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HOW DOES THE 1970s FEMINIST ART MATTER? RUPTURES AND CONTINUITIES BETWEEN FEMINIST ART PRACTICES OF THE 1970s AND THE 1980s IN *JEANNE DIELMAN* (CHANTAL AKERMAN), *REASSEMBLAGE* (TRINH T. MINH-HA) AND *MEASURES OF DISTANCE* (MONA HATOUM)

INTRODUCTION The feminist movement of the 1970s should not be circumscribed to the Women's Liberation movements that emerged in the West, *consciousness raising* groups and public manifestations. The political work of the movement took different paths and the *cultural* aspects of the movement, the feminist literature and feminist art for example, should not be understood as consequences of the movement but part of it. Feminist art of the 1970s deeply participated in shaping the feminist thinking of the time (Kiani 2016). In this article, I intend to examine the contribution of the feminist movement and the feminist art of the 1970s, the so-called 'feminist Avant-garde';[1] (Schor 2015) on three films that are generally referred to as feminists or / and postcolonial. I intend to measure to what extent those works share feminist epistemologies and how they participate in the reframing and the broadening of feminism / postcolonial theory. This perspective aims to consider the feminist art movement in continuity with the feminist movement, based on the idea that feminist art and feminist activism are deeply intertwined, to the extent that there might be no heuristic advantages to analyze them distinctively. The first work is from the second half on the 1970s, the famous film by director Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). While this work was not defined 'feminist' by Akerman, the influence of the 1970's feminist thought is clearly visible, mainly in the way the film links the 'private sphere' to the political, and considers the female body and sexuality to be the primary site of oppression. By using performance as an artistic and political tool, the film strongly echoes methodologies of the feminist art movement of the 1970s, especially the Southern Californian movement[2]. The second and third works, *Reassemblage* by Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1982) and *Measures of distance* by Mona Hatoum (1988) broaden the spectrum by producing a postcolonial discourse critical of 'ocularcentrism' that was reactivated by feminist theorists in the 1970s and the

1) I refer here to the exhibition from the Sammlung Verbund, Vienna, 'Feminist avant-garde of the 1970s' curated by Gabriele Schor which took place in different cities from 2015. Schor intends to reaffirm the avant-garde potential of feminist art that was thus rarely recognized as such. Gabriele Schor (ed.) (2015): *Feministische Avantgarde. Kunst der 1970er-Jahre aus der Sammlung Verbund Wien*, Munich, Prestel.

2) Feminist art programs in Southern California were pioneers in integrating feminist thinking in performance art. Judy Chicago was amongst the first to create a program for feminist performance. The practice of performance art by feminist artists participated in changing practices of performance art outside of feminism. Feminist artists for example widely used video in their works and this practice was then generalized outside of the feminist art circles.

postcolonial critique in the context of the postcolonial turn[3], even though the critique of Western 'visual primacy' can be traced back at least to prewar philosophers such as Nietzsche and Bergson (Jay 1991: 15). The feminist theory of the (male) gaze defined the (Western) primacy of sight as androcentric. *French Feminists* point to the importance of other senses in female embodiment and of a women's language, the écriture *féminine* (Irigaray 1977, 1985; Cixous 1975 ; Kristeva 1977). In other words, feminists 'gendered' the critique of ocularcentrism.

I will discuss the films by Trihn T. Minh-Ha and Mona Hatoum, reflect on how they conceptualize an alternative voice and to what extent this conceptualization shares continuity with some aspects of the feminist art of the 1970s. Thus, one can wonder if the practice of those filmmakers radically breaks with what some theorists of the 1980s depicted as 'essentialist' in the feminist art of the 1970s (see: Jones 1999). I would however suggest that *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance* primarily redefine the relationship to knowledge in a way that deeply replaces the representation of racialized women in *cultural formations* rather than in an *essentialized nature*, and that they also connect with the *French Feminist* idea of a feminine epistemology through senses and the body rather than the visual.

Arguably the 1970s feminist movement could be defined as one of the most creative and radical feminist movement of the 20th Century. The first experimentations on 'women's art' emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, at the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts), when Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro founded the first feminist art program and in 1972 the first feminist exhibition, *Womanhouse* that took place in an abandoned house[4]. The works presented dealt with the narrowness of the domestic space and of women's lives between marriage, children bearing, care, self-care, and consumption. North American feminist artists before the postcolonial turn mainly produced works dealing with the question of limitations, alienation and identity through the prism of domestic work and sexuality, though an appreciable part of the movement conceptualized difference and women's art in essentialist terms. Judy Chicago is often cited as the paradigmatic example of this: her artwork seeked to develop a 'female aesthetic', through celebratory representations of the vagina as "central-core-imagery"[5], best represented in her performance-sculpture *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979). The piece consists of a large dinner table, around

3) Among the important body of work which participated to the framing and discussion of ocularentrism and the importance of the senses, see: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964): Phenomonology and the Sciences of Man. In: James M. Edie (ed.), The Primacy of Perception. Evanston, Northwestern University Press; Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1988): Le Visible et l'Invisible. Paris, Gallimard; Michel Foucault (1977): L'oeil du pouvoir. Entretien avec Jean-Pierre Baron and Michelle Perrot. In: Jeremy Bentham. Le panoptique. Paris, P. Belfond; Jacques Derrida (2000): Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy. Paris, Gallilée; David Levin (ed.)(1993): Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision. Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press; Martin Jay (1991): The Disenchantment of the Eye: Surrealism and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism. In: Visual Anthropology Review, 7, 1, pp. 15–38; Martin Jay (1994): Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision In Twentieth-Century French Thought. Berkeley / Los Angeles, University of California Press.

4) See the website of the exhibition: http://www.womanhouse.net/ [30.10.2018].

5) The term was coined by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, in "Female Imagery", Womanspace Journal, 1/3, 1973.

which real and mythical figures of women are represented by plates and other utensils, and covered with symbols, among them, vulvar ones. Anne Marie Pois, participant and reviewer of this performance, writes in 1979: 'This imagery mirrors the great gains women made by the twentieth Century in achieving a *language* and art that expresses the *deepest female consciousness*' (Pois 1979: 74, emphasis mine). Other artists of the time have been using vulvar symbols in their works, Hannah Wilke being a well-known example of this. However, this vision of a celebratory bodily difference and of a female aesthetic should not shadow the radicalism of their critique of the alienation produced by the confinement in the domestic sphere, the un-satisfaction of their sex lives subjected to the primacy of male desires and the strong patriarchy critique. All these were considered as social artefacts, and the heritage of Simone de Beauvoir in the thinking of the 1970s feminism is crucial[6]. In the historiography of feminist art, the 'essentialist' component of the 1970s is to a certain extent overestimated[7]. Among others, the Viennese artist Birgit Jürgensson produced a criticism of the biologization of the oppression of women in works such as *Nest* (1979) representing a bird's nest between women's legs. This model of a 1970s essentialist feminism versus a 1980s de-constructivist feminism has been strongly criticized (among others: Gourma-Peterson & Mathews 1987; Lippard 1995; Jones 1999; Mondloch 2012) and authors advocated for a vision of diversity in practices and theoretical thinking of feminist art in the 1970s and in the 1980s (Mondloch 2012).

AKERMAN'S EYE IN JEANNE DIELMAN Chantal Akerman's 1975 three hour twenty minutes film 'performance' *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, participates in the feminist critique of women's alienation. The film is a meticulous observation of the quotidian life of the mother of a teenage boy and a widow (Delphine Seyrig) in the suffocating space of her home. Akerman – in a style that will become a signature – forces the viewer to focus on the domestic routine of the woman. Almost every gesture is shown from the beginning to the end. The ellipses are kept to a strict minimum. By proceeding that way, Akerman does not only give to domestic banality and repetition a central part, but changes at the same time the hierarchy of what is considered legitimate to be shown in films. The ordinary thus becomes extraordinary, the banal, the everyday lives of women becomes a subject for film. The artist explains this approach in

6) The book of Simone de Beauvoir, "Le Deuxième Sexe", published in 1949 impacted strongly the cognitive orientation of the women's movement of the 1970s.

7) It is worth reminding here that the accusation of essentialism made by feminists of the 'third wave' to the 1970s feminists is not limited to art. On this critique, see Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrand (2005): Reclaiming Female Agency. Feminist Art History After Postmodernism. Berkeley, London, University of California Press; Lisa Ditsch (ed.) (2015): 1970s Feminisms In: South Atlantic Quaterly.

1979: “Because there is a hierarchy in images. For example, a car accident or a kiss in close-up, that’s higher in the hierarchy than washing-up. (…) And it’s not by accident, but relates to the place of women in the social hierarchy”[8]. As she says herself, she works “with the images between the images”(Martin and Akerman 1979: 41). Moreover, Akerman’s practice can be seen in continuity with the one of the feminist artists of the 1970s as she thinks both and together domestic oppression and sexual oppression. *Jeanne Dielman* indeed is not only trapped into the monotony of domestic work, she also is a sex worker who receives her clients in the domestic space. The repetition of actions, the sensation for the viewer not to be able to escape from Dielman’s claustrophobic world creates a tension that only resolves with the killing of a client by Jeanne. The stereotypical role of women / housewife / prostitute in the film suddenly becomes less evident and more complex by her act of killing.

It is the performative dimension of *Jeanne Dielman*, I argue, that places the piece in continuity with feminist art practice. Indeed, 1970s feminist art, especially the south Californian art, deeply reshaped the practice of performance. The female body, exploited through domestic and sex labor, through child bearing and unpaid work, becomes the main tool of emancipation in performance. The representation of the female body is challenged and deconstructed: “Women’s performance art operates to unmask this function of ‘Woman’, responding to the weight of representation by creating an acute awareness of all that signifies Woman, or femininity.” (Forte 1988: 218). For the 1970s feminist movement the re-appropriation of the body is central to liberation; in performance art this methodology is put into practice. Feminist art participated in renewing performance practices and the feminist thinking of the time. As Erin Striff explains, “Oftentimes, women became performance artists as part of the feminist movement’s focus on consciousness-raising; performance art created a space for women to voice their personal beliefs and feelings” (Striff 1997: 1). As Jayne Warke affirms, “feminist performance was instrumental in challenging the premise that art is an autonomous activity separate from the social and political conditions of everyday life. By adapting the feminist axiom that the personal is political to the practice of art making, feminist artists used performance as a form of cultural intervention in which personal experiences, narratives and representations were drown upon to contest the prevailing social and political arrangements of gender” (Wark 1997:

8) Angela Martin and Chantal Akerman (1979): Chantal Akerman’s films: A Dossier. In Feminist Review 1979 3, 24–7, p. 41

ii). Thus, feminist performance artists participated in producing a political discourse on gender that blurred the boundaries between art, the everyday life and the political. Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* pushes the boundaries of the performative on the one hand by making the viewer *experience* the entrapment of the domestic space and labor, as she forces him or her to observe carefully the gestures of the everyday life, and to *feel* the boredom and anxiety surrounding the woman's life. By changing the hierarchy order of what is legitimate to show in cinema on the other hand, she insists that the personal, the routine of women, has a social and political meaning. The performative dimension of *Jeanne Dielman* is innovative in the sense that the over three hours devoted to the clinical observation of what is usually seen as the banality of women's lives creates a strong feeling of alienation and a shared experience between Jeanne and the viewer. In that sense, Akerman engages in a new form of cinematographic performance that closely echoes feminist epistemologies of the time but participates in creating new objects and new experiences of cinema.

SENSORIAL ART: REASSEMBLAGE AND MEASURES OF DISTANCE

The two films that I will discuss here grew out of different contexts and traditions. *Reassemblage* (1982) is an early product of the 'crisis of representation' experienced by social sciences in the course of the 1980s. The crisis of representations re-thinks questions of authority and objectivity, the objectifying of the 'other' and the authoritative position of the (Western) researcher, which were mainly taken for granted before the postcolonial turn. Visual anthropology is strongly impacted by this crisis and new modes of production of knowledge and regimes of representation are experimented by anthropologists and researchers such as autoethnography and more generally an anthropology of the self rather than of others. The trigger of the crisis is difficult to clearly situate, however the works by Marcus, Clifford and Geertz are usually presented as starting points for the discussion in visual anthropology (Marcus & Fischer 1986; Turner & Bruner 1986; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Geertz, 1988). Regarding feminist theory, the 1980s are considered a moment of intense reframing and repositioning along with poststructuralism, and feminist art of the 1980s is often presented in art history as a moment of strong de-constructivism as opposed to a more 'essentialist' art, as already stated.

Reassemblage is a particularly early film dealing with the

problematic of Western gaze in social sciences with regard to the crisis of representations. If Trinh T. Minh-Ha produced a large body of work as an ethnographer, (but also a writer and a composer), *Reassemblage* is a film that is generally considered a critic of ethnographic filming and thus a critical contribution to the genre. The film presents footage from her fieldwork in West Africa that she completed in the context of the Research Expedition Program of the University of Berkeley. Women of rural Senegal are at the center of the film. The film is non-linear and non-narrative and the images are edited as rough short cuts. The images show moments of the daily lives of rural Senegal and focuses on women: cutting wood, performing art work, making fire, dancing, cooking: scenes that constitute the primary material of ethnographic analysis. Trinh's voice, disconnected with the images, is present now and then. The soundtrack is composed of voices from the tribes and percussions, and some sudden moments of complete absence of sound. Trinh's voice begins: 'scarcely twenty years were enough to make two billion people define themselves as underdeveloped. I do not intend to speak about. Just speak nearby.' The authoritarian position of the anthropologist, its voyeuristic position, the colonial gesture that punctuates the history of ethnographic filmmaking, are from the first minutes of the film at the center of the discourse. Trinh participates to the critique of 'ocularcentrism' central to feminist epistemologies in the 1970s, while strongly pointing to the relations of power between men and women and between North and South, at stake in ethnographic filmmaking. The male and Western gaze are altogether dismissed. Thus it is interesting that her early contribution to the debate on representation with *Reasssemblage* is rarely cited as a starting point in the process of the crisis of representation. By contesting who is legitimate to speak, and 'about' whom, by affirming that, unlike generations of ethnographers Trinh intends to 'speak nearby', on displacing the gaze and the authoritarian voice she proceeds in a similar vein as Akerman: she intends to change the hierarchy of representations. Andie E. Shabbar points to the disruptive effects of the editing in order to trigger an active and reflexive viewing rather than a passive gaze (Shabbar 2015: 1). I argue here that *Reassemblage* offers a new sort of knowledge production that is merely sensorial rather than visual. In that sense her film is also a very early work of what will later be an important current of anthropology, the *anthropology of the senses* (Among others: Stoller 1989; Seremetakis 1994; David McDougall 2005; Sarah Pink 2006 and 2009) in which

Mona Hatoum also engages. *Reassemblage* adds the postcolonial critique to the 1970s feminist critique of the objectification and of the othering of women. The discourse of *Reassemblage* is not only about women's representations, but specifically about racialized women's representations. This "encounter between feminism and postmodernism" (MacCabe 2004: 65) again is a significantly early one. She echoes the approach developed by the feminist artists of the 1970s of finding alternative ways of representation. By putting the male and the colonial gaze at the center of her film, she clearly places her work in continuity with the 1970s feminist discourse and the art practice of representation through performance.

I argue here however that Trinh T. Minh-Ha mainly does not try to find this alternative voice by creating a new way of filming but rather by mimicking traditional ethnographic film. Women are represented working, taking care of the children, and engaging in social activities. The colonial gaze and the ethnographic methods are parodically reproduced. Thus, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, herself a racialized woman and ethnographer, plays with the ambiguity of the positions, by questioning who has the authority to speak, from where, and about whom. Trinh T. Minh-Ha 'reverses' the methodology of Akerman: while in *Jeanne Dielman* the author intends to find alternative ways of representations by focusing on gestures that are usually not objects of cinema, Trinh uses the same codes then the ones she powerfully puts into question.

The Palestinian artist Beirut-born Mona Hatoum proposes another way of thinking representation and gaze, and the imposition of (Western) stereotypes on oriental women. Hatoum mainly works with video, performances and installation and deals with questions of war, violence and separation. *Measures of distance* was released in 1988 while Hatoum was an artist in residence in Vancouver. The sixteen minutes film is a complex construction. Photographs of Hatoum's mother's nude body are displayed on the screen with subtle changes in light and movements, Arabic words and a barbed wire fence 'veil' the images changing at a slow pace. The still photographs of parts of the mother's body do not clearly reveal it, as the photographs are close-ups and difficult to read, complicated by the abundance of other information on the image: the Arabic writing (letters from the mother), the darkness of the images, the barbed wire fence, and the different layers of sound. The soundtrack is made of women's voices talking in Arabic, laughs and sounds from a busy city, essentially car sounds and horns evoking an oriental metropolis. Hatoum slowly and carefully

reads letters she received from her mother dealing with their intimacy, the pain of separation, and the desire to be together again. The photographs and letters are from 1981, when Mona Hatoum lived in London and could not return to Lebanon because of the war. Through the letters, the mother evokes the war, the love for her family and the intimate discussions she had with her daughter in 1981 when she took the photographs for the film: "I enjoyed very much all these intimate conversations we had about women's things and all that. You and I had never talked in this way before." While the film progresses, images of the mother become visible and after almost four minutes, her face reveals itself clearly. The images get blurred again. Only after about six minutes body parts are distinguishable again, the breasts and the stomach. The body is then again clearly readable. The photographs show the mother from head to waist. Towards the end of the film, the entire body is revealed, but in the distance. The last part of the film is made from pictures of the whole body in the distance and close-ups in the same style then the beginning of the film.

While the film conveys multiple layers of meaning, dealing with many issues experienced by women in diaspora, I will emphasize here on visuality and representation. In the film Hatoum complicates visuality and forces the viewer to concentrate on sound. Thus, the visual becomes secondary and leaves space for other senses to create meaning. The close-ups on the mother's skin give the feeling of the texture of it. (Western)Voyeurism is avoided, and more important for the discussion here, vision itself is secondary to the experience of the film. Hatoum plays with the imagination of the viewer, as in *Reassemblage*, the viewer is active in creating meaning. *Measures of distance* has been analyzed as a work drawing on 'haptic' methodologies. For Laura Marks, "in haptic *visuality*, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. Haptic visuality, a term contrasted to optical visuality, draws from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinaesthetics" (Marks 1998: 332). Eyes are not ignored, they however mobilize other senses, and are the medium for the sensuous experience. For Marks, the haptic renders possible an "embodied perception" (Marks 1998: 333). The play of visible / invisible, as Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff and David Sanchez Cano write, also evokes the veil, and the eroticism of oriental women: "In Measures of distance, the superimposition of the image of the body with Arabic writing triggers the image of a veil, which plays with the erotic game of distance and intimacy (...)" (Schmidt-Linsenhoff

& Cano 2016 : 440). Hatoum dismisses the pleasure of the visual denounced by Laura Mulvey in her famous article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 1975). As Helen Baker explains in regard to the work of Luce Irigaray, the privileging of the visual led to the denigration of other senses, including the touch (Baker 2002: 52). With *Measures of* distance, Hatoum puts the emphasis on texture, on feeling, and on sound. In other words, in her film, Hatoum offers an alternative way of representation that is not connected to the visual, but to other senses. Thus, Hatoum's work is directly in filiation with this feminist critique and the critique of the primacy of the visual more broadly while she proposes alternative ways of representation. The issue of representing the 'Other', the racialized woman, is dealt with in a way that is clearly marked by postcolonial thinking, the crisis of representations and the renewed discussion about the senses and ocularcentrism in visual anthropology, the so-called "crisis of ocularcentrism" (Jay 1988) and the "sensory turn".[9] If *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance* both put the emphasis on the making of a sensorial 'experience' for the viewer, modes of representations are dealt with differently in both films.

ESSENTIAL ART: CONCLUSION As already stated, while Trinh T. Minh-Ha draws on ethnographic filmmaking to address the question of representation, Hatoum creates a completely new alternative for representation. Akerman also creates a new form of visuality and of experience by showing what is usually neglected in cinema. Moreover, if Akerman's film could seem, at the first sight, working with different modes of representations than the works by Hatoum and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, it undoubtedly shares with the 1980s films the focus on an 'experiment', a 'feeling'. Akerman succeeds in creating a feeling of alienation by forcing the viewer to be trapped in the observation of *Jeanne*'s life. Thus, Akerman's film does, as much as *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance*, call to other senses than solely the visual to convey its meaning and create an 'experiment' for the viewer.

The three films presented here are strongly concerned with vision and visuality and tackle the question coherently with the feminist and / or postcolonial approaches of the time in which the films are made. They share with 1970s feminist art the desire to not only address how women are alienated by their assignation to the 'private', and how their bodies are oppressed by domestic work and the appropriation of their work, but also how they are

9) The 'sensory turn' encompasses a very diverse range of scientific and artistic practices. Generally, history and anthropology are considered the two main disciplines which developed new perspectives on senses and modes of knowledge. In history see for example the works of Alain Corbin (1982): Le miasme et la jonquille: l'odorat et l'imaginaire social XVIIIe–XIXe siècles. Paris, Aubier Montaigne ; Alain Corbin (2016): Une histoire des sens. Paris, Robert Laffont. In anthropology and visual anthropology, see among others the works of Paul Stoller, C; Nadia Seremetakis, Sarah Pink and David McDougall: Paul Stoller (1989): The Taste of Ethnographic Things. The Senses in Anthropology. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press; Paul Stoller (1997): Sensuous Scholarship. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press; C. Nadia Seremetakis (1994): The Senses Still. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press; Sarah Pink (2006): The Future of Visual Anthropology. Engaging the Senses. London,New York, Routledge and Sarah Pink (2009): Doing Sensory Ethnography. London, Sage; David McDougall (2005): The Corporeal Image. Film, Ethnography, and the Senses. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

represented, and to convey this knowledge through an approach that relies on other senses than the visual, mainly through an *experimentation* for the viewer. The three films propose diverse strategies in order to question what is shown, how hierarchies underpin representations, who speaks, for whom and about whom. If the 1970s feminist art practices seem more concerned with alienation, sexuality and domestic work, the films of the 1980s presented here are interested in the critique of ocularcentrism and link questions of gender and race. The path chosen by Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Mona Hatoum, favoring a sensuous experience, is in continuity with a whole body of audiovisual works mainly made by women in the 1980s. As Marks notes, "(...) it is significant that much of the video work that has haptic qualities is made by women, often by feminist or lesbian makers interested in exploring a different way to represent desire" (Marks 1998: 343). To what extent then *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance* may reproduce – strategically or not – the search for a female aesthetic through embodiment?

Indeed, if no 'cunt' imagery such as the ones used by Judy Chicago or Hannah Wilke is mobilized by the artists, the proposal of a specific aesthetic, outside of dominant representations of women – racialized women – through a sensuous approach, could be seen as 'essentializing'. This female aesthetic is also central to the theoretical orientation of some *French feminists*, who focus on a female bodily experience, as Béatrice Gallimore Rangira notes regarding the écriture *feminine*, "Here it is the writing [écriture] of the body, a writing [écriture] of sensations and the senses" (Gallimore Rangira 2001: 92)[10]. The main critique made by some 1980s feminist artists to their predecessor from the 1970s is that images produced by artists such as Chicago "are dangerously open to misunderstanding. They do not alter radically the traditional identification of women with their biology nor challenge the association of women in nature" (Griselda Pollock and Roziska Parker 2013: 127). Could this allegation also be made to poststructuralist and postcolonial works such as *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance?* If the continuity between works of the 1970s and the works presented here of Chantal Akerman, Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Mona Hatoum share the perspective of finding new ways of representing women, and that the whole idea of an alternative voice clearly links them to feminist art practices of the 1970s, *Reassemblage* and *Measures of distance* however strongly replace women's representations in *cultural formations* rather than in *an essentialized nature*, and I

10) My own translation.

argue that this is a central point that renders their approach different to some feminist artists of the 1970s. Trinh T. Minh-Ha, by questioning the ethnographic modes of representation, insists on the colonial imposition of meaning, on the sexualization of racialized women, on their objectivation by the Western discourse. In the same vein, Hatoum, by working on the stereotypical Western representation of the oriental women, emphasizes the social stereotype constructed in the West. This strong emphasis on social formations and on the power relations underpinning those formations renders possible to look further than the somewhat simple idea that representing women with sensuous means may run the risk to reduce them to bodies that feel rather than observe, however this association shares some epistemological thoughts with the female aesthetics of the 1970s that should not be overlooked either. To conclude, it is worth insisting again that the practices and the theoretical perspectives used and created by feminists since the 1970s are diverse and plural and that 'feminisms of the 1970s' as much as 'feminisms of the 1980s' should be understood as multiple and as much differences may exist within a decade than between decades. However, the question of a 'bodily' knowledge typical of women's epistemologies through art, an écriture with the body and the senses, is transversal to the history of feminist art and thinking, and was reactivated in new forms in the so-called de-constructivist 1980s feminist practices.

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Dr. Sarah Kiani is historian and film director. She holds a PhD from the University of Bern. Her thesis explored the links between the women's movement and equality laws in Switzerland. She is currently an associate researcher at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin and is writing a book on the links between State and homosexualities in the GDR. She recently wrote an article on the cinema of Chantal Akerman in the french journal *Genre, Sexualité et Société* and an article on feminist art in the Swiss Journal *Traverse* (2016). Her documentary feature film « Entre Simone et Brigitte », portraying the present lives of three former feminist activists of the 1970s, was screened in Switzerland and in France.

// Abstract

Der Artikel untersucht die Verbindungen zwischen drei Filmen prominenter Künstlerinnen in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren und der feministischen Bewegung der 1970er Jahre. Die erste Arbeit, Chantal Akermanns Film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), stammt aus der zweiten Hälfte der 1970er Jahre. Indem der Film die Performance als ein künstlerisches und politisches Werkzeug nutzt, spiegelt er stark die Methoden der feministischen Kunstbewegung der 1970er Jahre wieder, insbesondere der südkalifornischen Bewegung. *Reassemblage* von Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1982) und *Measures of distance* von Mona Hatoum (1988), erweitern das Spektrum und produzieren einen postkolonialen Diskurs, der dem Okularenzentrismus kritisch gegenübersteht und in den 1970er Jahren von feministischen Theoretikerinnen reaktiviert wurde. Der Artikel zeigt, dass obwohl die von den Feministinnen seit den 1970er Jahren angewandten und geschaffenen theoretischen Perspektiven vielfältig und pluralistisch sind, die Frage

nach einem typisch weiblichen ‚körperlichen'erkenntnistheoretischen Wissen transversal zur Geschichte der feministischen Kunst ist und in neuen Formen in den sogenannten dekonstruktivistischen feministischen Praktiken der 1980er Jahre reaktiviert wurde.

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