

Conney Colloquium 2004

Experimental Jews: Projecting Jewish Identity in the New Millennium

Douglas Rosenberg

I'd like to welcome everyone here to what I think will be a rather amazing day. I would like to thank Anita Lightfoot for her unwavering help in all areas of the planning of this day and also Julie Weitz who has been assisting me with research. I also must acknowledge the support of Marv Conney who's vision and generosity have made this possible. And Bob Skloot for guidance in formulating the right questions to be asking. The colloquium is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend Irv Sopotnik, who was a mensch and a mentor to many in the arts.

What follows is intended to provide a context for today's discourse. It is an overview of the issues I have been thinking about that lead to this colloquium.

This colloquium is about interrogating issues of Jewish identity and practice, about beginning to open a dialog around Jewishness and art and above all, about asking questions. It is about experimentation with both art practice and the practice of Judaism as well. The speakers today represent a kind of new diasporic Jew; we are straight, gay, practicing, non-practicing, out-married, secular and or otherwise identified. This new diaspora is a metaphoric one. One that is not so much a geographical diaspora, but more so a conceptual one. For the artists here today, Jewishness may not be at the foreground of identity, but for today I have asked the participants to consider how it might be a part of the gestalt of their art-life. The consistent thread among all of the presenters here today, aside from Jewishness, is that all are performative in their art practice, and all either implicitly or explicitly place the body at the center of their practice. The work represented covers an arc from installation to dance to object making and virtual worlds.

Begin

My father had a Jew in mind for every situation. He could always name a Jew who had contributed to a given situation, be it literature, art, music, business, and always he made sure to make it clear that it was a Jew who had accomplished a particular success. It was a scattershot version of Jewish accomplishment in the twentieth century, but it gave me hope that there were Jews out there who had done things that I might emulate. My father's version of archiving Jewish history and accomplishment was not at all scholarly. It was in retrospect I think, a common method for my father's generation of cultural inscription, of marking territory and a persistence of memory; the act of bearing witness in the face of assimilation into an American culture that decidedly did not welcome the "ethnic" Jew of the late 18th century. What this method did not provide was a clear image of Jews in the

arc of twentieth century cultural evolution. It did not go far enough toward staking out a claim for Jewish leadership in matters political, humanist, artistic and otherwise.

As an artist and later as a university professor, I have long pondered the role of Jews in the creation of Modernist art theory and the production of objects and works related to that theory. This musing on my part has led to my attempt to analyze how, while clearly engaged with both the practice of and the writing of contemporary art history, Jews have been marginalized into whiteness. Their/our difference, once the material for anti-Semitic exclusion from the canon, has been absorbed by critical culture to such a degree that in this multi-cultural era, Jews have been similarly excluded from the debates due to our complete assimilation into "white" culture. While no one will deny the importance of the critics, scholars and artists I will be talking about today, rarely if ever are they looked at as a group of individuals with a common thread, that being their identity as diasporic Jews in the twentieth century. In my research on the subject, I have made no distinction as to religious, secular, observant or otherwise and as well have looked at the broad contribution to modern art in general made by Jews who are identified as either artists or critics. I am not proposing a ghettoization of Jewish artists as such nor is this simply an attempt to catalogue the contribution of Jews to twentieth century culture. Rather, I am proposing that, out of a Jewish experience, either secular or religious in the twentieth century, comes an innate questioning of authority, power relations, and texts that flows from an ancient place in Jewish culture. What I am pointing out is that there is an undeniable thread that runs through modern art history which stitches together numerous Jewish painters, sculptors, writers, performers and thinkers into an ephemeral fabric that is the material of modernism itself and later of post-modernism as well.

As I began reading theory in the era of multi-culturalism, the canon was under revision; a revision that sought to integrate and diversify it. The deconstruction of the official white male artist club was bloody and hard fought. Much of it was fought by first wave feminists, ironically, as I will address later, many of whom were Jews. They fought not for the inclusion or recognition of Jewishness, but rather for the inclusion of women. I believe that it was feminists, who inadvertently, while opening doors for women, opened the door for a Jewish renaissance in the arts as well. That is to say, many of the same barriers that kept women out of the culture of the arts, kept Jews from asserting their Jewishness within twentieth century art making and critical practices. In both cases the barriers were kept in place by a common foe. A sense of Jewish righteousness pervades early feminist activism, even though not identified as such in its time.

Much earlier, the same righteousness is evident in the early modern dance of the 1930's and forties. Much of the most important work of that era was created by Jewish leftist women who were choreographers and dancers as well as activists for the left. That work was supported by among other venues, the 92nd St. Y in New York.

The 92nd St. Y was founded in 1874 by prominent German Jews (Jackson) and went on to become a leading cultural center for Jewish and gentile artists, women and people of color as well. According to Naomi Jackson, from her book on the 92nd St. Y,

"The easy convergence of modern dance and Jewish culture at the Y consequently occurred for a variety of reasons. For the Y's Jewish members and modern dancers of the time there were ideological as well as practical reasons for a smooth merging of interests. Both, for instance, shared a humanistic outlook on the role of the arts in modern life. Influenced by the various progressive movements of the time, they thought the arts and humanities uplifted men's souls, making them better individuals and citizens in a democratic society... If the intersection with contemporary art was to help define the nature of American Jewry, the reverse was also true. [William] Kolodney, [educational director of the Y] along with the Y's audiences, teachers and students helped to broaden modern dance to embrace diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, age, experience and stylistic experimentation".

(Dance and the Jewish Encounter With America: Moving Toward a Multi-Cultural Ideal, Naomi Jackson)

(slides Sokolow/Halprin)

(Note: Describe Halprin here)

Dance, as it entered modernism was articulated by numerous voices, among them the "Jewish leftist choreographers" Jackson mentions, including Anna Sokolow and Helen Tamiris and even Martha Graham's early vision of Protestant America was largely written on and with Jewish bodies. Graham's early companies included, Sophie Maslow, Pearl Lang, Sokolow and Lillian Shapiro.

In 1957, Sokolow found an affinity with the work of Franz Kafka and choreographed a work called, Metamorphosis. (Sokolow has been referred to as the Kafka of the Dance)

"Anna's Eastern European Jewish ancestors believed that they had an intimate relationship with God.. The despair in so much of Anna's work indicates how she turned away from this belief. Her viewpoint is more akin to that of Kafka, who as Irving Howe has suggested, knocks on the door of the lord, but never expects the door to be opened".

(Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit, Larry Warren)

The critic Clement Greenberg also invoked Kafka in his 1955 essay, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", (Commentary, April 1955). The essay,

"challenged a basic tenet of British literary theory, still the most accepted body of work on modern art criticism. In [Greenberg's] judgement, this axiom which held that "the value of... art depended ultimately on the depth to which it explored moral difficulties, precluded either Kafka or abstract art from receiving the recognition they deserved"

(Rubenfeld biography of Greenberg)

So, while both explored the nature of Kafka's vision, Sokolow and Greenberg's particular hermeneutics led them to entirely different conclusions, in keeping with the practice of defining and redefining sacred texts in a modern era.

In a sense, Sokolow reformed Graham's vision (as Greenberg reformed criticism) as one movement in Judaism reforms another. Later, other Jewish choreographers including Anna Halprin, Bella Lewitzky, Meredith Monk, and Liz Lerman would reform Sokolow's as well as the dance world's vision of dance.

Sokolow was given institutional support early in her career from the Neighborhood Playhouse at the Henry Street Settlement in New York's Lower East Side. The Neighborhood Playhouse was founded by Irene and Alice Lewisohn, two wealthy young Jewish women who had hoped to become professional performers, but were forbidden to do so by their Orthodox Jewish father. Instead they turned their energies toward supporting theater and dance at the Playhouse.

"Miss Irene's avowed personal goal in her work was to develop in the young participants a pride in and inspiration from their ethnic backgrounds. Something vital, she felt, was being lost in the passion for assimilation".

(Warren, Sokolow biography)

Though a secular institution, the work that the Neighborhood Playhouse produced was decidedly "Jewish" in its early years. Sokolow began studying dance at the Playhouse around 1925, principally with Blanche Talmud and later with Louis Horst. Her early solos created in the 1930's, in the milieu of the economic and social struggles of the time, reflected her concerns with social injustice.

Dance historian and critic, Sally Banes has reformed dance history in her numerous books on dance. In *Dancing Women*, *Female Bodies on Stage* she reinterprets, from a feminist perspective, a dance history that dates back to the 19th century, bringing the entire canon of western dance history and scholarship into question. Banes also brought into common usage, the term "postmodern dance" and radicalized thinking about dance by applying strategies to dance more common to visual art criticism. She has addressed issues of multi-culturalism and race in regard to dance in a way that has re-focused scholarship in the field.

"The issue of difference within gender-the diversity of women in terms of class, race and ethnicity-came to the fore in the woman's movement in the 1980's and 1990's".

(Sally Banes, *Dancing Bodies*, *Female Bodies on Stage*)

Banes quote denotes the 1980's and 1990's as the coming of age of multi-culturalism. However, the question that persists in regard to multi-culturalism, is "where do Jews fit in the equation"?

Catherine M. Soussloff, editor of *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*, states, "Despite the experiences of the [Jewish] émigrés and their influence in America, we find in the discipline a critical situation in which significant topics in the history of art related to Jewishness have been elided or are absent". (pg. 2) So, why this omission? Perhaps it is related to the assimilationist tendencies of post-war Jews, perhaps not. However, for the purposes of this talk I went back to the texts that are the backbone of art history as it is

inscribed by institutions and others who teach the subject and looked at them in a way quite different from that which I was taught. I read them with an eye toward identifying the ethnic and religious affiliations of those mentioned as seminal or important to the field of modern art. It is a decidedly biased way of reading texts but for my purposes here, it also cuts to the chase. The language I found used to describe artists I knew to be Jewish in a number of cases was fascinating. Descriptions such as, "so and so fled Germany during the war", or "his parents came to America in search of a better life", etc. I began to see a sort of code used to describe immigrant Jews that seemed to stop just sort of identifying them as immigrant Jews. Or as in the case of the painter Helen Frankenthaler, her Jewishness was dismissed as unimportant.

(slide Frankenthaler painting)

"Helen Frankenthaler was not heavily influenced by any one culture or heritage, despite her strong family background in Germanic and Jewish culture. Her paintings are individual in style and meaning, and she developed an unconscious attitude that culture was not foreign or exotic, but just one part of who she was".

(Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln,
Nebraska Art Association Collection-
Nelle Cochrane)

A Post-modern reading of texts implies that the author is not neutral, and in this example, the author clearly seeks to minimize or eradicate Frankenthaler's decidedly Jewish identity. Conversely, In Florence Rubenfeld's biography of the critic Clement Greenberg, the very first mention of Frankenthaler describes her as the child of upper-class German Jews, financially independent, and goes on to cite class differences between German and East European Jewish émigrés and what role that played in their assimilation into American culture.

(Slide Frankenthaler #2)

"Helen's father was a judge in the Superior Court of New York. Her affluent family occupied a near royal position in the hierarchy of Jewish American society". (pg. 145) Rubenfeld clearly situates Frankenthaler within the context of a Jewish experience in America thus providing a context for further speculation or observation of her work. This kind of reading between the lines so to speak, has its roots of course in the philosophy and literary criticism forged in the writings of the philosopher Jacques Derrida an Algerian Jew.

"In sum, Derrida's philosophical enterprise claims to deconstruct pervasive shibboleths as these occur in both academic work and in the language of everyday life. Everyday language is not neutral; it bears within it the presuppositions and cultural assumptions of a whole tradition. At the same time, the critical reworking of the philosophical basis of the tradition in question results, perhaps unexpectedly, in a new emphasis on the individual

autonomy and creativeness of the researcher/philosopher/reader. Maybe this anti-populist yet anti-Platonic element in grammatology is Derrida's most important contribution to the thought of the post-war era".

(Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers by John Lechte, Routledge, 1994.

<http://students.pratt.edu/~arch543p/help/Derrida.html>)

It is indeed of the utmost importance in the reading of intertextual works of art, art criticism and history in general. To eradicate difference is to deny difference and it's attendant issues regarding race, class, gender and ethnicity.

In my studies at art school in the 1980's, Derrida was one of the beacons of art criticism. It is in his idea that, "I try to place myself at a certain point at which ... the thing signified is no longer easily separable from the signifier," (ibid) that the whole of artmaking and particularly how one views art criticism undergoes a fundamental change. The texts most familiar to me in relation to my own teaching in the area of performance and video and indeed texts that I have relied upon, are largely the work of Jewish artists and critics. Texts such as those written by Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg on Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting and the art of the modern era, texts by Susan Sontag on photography and the seminal, *Against Interpretation*. Alan Kaprow, the founder of Happenings, wrote essays of great importance in the late fifties, sixties and beyond as did Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Barbara Rose and Annette Michelson. The feminist artists Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, Martha Rosler, and others, have contributed both important texts and performative works to the discourse. All of the above are Jews, however ethnicity has played a particularly important role in the writings of Greenberg and Rosenberg, which I will address later.

Because early Germanic notions of art history were based largely on national styles, it was relatively easy to dismiss any kind of Jewish art, since, lacking a nation, Jewish art lacked an identity.

Much of what early art historians found lacking in "Jewish art" hung on the rather weak framework of the second commandment. That is to say, a simplification of the commandment against graven images. It is commonly stated that one of the reasons that Jews made no art is that they were prohibited to do so. E.H. Gombrich in his *fin de siecle* *Story of Art*, in speaking of the Jewish frescoes at the Dara-Europos Synagogue, cites two tropes in this regard,

"The artist was doubtless not very skillful.. But perhaps he was really not concerned with drawing lifelike figures. The more lifelike they were, the more they sinned against the Commandment forbidding images." (Soussloff/Olin, pg. 32)

(The art historian H.W. Janson nullifies them completely (as Jewish) in his survey and place them under the heading of Roman Art.)

However convenient this might be for historians and critics, the notion of Judaism as opposed to portraiture, is to my reading mistaken. Under the heading of "Art" in *The Jewish Religion: A companion*, by Louis Jacobs, one finds the following:

"With regard to pictorial representation there is an erroneous but widespread notion that Judaism is opposed to portrait painting. This notion is supposedly based on passages in the Pentateuch. The two passages quoted in this connection are the second commandment (Exodus 20: 4): 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of anything that is in heaven and earth, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth'; and Deuteronomy 4:16-9, which forbids the making of any graven image: 'Lest ye deal corruptly, and make you a graven image, even the form of any figure, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the heaven, the likeness of anything that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.'

Jacobs points out that both passages, in context, prohibit fashioning likenesses for the purpose of worshipping them. He cites examples in which this prohibition is taken more or less literally, but states that,

"..the ruling in the standard Code of Jewish law (Yoreh Deah, 141-7) is clear: 'It is permitted to paint, draw or weave in tapestry the figures of human beings but not to make statues of the complete human form.'" He goes on to say, "An incomplete human figure is allowed-the head on its own, for instance, or the torso on its own. Henry Moore's work would be allowed on this definition and practically all modern art and sculpture".

However, he points out that the Code of Jewish Law is not necessarily always followed in this matter.

This is particularly apropos as it relates to modernism and modern art practices. Judaism is a hermeneutic practice as is art criticism and both rely on dialect reasoning.

Theodor Adorno wrote, "After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric", (Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft, 1949, Adorno),

which according to author Lisa Saltzman he later qualified and regretted. Saltzman goes on to say that in his "proscription, 'after Auschwitz', he reveals a time "before Auschwitz, an ethical time, one shaped by the law of the Hebraic father, which with his proscription he both evokes and instantiates". Saltzman posits that the second commandment's "Thou shalt not make graven images"

"fully emerges only 'after Auschwitz', first in Adorno's own proscription and then in his ensuing writings"

Later in 1966, perhaps in the qualification Saltzman notes Adorno wrote,

"In illusion there is a promise of freedom from illusion"

(Negative Dialectics, Adorno)

The move toward abstraction at mid-century was brokered by the Jewish critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. It was put into practice by numerous Jewish artists including Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Lee Krasner, generally, until recently referred to as "Jackson Pollock's long suffering wife", Mark Rothko and others.

(slides Frankenthaler, Louis, Krasner, Rothko)

On its surface abstraction looks to be the product of Jewish intellectual problem solving. In other words, a way to get around the second commandment. However, in regard to contemporary art history, abstraction is an anomaly. Artists, Jewish or otherwise, made figurative work before during and after abstraction's heyday. The critic Rosalind Krauss describes Modernism as not monolithic, but one full of digressive moments.

(paraphrasing) While it is possible that abstraction allowed Jewish artists to make works of art while remaining at a safe distance from the taboo on graven images, not all of the artists were pious or necessarily practicing Jews. It is more likely that abstraction was the product of a confluence of events and circumstances, which included both the proscriptions of Jewish law and the prescriptions of Clement Greenberg.

(The critic Barbara Rose referred to Abstract Expressionism as "schmearkunst")

The critic Robert Hughes somewhat ironically states,

"Hitler, one might say, had presented the Allies with an immense cultural gift, not that everyone appreciated it. And it wasn't just painters and sculptors. After the Bauhaus, the leading experimental visual-arts school in Germany, was suppressed, some of its leading lights--Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy--moved to America, where their example and teaching changed its architecture, making New York City and Chicago the epicenters of the postwar International Style. And the academic study of art history in America, which had been fairly larval before the 1930s, was transformed by German-Jewish and Austrian-Jewish refugees like Erwin Panofsky and Richard Krautheimer--despite the endemic anti-Semitism of many American universities".

(Time Magazine, March 24, 1997 Vol. 149 No. 12

A Cultural Gift From Hitler)

The influx of émigrés energized the art world in general and had a profound effect on the fabric of New York culture.

Clement Greenberg was one of the most influential critics of the era. Greenberg reformed art in the cloth of Jewish-American experience. The son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Greenberg began writing seminal essays as early as 1939, when modern art was not yet part of the American liberal arts curriculum, and the [so-called] New York School did not exist. (Rubinfeld pg. 19) Florence Rubinfeld notes that in America at the time Greenberg and his Jewish friends felt like outsiders in a WASP dominated culture. She states, "Many Jewish immigrants identified themselves, not as Americans but as socialists.. [Greenberg was] brilliant, idealistic and radical". Additionally Greenberg considered himself a Marxist. Greenberg insinuated himself into the New York art scene from his position as an editor of Partisan Review, the publication founded in 1934 as the "writer's arm of the American Communist Party". (Rubinfeld pg. 47) Partisan Review was a magnet for young writers and intellectuals of Greenberg's generation. In 1939 Greenberg published his essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in Partisan Review which set forth the social and cultural context that birthed abstract art and its attendant philosophical necessity.

In speaking about a "civilization that produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by TS Elliot and a Tin Pan Alley song or a painting by Braque and a Saturday Evening Post cover", Greenberg begins his journey into the esthetics of contemporary culture.

"The answer involves more than an investigation in aesthetics. It appears to me that it is necessary to examine more closely and with more originality than hitherto the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific-not the generalized-individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place. What is brought to light will answer, in addition to the question posed above, other and perhaps more important questions."

(Greenberg, Collected essays, Vol. 1)

In this passage from 1939, Greenberg, while wrestling with modernism, lays the groundwork for and foreshadows post-modern criticism. By situating the work of art within the social and cultural context, he opens the door to a kind of deconstruction of both art and artist that does not come to fruition until the early 1970's. That, however was not Greenberg's mission. He did, in his writing and in his social dealings, affect the course of modern art in a way that no other non-artist had before. Greenberg was infamous for his unorthodox mingling in both the business of and the work of artists of the era. He championed those he liked and bullied those he did not. Greenberg pushed for a reductive, ascetic style of painting that ultimately would meld paint with canvas. While his initial support was for Jackson Pollock, his esthetic evolved through the 50's and emerged in the work of those previously mentioned as well as Adolph Gottlieb and Kenneth Noland

(slides here Gottlieb and Noland)

Greenberg was a self-identified Jew, which is to say that while he was to a large degree an assimilationist, his Jewishness was undeniable. While writing on contemporary art, he also wrote about Jewish issues including pieces on Sholem Aleichem, an essay titled, "Self Hatred and Jewish Chauvenism: Some Reflections on Positive Jewishness, and an essay called, "Under Forty: A Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews". The "Under Forty" essay, begins,

"This writer has no more of a conscious position toward his Jewish heritage than the average American Jew-which is to say, hardly any. Perhaps he has even less than that. His father and Mother repudiated a good deal of the Jewish heritage for him in advance by becoming free-thinking socialists who maintained only their Yiddish, certain vestiges of folk life in the Pale, and an insistence upon specifying themselves as Jews- i.e. to change one's name because it is too Jewish is shameful. Nevertheless the reflection in my writing of the Jewish heritage- is heritage the right word?-though it may be passive and unconscious, is certainly not haphazard".

(Greenberg essays, vol 1 Pg. 176)

SUMMATION

This insertion or identification of the voice of the speaker, and his biases, in other words framing his writing as a product of his ethnicity and politics is part of the Greenbergian legacy of modernist criticism. In the end it worked against Greenberg, but does become somewhat institutionalized in the post-modern era.

In the eras following Greenberg's pinnacle of influence came other Jewish thinkers including Alan Kaprow, most well known as the instigator of "Happenings".
(slide Kaprow)

However, in 1983 Kaprow reflected on his work and the history of western art in an essay called, "The Real Experiment". In it he charts two avant-garde histories: one of "artlike art" and the other of "lifelike art". He notes that, (slide)

"artlike art holds that art is seerate from life and everything else, whereas lifelike art holds that art is connected to life and everything else. In other words, there is art in the service of art and art in the service of life".

Kaprow returns art to not the service of ritual, but ritual itself. In Kaprow's manifesto, the preferred outcome of the artmaking process is not necessarily an object that can be traded or sold, rather, he valorizes the process itself, the activity that one engages in becomes the work of art and if the by-product of that process is healing or joy or wonder, all the better. The dialog between Greenberg, Rosenberg, Kaprow and other Jewish intellectuals was continued in the writing of Susan Sontag. Born Susan Greenblatt and raised in New York she entered the discourse with a collection of essays called, "Against Interpretation" that solidified her place in the critical debate. Her style is familiar, written in straightforward language in the first person. Published in 1966, it begins with an essay of the same name written in 1964. Sontag argues that,

"..all Western consciousness of and reflection upon art have remained within the confines staked out by the Greek theory of art as mimesis or representation. It is through this theory that art as such-above and beyond given works of art-becomes problematic, in need of defense. And it is the defense of art which gives birth to the odd vision by which something we have learned to call "form" is separated to what we have learned to call "content", and to the well-intentioned move which makes content essential and form accessory."

In other words, as works of art evolved beyond the scope of what Plato or Aristotle might have foreseen, it was imperative for Sontag to arrive at an equally evolved form of criticism. By the 1960's art had changed dramatically. Abstract Expressionism had peaked, Kaprow's

Happenings had taken hold, minimalism was on the way as was Pop Art and Conceptualism. And on the horizon was feminism and feminist art.

"Though the actual developments in many arts may seem to be leading us away from the idea that a work is primarily its content, the idea still exerts an extraordinary hegemony. I want to suggest that this is because the idea is now perpetuated in the guise of a certain way of encountering works of art thoroughly ingrained among most people who take the arts seriously. What the overemphasis on the idea of content entails is the perennial, never consummated project of interpretation. And conversely, it is the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there is such a thing as content of a work of art".

She notes that "the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling". In other words we are to react in a particular way to a particular sign and for Sontag, art had fallen prey to semiotics. She ends the essay with the challenge,

"The aim of all commentary on art should be to make works of art-and by analogy, our own experience-more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show us how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show us what it means. In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art".

As an answer to Sontag's prescription, in the 1970's artists, many of whom were feminists began to make work that relied on their own bodies to address issues vastly different from what artists had historically looked to for inspiration. The work was loud, messy, erotic and at the same time spoke to political issues that were divisive and urgent. At the birth of this new genre were Judy (Cohen) Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, Jewish, feminists and founders of the first feminist art program at CalArts in 1971.

Chicago, Shapiro and other Jewish women including Carolee Schneeman, Eleanor Antin, Martha Rosler and others made work that was ostensibly about women's issues, though it is undeniable that simultaneously they were transgressing taboos specific to Judaism as well.

(slide of Rosler, Vital Statistics of The Citizen Simply Obtained, and screen excerpt from tape)

Benedict Anderson, in his book, *Imagined Communities*, reflects that communities, rather than defined by geographical boundaries, might also be considered contingent on common language. He proposes that a "sense of nationality" might survive beyond nation-states, preserved by language. If one extends this metaphor to the arts, and further to the Jewish diaspora, then it is possible to suppose that Jewish artists speak in a common language, be it visual, verbal, cultural or otherwise. It may be that the common language is as simple as *Tikkun Olam*; to repair the world through art practice and critical thinking.

It is my hope that today's colloquium will present us with some of the answers to some of the questions, though I am quite sure that it will also raise new questions.

Initially, I asked today's presenters to think about the following set of questions as they prepared their talk. I should also say that I did not expect to receive simplistic or monolithic responses, nor did I. The artists represented here are people whose work I greatly respect and in most cases have known for many years. I invited them because I knew them to be complex and thoughtful individuals, deeply engaged with the world on many levels. As I began formulating this colloquium, it became clear to me that the questions I have been asking myself are questions that many other Jewish artists have also been asking. It also became apparent that questions of spirituality and faith, either secular or otherwise are universal, though what we are here to inquire about is how those and other questions are interrogated by Jewish artists.

These are some of the questions I asked everyone to ponder as they planned their presentations.

questions:

How were you raised, ie were you raised in a secular or religious home? Do you practice now?

How do you experiment in your work and in your Jewish identity? How does your Jewish identity differ from your parents?

Two phenomena have largely defined American Judaism in the 20th century; the state of Israel and the Holocaust. As Israel's politics become increasingly destructive and the Holocaust recedes into history, how do you negotiate the state of Israel and the weight of the Holocaust in your Jewish identity?

How do you define yourself as a Jew in the 21st century, eg, Jewish artist or artist who is Jewish or any other way?

Do you consider Judaism to be a people or a religion? What qualities and characteristics do you think are inherent in American Jews?

In the arts, did you have Jewish models for your own work?

Do you think there is such a thing as "Jewish Art?"

Is there something essentially Jewish in your own work?

Is there something essentially Jewish or recognizable in the work of Jewish artists in general?"

What do you think has been the role of Jewish artists and scholars in shaping 20th century art practices? For example, from Walter Benjamin Clement Greenberg, Susan Sontag and others on the theory side to the numerous Jewish artists from Rothko to Frankenthaler, Alan Kaprow, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, etc. on the practice side, these individuals have created a foundation for modern and post-modern practice; is that a coincidence or is there a thread that connects these thinkers/artists?

Each presenter will have 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes for questions. I will try to keep us on track and I will ask the presenters in advance to help me do so by keeping an eye on the clock. In the afternoon we will reconvene as a large panel and engage in discussion about the issues raised.

Please join us after the colloquium for a reception in the parlor.
Now, I would like to introduce our first presenter.