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Introduction

If we do not know our history, we are doomed to live it out as if it were our own private fate.

(Hannah Arendt)

Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art is a study of Jewishness and US feminist art practices aimed at understanding a past that no longer exists but continues to haunt the present with its assumptions and omissions. The book addresses the unacknowledged but powerful roles of assimilation and Jewish identity in US feminist art, especially in light of renewed critical interest in these issues in the 1990s both within the US and internationally. It focuses first on the work of four of the most provocative Jewish feminist artists from the 1970s – Judy Chicago, Eleanor Antin, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Martha Rosler – and then looks at a wider group of Jewish artists and critics from the 1980s to the present practicing on both coasts. It is worth pointing out that, with the exception of Chicago's recent Holocaust-inspired imagery and the controversy generated by that work, I have chosen not to write about representations of the Holocaust and the experiences of immigration and assimilation in contemporary art per se, but rather to explore the long shadow that these experiences continue to cast, consciously or unconsciously, on the work of second- and third-generation Jewish-American women artists.

This study is based on both historical research and oral interviews with artists, and traces the various ways in which Jewishness and feminism were marked in the 1970s, both in various southern Californian artistic communities and in urban centers such as New York and Chicago. It also delineates the wider impact of anti-Semitic policies on the way that Jewishness distinguished itself from a more assimilated notion of Americanness during that period. Though many of the artists and critics I write about are of Eastern European descent, a wider range of artists is represented, highlighting the diversity of the Jewish diasporic art communities in the United States at the end of the twentieth century and noting the especially

complicated status of more recent Jewish immigrants from Israel or the Arab world as well as those of mixed racial and ethnic ancestry. Throughout the book, US Jewish feminist artists are considered within a multidimensional framework, with ongoing and complex internal class, generational, political, gender, racial, and sexual divisions and concerns.¹ For that reason, I want to emphasize that Jewishness in the context of this book stands for a cultural identity rather than a strictly defined religious one, and for a shifting set of historically diverse experiences rather than a unified and monolithic notion of Jewishness.

Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art claims that much feminist art practice and art criticism from the 1970s to the present, rather than expressing a fully successful integration of Jewish women into the US cultural sphere, can be seen as historically fractured and as eloquently negotiating the contradictions of a post-Holocaust culture in which Jewish women possessed, in Karen Brodtkin's words, a "kind of double-vision that comes from racial middleness." This includes both "an experience of marginality vis-à-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-à-vis blackness."² Positioned in a mediating category as neither black nor white, Jewish women are, in Brodtkin's view, unable to fit neatly within the class and ethnic orders of racialized identity politics in the United States. However, Brodtkin is also fully aware of the limits of the black/white coding of racial difference and the ways that it favors Jews who became "white" in the postwar years. She puts emphasis on the ambivalent experience of Jews in the United States and how that ambivalence allows them to speak only uncertainly. Whereas her research is limited to a more homogeneous group of Jewish women of Eastern European background, the current study, particularly the later chapters on artistic practice in the 1980s and beyond, includes various abstractions of Jewish-American feminist identity – abstractions that deal with the intersections of generation, class, gender, sexuality, religion, race, and the cultural reconstruction of identity.

I initially undertook the research for this book in order to make sense of how changing notions about what it means to be a Jewish man or woman in the United States could result in generational tensions among artists, critics, and art historians. Such concerns led me to revisit the issue of Jewish identity and how it became one of the fault lines at the heart of the conflict between second-wave feminists in the arts, who were tied to the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s, and third-wave feminists of the 1980s and 1990s, who differentiate themselves from the postfeminist label. It is a fault line that has been treated with great circumspection, if discussed at all. Moreover, it quickly became apparent to me that wider historical issues behind the reticence on this topic required my looking back much further than the 1970s. Therefore, part of the book is devoted to accounting for the role played by certain prominent Jewish art critics, notably Clement Greenberg, from the late 1930s onward in omitting consideration of any specific Jewish experience from the content of art history and art criticism.³ Such

an inquiry draws on substantial recent scholarship in the fields of art history, art criticism, Jewish studies, and women's studies on the intersections of art history, race, gender, and ethnicity.

In fact, it took changing cultural conditions in the 1990s in the United States for the ghostly concerns of an unadmitted Jewishness in feminist art to emerge. One important catalyst was Norman Kleeblatt's groundbreaking 1996 exhibition *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, in which the topic of Jewish identities in the United States was explored explicitly through the work of contemporary New York artists. The current project extends some of the questions and conversations generated by that exhibition and, like it, it understands Jewish identity as a site of struggle where fixed notions of identity clash against socially constituted ones. Thus, throughout the book I have attempted to analyze the ways in which identity is enacted by Jewish artists who make use of as well as resist the dominant culture's definition of them, often through the use of parody and imitation in their artwork. José Muñoz calls such an approach "disidentification":

Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.⁴

Though Muñoz focuses on the artistic practices of queer artists of color, his strategy interrogates the place of multiculturalism within a politics of disidentification. One of the ways he does this is by revealing the limits of an essentialized understanding of identity, which often reduces identities to mere clichés and stereotypes. His theory of disidentification is meant to demonstrate the ways that artists disidentify with mainstream representations of lesbians and gay men by transforming a phobic cultural logic from within, rather than through positive imagery. In a similar vein, a number of the artists discussed here reconfigure Jewish stereotypes, such as the Jewish-American Princess or the self-hating Jew, through a parodic rendering of these images and in this way transform what was considered pathetic and abject into something sexy and glamorous. Indeed, the confluence of femininity and drag in the work of Eleanor Antin, Deborah Kass, and Danielle Abrams, for example, underlines the strong performative component in the construction of identity and stereotype: this may include an irreverent nostalgia for an older Yiddishkeit culture of the shtetl, as in the work of Antin, or it may entail in Kass's work an ironic commentary on her relation, as an artist, to the legacy of Pop art and Warhol (see cover) through substituting of the very Jewish Barbra Streisand for Warhol's iconic Marilyn Monroe in her celebrity portrait, or it may involve, as Abrams's work does, a performing of how contemporary lives are fragmented into various identity bits that do not properly line up.

It is important to point out that *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art* is not intended to be a survey of Jewish feminist artists in the United States.⁵ Instead, I have tried to present a small group of artists whose work, I believe, best embodies some of the questions faced by Jewish feminist artists during this period, throwing the complex issues of feminism, assimilation, identity, and geographical displacement into relief generationally. The chapters that follow are premised on interrelated preoccupations shared by these artists and are intended to give a critical account of various kinds of ethnically marked feminist practices coming out at different historical moments. Indeed, the book grapples with the complex web of identity issues that many of these artists acknowledge facing, including lapses in religious faith and practice, the pressures of assimilation and the drive to identify with a WASP norm, the difficulties of interracial marriage, and the discrimination experienced for not being white or heterosexual. The development and persistence of ethnicity as a paradoxical process are emphasized. Though I look at ethnicity as a social construct, the book does not fully subscribe to the more sweeping postethnic label proposed by historian David A. Hollinger.⁶ The implications of the terms postethnic, postblack, or postfeminist are too far reaching and problematic to be taken lightly, given that the same sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism remain fixed in place in the US, despite the use of these new labels that suggest we have moved beyond these real-world problems.⁷

Given the book's focus, it is true that many other deserving artists could have been included. Some, such as Hannah Wilke and Eva Hesse, were excluded simply because they died before I could interview them for this study and no archives exist that relate their work to this subject owing to the veiling of ethnicity endemic to art history practices. Other artists, including Rachel Rosenthal, Miriam Schapiro, Ida Applebroog, Helene Aylon, and Nancy Spero, among others, have been discussed very insightfully by others before me. Still others, including Helen and Newton Harrison, Lynn Hershman, Julia Scher, Susan Greene, Joyce Kozloff, Joanne Leonard, June Wayne, and Joan Snyder have especially inspired me, and I garnered valuable insights from my interviews with them even though I wasn't able to include their work here. Also important to this study, though outside of its bounds, was the work of European, American, and Israeli artists who more directly integrate the memory of the Holocaust into their work, notably Ellen Rothenberg, Chantal Ackerman, Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie, Renata Stih, and Frieder Schnock, among others. All of these artists have made important contributions to this topic and deserve wide audiences and critical attention for their work.

My idea for putting together this book came about initially as an attempt not only to critique a continuing cultural investment in traditional art historical narratives that insist on the disengaged look of an unmarked viewing position but also to imagine what the field might look like if it were more self-reflexive about how the discipline transmits and reproduces its ethnic and gendered premises. As an

image of scholarship, "detachment" is a gendered privilege of knowing no bodies, of being, in Donna Haraway's words, "a conquering gaze from nowhere," a gaze that claims "the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation."⁸ What I am proposing then is to insert Jewishness into the complex discursive and rhetorical dimensions of visual cultural studies. Following the recommendation of Haraway, who claims that feminists should work from their embodied perspectives in order to produce what she refers to as "situated knowledges," much of the impetus for writing this book came out of my personal investedness in intervening in the discipline of art history and what I have come to see as its limiting ideological assumptions.

My own professional practice has been deeply influenced by the changes brought about in the humanities and social sciences by feminist theory, and visual cultural studies, particularly the way these fields have reformulated what counts as both pedagogical practices and scholarship. Since I have found visual cultural studies and feminist theory so genuinely responsive to both my intellectual and my pedagogical concerns, particularly in shifting awareness from the consumption of knowledge to the production of knowledge and regarding the visual image as the focal point in this processes, it has been encouraging to see the ways that the field of art history is changing — to become more compatible with feminist visual cultural studies. One of the ways *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art* responds to this change is by presenting artists' work not as something that can be taught in a disinterested way, as information to be memorized, but as part of a vital and living tradition that is constantly being negotiated in everyday life. Many of the artists discussed in this book do their work from the standpoint of what it means to be a cultural subject, and this point of departure leads to a renewed emphasis on the autobiographical. However, this turn to the autobiographical is meant to be quite distinct from earlier autobiographical tendencies, which privileged the autonomous writer or artist. An author- or artist-based presumption of speaking from the heart, or confessing one's essence, has been replaced by a different kind of autobiographical expression: that of the writer or artist as an embodied individual operating within the larger process of cultural interpretation.

Although the scope of the book is historical, it might prove a disconcerting study for US art historians, for it is written within a tradition of visual cultural studies that takes as its starting point the political concerns set by the present. It also reverses the trend of traditional feminist art history in the sense that it does not conflate feminism with female authorship or with female identity exclusively. By focusing on the unadmitted Jewishness of much feminist art in the US, this book acknowledges one of the most noticeable absences in the writing of this history, and thus complicates in some ways what can be perceived as a reductive definition of "women artists" and "women's art."

Generational fault lines

Issues of aesthetics shift from one generation to the next. The generation of Clement Greenberg held art aloof from the concerns of the physical world and politics. For writers such as Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, the other leading voice of midcentury art criticism, the realities of fascism, the destruction of war, and the devastation of the Holocaust led them to believe that art was incapable of representing social or political problems. This recalls Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted remark about the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz, which references the paradoxical nature of an event such as the Holocaust and how it defies representation.⁹ For many artists of Greenberg's and Rosenberg's generation, abstraction or a stringent form of visual asceticism was a more appealing way to express the intellectually unanswerable questions of their day and to express their modernist skepticism. Moreover, the affinity between fascism, consumer culture, and show business that was seen as underlying the "aestheticization" of politics — already critical to the philosophy of Walter Benjamin and to Greenberg's distrust of kitsch — led many artists to turn away from the visual pleasure and seduction of the more socially engaged realist art that was popular before the war. Though there was a return to realism in the work of Judy Chicago, other artists in this book, such as Martha Rosler, Eleanor Antin, and Elaine Reichek, took a feminist position that is similarly distrustful of any kind of mimetic, affective undertaking and the potential aesthetic pleasure of such representation. Nevertheless, these women have developed work that engages itself politically through an aesthetics of impersonality and understatement, as well as irony and humor, that is influenced, in the case of Rosler and Antin, more by 1970s conceptualism. For an even later generation that is much more removed from the Holocaust, subject matter dealing with suburban consumer culture, middle-class values, and an ironic emotional engagement with kitsch and strident politics becomes much more acceptable as a representational norm. For artists such as Rhonda Lieberman and Deborah Kass, the increasingly blurred boundaries of art and commodity culture in the 1990s enabled them to promote a different kind of undertaking with art inspired in part by Pop art from the 1960s but now foregrounding the ethnic and the cultural to speak ironically about a certain unacknowledged Jewishness.

The generational divide among feminist artists, critics, and art historians in the United States was caused in part by the great shift of multiculturalism that forced a generation of Jewish artists and critics to rethink their place in society. As I suggested earlier, I understand the issue of Jewishness to be one of the fault lines in the conflict between second-wave and third-wave feminists because it was so rarely discussed or taken seriously. This is surprising, considering that the price of admission into feminist circles in the 1970s seems to have been high for Jewish feminist artists and art historians, who had to erase their Jewish identity to be at the center of a movement in which gender overrode all other kinds of identities.

The contradictions of Jewish identities within US culture are exacerbated in those cases in which secular Jews find themselves in positions of considerable power but are also denied acceptance as secular Jews. By the time the third wave of feminists came along in the 1980s and 1990s, Jewishness became translated into privilege since it presumably put one on the wrong side of the culture wars, as it was often lumped with dominant white culture. This is referenced in the work of Beverly Naidus, which examines her distance from the assimilationist and class narratives that have enabled a generation of Jewish-American artists to disidentify themselves from American class and racial struggles. Again, an erasure of Jewishness was the price some women paid for their strong presence in the fields of art, art history, and women's studies. However, the debates around Jewish identity in the 1990s changed some of this and enabled women to come together on a different basis, a basis from which Jewish identities, among others, were able to be worked out publicly, for example in Ruth Wallen's participation in the US–Mexico border group *Las Comadres and Wallen's* and Bittar's collaborations with Jewish–Palestinian dialogue groups.

Geographical (re)locations

Relocation haunts many of the artists in this book, especially the initial migration of their parents' generation from Eastern Europe or Russia to the United States. The permission that distance from Europe, or the even greater distance from Israel, gave these women is significant here. It explains why some of these women felt so at home, as Jews, in New York or southern California that they were able to focus in their art solely on the experience of being displaced as women. Artists such as Judy Chicago were able to see their concerns as beyond, or superior to, any considerations of ethnicity. That this was the case even in New York is surprising since in some ways New York remained throughout the 1970s as an ethnic enclave where kinship networks among even non-religious Jews in the boroughs remained strong and traditional cultures were sometimes frozen in time as the result of a collective, concerted effort to preserve them. In Los Angeles and San Diego, there are very few examples of the large and distinctly monoethnic enclaves of non-religious Jews that were common in the boroughs of New York. Overall, among non-religious Jewish Americans trends of integration (moving into white, middle-class neighborhoods) and suburbanization have always been particularly strong in southern California since early on, resulting in decreasing levels of residential segregation even in areas where there is a higher concentration of Jews. However on both coasts, but especially in Los Angeles and in Brooklyn, New York, there still remains evidence of such clustering along ethnic lines for certain religious Jews and recent Jewish immigrants from Russia and Israel. Today, geographical concentration continues to be significant as newcomers follow the footsteps of their predecessors to settle in these areas in disproportionate numbers.

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However, the geographical differences between New York and California are not the only relocations at issue in this book, and even this geographical divide does not follow the typical regional narrative because, in the context of feminist art, the cosmopolitan centers are not that cosmopolitan and the peripheries are not always that provincial.

The question of what gets erased in such relocations is what impinges on certain more recent feminist practices. For some of the younger Jewish feminists in this book, this takes several forms. For Danielle Abrams and Beverly Naidus, hybridity captures the material contradictions among Jewish-Americans who are not white or who, as in Naidus's case, are unable to "pass" as white. For Lidia Shaddow, Ruth Wallen, and Doris Bittar, the extraterritorial interaction between the Jewish-American community and the Middle East, including the Palestinian struggle in the Occupied Territories, is of central concern. Their work suggests a need for an expanded view of feminist art's geographical scope, emphasizing a transnational frame that enables us to better understand the ways that flows of people, capital, and goods between nations and continents have shaped the Jewish-American experience.

The culture wars and the history of art history

The ghosts in this book don't just inhabit the hearts and minds of artists but roam all too freely in the halls of academe. In 1992, when I lost a job for teaching a book by Edward Said and Jean Mohr,¹⁰ cultural politics was rapidly replacing anti-communism as the major ideological preoccupation in the USA. In the arts, the religious right and conservative members of Congress, notably Senator Jesse Helms, were busy targeting specific artwork that dealt with AIDS and homosexuality. Photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe of gay male sexuality, Marlon Rigg's video portrayal of black gay men and AIDS titled *Tongues United* (1989), and other works were used in right-wing literature by conservative organizations such as Donald Wildmon's American Family Association to argue against government funding of the National Endowment for the Arts. Though the culture wars took various forms, in the arts the result was a reentrenchment of conservative art historical discourses just at the moment when new artists were being admitted into the canon. The prior exclusion of these artists recalls the exclusivity of Greenbergian aesthetics that remained hostile to an art that didn't meet the required modernist norms. Art historians who had barely moved beyond studies in connoisseurship, formalist analysis, and the study of iconography and iconology to areas that lie between historical research and critical interrogation were not able to mount much of a defense to protect these artists against the right-wing backlash.

At the same time that the culture wars were being waged in the arts, conservatively funded think tanks such as the Hudson Institute and the American Enterprise Institute issued proclamations about the excesses of multiculturalism and relativist

thought. Having been left out of the multiculturalism debate, Jewishness now became identified with social and cultural conservatism. The gulf widened between the kind of Jewishness to which I adhered and the very conservative position that many Jewish liberal academics took on the culture wars in which any consideration of race, sexuality, or ethnicity was considered a threat to keeping art above politics. Perhaps this conservative stance was connected to the fact that multiculturalism was seen as too much of a parochial US issue, since it was not picked up with the same vehemence abroad. In this climate, US art historians and art critics, some of whom were Jewish and studied European art, had to resist the rise not only of multiculturalism but also of the fields of cultural studies and visual culture in the mid-1990s, which involved, among other things, the admitting of popular culture, advertising, video, body art, and the like into the hallowed curricula of the university.¹¹ Given the prominence of a powerful second generation – after Greenberg – of Jewish art critics, curators, and art historians, among them Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Sydney Freedburg, Walter Darby Bannard, and William Rubin, who made their reputation as formalist art critics and historians privileging modernist art, it is not surprising that the rise of multiculturalism and visual cultural studies resulted in a series of battles over hiring, tenure, funding, and curricula. The cost of such antagonism entailed ruined or stalled careers for Jews from a younger generation who did not share the same aesthetic or ethnic and racial priorities as their predecessors. Now that the older generation has begun to retire and the younger generation is moving into the academy and the classroom, we can perhaps get beyond the acrimony of the culture wars and the conservative impulses of the discipline of art history.

In tandem with these developments, there has been a rethinking by Jewish art historians of the complex relationship Jews have had historically to the field of art history, a position that may have made them resistant to multiculturalism and visual culture in the first place. This resistance can be attributed in part to the desire of Jews of an older generation to seek anonymity in total assimilation and to slam the door on the tragic past, though this attitude was not absolute and there also remained a fascination with the culture of the enemy, as feminist art historian Eunice Lipton suggests:

Several things strike me about the history of art history practiced by Jews. One is the extent to which Jewish art historians have studied Christian art. Connoisseurs and iconographers involved themselves in the work of high gentile culture. Only a truly assimilated Jew would even think of this world as a legitimate subject of study. Or, a Jew who *wanted* to assimilate. Or perhaps a self-aware Jew who was ingenious about using his or her marginality. So, in part, becoming a scholar of art history can be construed within a general desire to assimilate, to journey into a gentile world and perhaps be invited to stay.¹²

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Lipton's comments about the uneasy position of Jewish art historians in the United States indicates some of the ways that Jewish art historians linked their desire to assimilate and to be included in the mainstream with their professional career choices. However, Lipton acknowledges this was also part of a reactive strategy to resist discrimination, as she explains that becoming an art historian enabled her both to retreat ironically into her own ethnic community, since there were many Jews in the profession, and to conceal her Jewishness in what appeared from the outside to be a non-Jewish profession. Significantly, she concludes that her attempt to "pass" was not motivated by her shame of who she is, but was an attempt to refashion her own identity in a way that was meaningful:

I wanted a profession that would allow me tactily to acknowledge my Jewishness through the company I kept – but I also wanted to hide, to be gentele. I wanted to assimilate, but on my own terms and ambivalently. I didn't give up my singsong, my gesticulating, my haggling, my appetite. I don't think I ever fooled anyone but myself.¹³

Lipton thus ironically saw the profession of art history as enabling her to vacillate between the outsider's gentele world of art and an insider's world into which she was born, all the while remaining ambivalent about those conflicting identities. At the same time, her choice enabled her to share in the opportunities of economic and social mobility, and to resist assimilating in a more complete way.

The unadmitted role of Jewishness in feminist art

If there are ghosts in the discipline of art history, as Lipton suggests, there are also absent conversations about the veiled role of Jewishness in the very understanding of feminist art in the United States. Conversations about the unadmitted role of Jewishness in the work of well-known feminist artists such as Judy Chicago, Eleanor Antin, Martha Rosler, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles – an analysis attempted in this book – have been sorely lacking in US feminist circles.¹⁴ Chapter 1 provides the historical framework for understanding why Jewishness for so long was unadmitted in feminist work. It starts by interrogating the ways that internal ethnic differences have been elided in the United States under a tyrannical universalism that took the form of a formalist aesthetic position, which came into favor beginning with the Cold War period. It begins with a critique of the writings of Jewish critics from the 1930s and 1940s – Greenberg in particular – to historicize the emergence of the New York School's critical hegemony and considers how an older modernist discourse was conceived by its proponents in the 1940s to dislodge the notion of identities altogether from its narrative. It investigates how US modernism evolved in the 1940s in relation to dominant definitions and endorsements of American regionalist painting in the 1930s that opposed the

encroachment of urban European modernism on US soil. This took many forms, but one telling example is how the work of Jewish modernist photographer Alfred Steiglitz was critiqued by well-known right-wing critics as unrepresentative of American art and tradition.

Telling such a history today, however, is complicated by the fact that many Jewish artists, critics, and historians since the 1940s have played a crucial role in expunging Jewishness from the content of this art history and have been more comfortable with an approach that glossed over these questions. In her anthology *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*, Catherine Soussloff argues that there has been an understandable reluctance on the part of art historians to study this history from such a perspective. She notes how "this avoidance over many years and several generations has produced an aporia at the very heart of the project of art history, a space of doubt brought about by the suppression of the history of the discipline and its effects on discourse."¹⁵ So complete is this politics of forgetting that, even decades later, some of the more sophisticated official versions of wartime and postwar art histories, such as Serge Guilbaut's Marxist intellectual history *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983) or Cecile Whiting's *Anti-Fascism in American Art* (1989), leave out entirely from their studies any mention of the Holocaust or Jews, despite the exceedingly large presence of Jewish artists and critics in New York art circles during the period that is the subject of their studies.¹⁶

Prominent postwar critics from the 1940s and art historians of the 1980s were not the only ones to drop from their accounts any meaningful reference to Jewishness; so too did some well-known US Jewish feminist artists of the 1970s. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of Judy Chicago's influential book *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975) as well as her artwork from this period. Though Chicago's work has already garnered much attention, most critics have not examined the fact that Chicago's discourse was never only about gender, but rather about a whole set of identifications mediated through various social identities, all involving questions of power inequality. This oversight is due in part to Chicago herself, who gained visibility in the 1970s as an artist by emphasizing her gender exclusively. Yet I argue that ethnicity played a central role in her self-construction as both a feminist and an artist.

This chapter also examines how Mierle Laderman Ukeles negotiated her dual careers as an artist and a feminist in New York in the 1970s through her "maintenance art." Her work takes a different trajectory from Chicago's since she foregrounds her Jewishness, defined through orthodox religion, while engaging in a more radical aesthetics deriving from garbage, labor, bodily pollution, and social issues.

Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Eleanor Antin and reveals some of the ways a unitary history of US feminism, in which gender is the sole emphasis, is inadequate for dealing with the complexity of many artists' work. Indeed, Antin provides a rare example of a white woman dealing with questions of feminism,

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assimilation, and the legacy of Yiddishkeit culture from the 1970s to the present through both conceptual art and performance art. Though her art has received widespread praise, it has been singled out mostly for its rejection of formalism or for Antin's use of autobiography in her performance work – with its attention on the self and everyday life as a form of innovative subject matter – rather than for how it reinvents a new tradition of feminist art out of Jewish remnants from pre-World War II Eastern European shtetl communities.

Chapter 4, on the work of Martha Rosler, begins to examine the issue of ethnicity within a wider feminist context. The first part of the chapter looks at the ambivalence of some artists and critics when it comes to positioning themselves or being positioned by others as “Jews” and, specifically, as Jewish women within feminist contexts. It compares remarks made by a Jewish feminist literary critic, Nancy Miller, in response to a conference on feminist theory she attended in 1985 in Milwaukee, and comments made by Rosler in a recent interview about her perspective now on feminist debates and discussions during the 1970s. The chapter goes on to describe California feminism and to outline the difficulties that terms such as gender, Jewishness, US nationalism, and assimilation pose for Rosler and how such difficulties are made evident in her work.

Chapter 5 focuses on a few of the women artists who were involved in the 1996 *Too Jewish?* exhibition – Deborah Kass, Rhonda Lieberman, and Elaine Reichek – as well as other New York-based feminist artists such as Sherry Millner, Joan Braderman, and Danielle Abrams. Significantly, *Too Jewish?* was one of the first exhibitions in the United States in which the Jewish-American arts community asserted itself socially and politically and constructed a Jewish-American identity from a secular position. Important to this chapter, as well as to the book as a whole, are the questions raised by curator Norman Kleeblatt as to why Jews (both male and female) have participated historically in the erasure of their own Jewish identity in terms of the artwork they exhibit or make, or the art criticism or art history they write. Kleeblatt suggests that an equivalent blindness regarding race and ethnicity applies equally to Jewish male artists, curators, and historians and is not a problem exclusive to Jewish feminists.

Chapter 6 locates the discussion in southern California and examines how recognizable markers of California culture appear and disappear in unexpected ways in the work of Ruth Wallen, Beverly Naidus, Lidia Shaddow, and Doris Bittar. However, the chapter also looks beyond the geographical scope of California to examine how transnational linkages through the process of immigration as well as close connections to the Middle East affect the art of Jewish-American feminists in California today. The chapter specifically addresses narrative art that constructs an argument concerning geography and identity around questions of displacement. Significantly, many of the artists in this chapter submit their art to several displacements back to the cultures they or their families left behind. Therefore, the social context they reference in their work isn't simply that of

southern California, and the displacement isn't simply from New York or the Midwest.

These last two chapters show how grouping together women artists of Jewish descent complicates the notion of ethnicity, because ethnicity alone cannot account for regional and national differences, the hybridity of the artists themselves, or the historical legacies of intergroup conflicts. The Jewish-American community in both New York and southern California today is, and continues to be, marked by tremendous diversity. Diverse languages and differing historical legacies as well as differences in class background, especially among the immigrant generation of Russian-Jews and Arab-Jews, all allude to the problems inherent in essentialized notions of race and ethnicity as well as the presumed unity of the Jewish feminist art community.

These chapters, taken as a whole, illustrate some of the possibilities and problems currently haunting the area of Jewish participation in the making and the history of feminist art in the United States. It is my hope that readers will approach these issues in a critical manner, one that draws directly on their own experiences and histories, and that acknowledges that Jewish identity and feminist contemporary art come in many and varied forms. The book is by no means a definitive statement on the complexity and range of issues raised by this kind of art; nor is it a moralizing discourse on the type of Jewish identity one ought to have. It is important to acknowledge at the outset that no single book can capture the diversity of artistic practices that constitute Jewish-American feminist communities today. In a way, the book only begins to raise some of the concerns, which may not have clear and definitive answers, regarding the perilous and circuitous roots of Jewish identity and feminist contemporary art. In certain respects, some of the artists and critics discussed in this book, particularly those from the 1970s, were expected, often in ambiguous ways, to assimilate into the homogenizing culture of the United States, and thus their contributions were understood as more ethnically neutral than my account suggests. Their greatest successes – legitimacy in the art world 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. Nonetheless, as this line of inquiry is extended to include more contemporary work and as additional documentation and research unfold about Jewish artists, critics, and curators (male and female, from the United States and abroad), we can hope to puzzle out the silences and confusions that haunt this topic. Though ghosts will probably always remain, it is important that the conversations begin.