of self that is not fully containable.

Each of these historical chapters is a vehicle for the author to review broader themes of feminist history in relation to the differing subject position of the artists. Chapter 4, for example, deals with themes of silence and an inability to speak as a Jew in activist or feminist artistic circles. Bloom brings Nancy Miller's observations of the 1980s to add to Rosler's of the 1970s where the environment was openly hostile to any Jewish voice. Both women have since grappled with the complexities of being a secular Jew in relation to Israel, to competing hierarchies of victimhood, to the economic success of Jews in the United States according to Rosler, or the ability of Jews to 'pass' according to Sondra O'Neale.⁶

These are important themes that reveal the difficulty even now of speaking with a Jewish voice and of thinking what it means, especially within the black/white binary that so dominates the US discourse. Lisa Bloom is aware of this as she suggests through her explanation of the work of some of the contemporary artists, such as Danielle Abrams or Beverly Naidus, and also through repeated citing of Karen Brod-kin's view that Jews take up a middle ground of 'double-vision of in-between-ness'.⁷ These questions need to be explored further, as do the absolute distinctions between Jews as ethnic under an overriding distinction of black and white as race. Some scholarship has focused on the need to understand the mechanisms of racism through acknowledging (in the British context) anti-Irish racism, anti-Jewish racism and anti-Arab racism, for example, through their different expressions and signifiers in a way that does not subsume them into an overriding black-white dualism where 'colour racism' is posited as the 'real racism'.⁸ Lisa Bloom's empirical evidence, while not developed explicitly, posits these questions, as evidenced in the work of Elaine Reichek, for example. Reichek's installation piece entitled *Postcolonial Kinderhood* exploring the impulses and impact of assimilation, includes embroidered samplers depicting quotations such as 'I never think of being Jewish until I leave New York', or the following quotation that forms part of the work of Beverly Naidus, 'The Assimilation generation was brought up to conform, to look like the people in the magazine, to be better at being WASPs than the WASPs themselves. Both genetically and temperamentally she could not fit into the proper role or the right dress'.⁹ Another work by Naidus that Bloom also explores is the piece entitled *You're Greek Aren't You* (1995) (plate 2), which references Adrian Piper. Naidus's work is explicitly about not being able to be placed or 'pass', being identified as Other, either from a look or in some other indiscernible way. Bloom's critiques of Antin also serves to highlight the bifurcated position of Jews, suggesting on the one hand that in *Carving* the 'photographic self-portrait depicts an attractive, short Jewish woman' and on the other,



At an art opening
she meets an art historian
whose doctoral dissertation
focuses on assimilation and cultural identity.

The art historian says,
“You’re Greek, aren’t you?”

She responds, *“No, actually I’m Jewish.”*
“Well, then, with your name and coloring,”
the art historian says,
“you must be Sephardic.”

“No,” she says,
“I am a dark-skinned, third generation,
Eastern European-American.”

The art historian looks baffled
and walks away.

2 Beverly Naidus, *You're Greek Aren't You*, 1995, in *What Kinda Name is That*, 1996, laser prints on paper and mixed media.

when commenting on Antin's black ballerina persona, Eleanora Antinova, 'Antin seems to suggest that Jews such as herself, who have assimilated to the point that they are now indistinguishable in appearance from dominant white Americans, can no longer be imagined as having parents or grandparents who were pigeon-holed by arbitrary racial distinctions.'¹⁰ Doris Bittar, a Jewish artist explored in the final chapter, hinted at a kind of tyranny of whiteness amongst Jews in New York from which she feels liberated in California. As I have already argued elsewhere, it is through the very indeterminacy of the Jew that we may be able to start thinking about race in a way that can overcome the inadequacies of the black/white binary.¹¹

The final two chapters explore a range of contemporary artists – Rhonda Lieberman, Deborah Kass, Elaine Reichek, Sherry Milner, Joan Braderman and Danielle Abrams – who live and work in New York. What marks their practices is a use of irony and parody as a self-reflexive device, questioning their relation to kitsch, popular culture and representations of Jews and women – through the influence of Greenberg by way of negation. By contrast Ruth Wallen, Beverly Naidus, Liddia Shaddow and Doris Bittar, active in California, are earnest in their mode of address, and their work often dovetails with activism. For example, Doris Bittar, a Jewish woman born in Lebanon, makes work that explores connections between Jews and Arabs through oral history. She garners the narratives that make up part of the portraits she makes from a Jewish-Arab dialogue set up by herself and her husband. Similarly, Ruth Wallen is involved with a Jewish-Palestinian dialogue group and has made a website-based work drawn from this engagement. Wallen also works with Chicana women creating performances comprising dialogues taken from family narratives that allow all voices to be heard without competing.

These last chapters would have benefited by being longer, enabling them to reflect the range and scope that Bloom has achieved in the earlier sections of the book. Bloom concludes by arguing for a trans-national and trans-ethnic framework for arts practice, as distinct from earlier forms of practice that strove to define a singular identity. Artists such as Wallen and Bittar are indeed working towards a more inclusive sense of community that aims to counter deeply entrenched antagonisms. What remains unclear, however, is the current climate towards these artists within New York and California. Would Bloom agree with Deborah Kass's point that, 'it's really not as interesting to people as blackness'?¹²

In foregrounding the bifurcated position of Jews and the routes that Jewish identity has taken in the United States, in its complexities, Lisa Bloom is asking valuable questions. Through her exploration of the impact of assimilation, the power differentiations between feminists of different cultural, geographical and class backgrounds, and the mechanisms through which the formation of subjectivity becomes enmeshed in other identity formations, Bloom is making a valuable contribution to disrupting current entrenchments. Her particularly important contribution lies in demonstrating how these themes have played out in art practice and how new practices continue to constitute complex identity formations that push the boundaries of previous generations of art practitioners.

Ghosts of Ethnicity is not only a pleasure to read but a timely and brave book: the issue of Jewish identity in the visual arts has been and continues to be under-theorized and difficult to talk about. As Bloom points out, even recent scholarship, benefiting from postmodern discourse, often ignores any impact Jewish-ness may have had on postwar art practices in the US.¹³ Furthermore, in Britain there is no audience for

work interrogating Jewish identity. Most artists who are Jewish still feel that they would be marginalized by making such work. If Deborah Kass's statement (quoted above) from 2003 is true then what was true in the 1970s of Chicago, Antin, Ukeles et al, as framed by Bloom, is as true today. Bloom sums this up:

Their greatest successes [i.e. the artists in this book, particularly those from the 1970s] – legitimacy in the art work and the academy, recognition by feminists internationally – seem to have come at an enormous cost, which may have distanced us even further from filling in this history that continues to haunt us.¹³

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Notes

- 1 Bloom's work on Judy Chicago and Eleanor Antin has appeared in: 'Ethnic Notions and Feminist Strategies of the 1970s: Some Work by Judy Chicago and Eleanor Antin', in Catherine M. Sousaoff, ed., *Jewish Identity in Modern History*, Berkeley, 1999, 135–66; 'Contests for Meaning in Body Politics and Feminist Conceptual Art: Revisioning the 1970s through the Work of Eleanor Antin', in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds, *Performing The Body Performing The Text*, London, 1999, 153–69.
- 2 Bloom's interest in issues of difference from a broad perspective is exemplified in her previous books: the anthology *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, Minneapolis, 1999, and *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expedition*, Minneapolis, 1993.
- 3 In this book, Bloom's focus ranges from the shifting position of Greenberg through to contemporary artists.
- 4 Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 154.
- 5 Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 64.
- 6 According to the New York-based newspaper, *The Jewish Week*, in 2003 (<http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent>), 'one third of the Jewish population in New York City is at or near the poverty level.' Zora O'Neale is quoted by Nancy Miller in Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 84.
- 7 Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race In America*, London, 1998, 2.
- 8 '[T]here is nothing new about cultural differentiation as a basis for racist discourse in this country.' Quoted in Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations*, Milton Keynes, 1999, 72. See also Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age', in *Art & Design, Art & Cultural Difference*, London, 1995; Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, 'Self-Exposure as Theory: The Double Mark of the Male Jew', in Deborah Battaglia, ed., *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, Berkeley, 1995, 16–41; Brian Cheyette, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Jews and Jewishness in the writings of George Eliot and Frantz Fanon', in Keith Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry, Judy Squires, eds, *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, London, 1997, 106–126; Sumi K Cho, 'Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction', in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising*, New York, 1993, 196–301; Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations Culture and the Allure of Race*, London, 2000; Rachel Garfield, G Ali, 'Just Who Does He Think He Is', *Third Text*, 54, Spring 2001, 63–70.
- 9 Elaine Reichek, *Postcolonial Kinderhood, Samplers* (1994), needlepoint samplers; Beverly Naidus, *Right Dress Size* (1995), in *What Kinda Name is That* (1996), laser prints on paper and mixed media.
- 10 Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 76.
- 11 Garfield, 'Ali G', 63–70.
- 12 Interview with Deborah Kass and author, 25 April, 2003.
- 13 Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 11.