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“Foreword” to *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity*. Berna: Peter Lang, 2013.

The texts gathered in this volume were originally presented at the international conference *Women and the Arts: Dialogues in Female Creativity in the U.S. and Beyond*, co-organized by Paula Elyseu Mesquita and myself in the context of our American Studies research group at ULICES (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies). This three-day event took place at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon, in June 2011, and promoted a transdisciplinary debate on women’s artistic production covering multiple areas, which included literature, the visual arts, music, and the performing arts. With the participation of scholars from several continents and of the plenary speakers Christine Battersby, Sandra M. Gilbert, and Edward Lucie-Smith, we debated women’s aesthetic expression in diversified fields, from modernity to the present age, and reflected on the specific conditions of production, circulation, and reception of their works. Furthermore, we organized several activities involving the

local community, such as a debate with contemporary Portuguese women artists, a workshop with storytellers, a poetry recital with texts from Anglophone women poets from the nineteenth century onwards, and an improvisation session ('The Voice of the Word: Retelling Scheherazade') included in the Lisbon-based Festival Silêncio [Silence Festival] that since 2009 has been celebrating language in its myriad artistic manifestations. Finally, sponsored by the Rectorate of the University of Lisbon, we animated, for a month, the main hall of the Faculty of Letters (then celebrating its centenary), where we exhibited the monumental artwork *Valquíria Enxoval* [Valkyrie Trousseau] by Joana Vasconcelos. The conference program also included a one-hour documentary that described the collaborative process of the creation of this art piece, which sought to recover a tradition of the Portuguese Nisa Municipality in which local women started embroidering their trousseaus as children to sell them before their marriage, so that they could help to support the new family.

I believe it is important to evoke this background in order to understand the diversity of the contributions gathered here under the same title and the fact that they are mostly centered in U.S. literary and artistic contexts. In the long editing process, the authors have had the opportunity to

rewrite their presentations and enrich them in theoretical terms, as usual in these cases, and also to obtain permission to reproduce some images that enrich the texts and help to develop a useful reading dynamics.

The volume is divided into five sections, which facilitates access to the contents of each and places the twelve essays collected here in similar interpretative frameworks, suggesting particular paths for engaging in a dialogue with these texts. I am well aware that all divisions are subjective and fallible, and that many other approaches would have been possible, including organizing the articles alphabetically by their authors' names. And I am equally sure that readers will enjoy building their own logical and imaginative maps, after having travelled through the whole book using these tentative guidelines.

The first section, entitled '**The State of the Art,**' provides a philosophical and theoretical approach to problems of gender and creative identity and to epistemological questions concerning the conceptualization of art produced by women. In "'By a Woman Wrought": Do We/Should We Still Care?,' Christine Battersby searches for a feminist metaphysics that may be operative in the contemporary world, where notions of gender and personhood clearly do

not fit the binary opposition that still bounds the French poststructuralist and psychoanalytic authors, such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. Revising Toril Moi in the light of the Western philosophical tradition, Battersby argues that, in order to consider the 'singularity' of 'female artistic production' and articulate a more fluid and relational model of subjectivity, the debate about identity should include five features: natality, physiological dependence, pregnant embodiment, fleshiness, and cognitive dislocation. In 'From Practice to Theory: The Ontological Turn in 1970s Feminist Art,' Márcia Oliveira establishes a parallelism between U.S. feminist art in the early 1970s, in particular the *Womanhouse* project, coordinated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, and the work of several Portuguese woman artists during the same period, such as Tília Saldanha, Ana Vieira, Ana Hatherly, and Helena Almeida. Oliveira claims that the feminist practice has been paramount to the re-conceptualization of the visual arts that took place in the late twentieth century, through its use of interactive mediums (performance and installation directly engaged the spectator and revised notions of spatiality and corporeality, for instance) and the recurrent questioning of identity politics.

'Photography at the Crossroads' includes three essays that cover a wide chronological period, going from

one of the woman pioneers in this artistic field to a very talented artist whose premature death condemned her work to obscurity for a period, and lastly centering on one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary woman photographers. In 'Gertrude Käsebier – "Lady Amateur" or "Advanced Photographer"? The Case of the Tea Party with the Sioux,' Susana M. Costa discusses Käsebier's professional status and analyses the series of prints known as Indian Portraits, comparing them with other depictions of racial alterity by U.S. artists. Costa suggests that the photographer used her studio as a liminal space that allowed for a cross-cultural negotiation of her own identity as a woman artist and the complex identities of her guest-sitters, who were empowered as subjects partly in control of the process of image making. In 'Francesca Woodman's Journey into the Gothic Wonderland,' Elisabete Lopes presents the photographer's Gothic strategies for rewriting gender identity through the use of female 'ghosts' who threaten the customary association of women with the domestic space and are able to cross the boundaries of life and death, redefining identity as a dynamic process. Lopes also points out intertextual echoes between Woodman's work and the literary universe, in particular some fairy tale figures (Sleeping Beauty, for example) and major characters

of children's literature (such as Lewis Carroll's Alice). In the next essay Ana Raquel Fernandes and Daniela Garcia go back to the seventeenth century male-dominated literary world of the salons where the 'conteuses' reclaimed creative agency by rewriting traditional fairy tales. 'From D'Aulnoy to Rego and Sherman: Fairy-Tales Revisited' highlights a cross-fertilization between these early literary versions of the genre and the visual arts, in Paula Rego's illustrations of 'La chatte blanche' [The White Cat], and further proposes a dialogue between this type of text and some of Cindy Sherman's photographs that explore the abject and the uncanny.

Centering on women artists from different ethnic backgrounds, the third section, '**Visual Arts in Context**,' surveys the plurality of identities in the U.S. and its impact on specific expressive languages. In 'Finding an Aesthetic of Her Own: Partnering Identities in the Work of Faith Ringgold,' Teresa Botelho traces the evolution of Ringgold's artistic production from the early 1960s to her quilt series produced two decades later. Botelho maintains that the artist's creative identity was predominantly shaped by a gender allegiance that resisted the racialized anthropocentric essentialist stance prevalent in the cultural domain of mainly male black artists. In 'Mestiza Aesthetics: Anzalduan

Theories on Visual Arts and Creativity,' Guisela Latorre analyses Gloria Anzaldua's art criticism and drawings, which destabilize the distinctions between the verbal and the visual realms, the theoretical and the artistic fields. Dwelling on Anzaldua's concepts of artistic inspiration and interconnectedness, Latorre considers the work of some contemporary Chicana and Latina artists (Yreina Cervántez and Liliana Wilson) that represent a *nepantla* [liminal] state where hyphenized identities can better express themselves, using art as a political tool.

The following section, '**Lyrical Dialogues**,' focuses on poetical texts articulated upon a matrix of intertextual allusions to other authors or to political circumstances that shape their reading. 'In the Skin of Another: Rainer Maria Rilke's, Anne Michael's and Sujata Bhatt's Poems as Embodiments of Paula Modersohn-Becker's Life and Art' contrasts Rilke's *Requiem* for his painter friend, which expressed his modernist belief in art as an absolute exclusionary call, with Anne Michael's and Sujata Bhatt's writings, which present the German painter involved in a spiritual and emotional quest that had full expression in the large body of work she produced. Monica Pavani defends that Paula Modersohn-Becker's biographical experience illustrates the tensions faced by early woman artists, caught

between the hegemonic idea of the secluded genius and their beliefs in the intersubjective roots of creativity. In 'Family Resemblances: Elizabeth Bishop and Mark Strand,' Jeffrey Childs presents a philosophical reflection on the categories of identity and belonging, applied to the analysis of Bishop's influence on Strand's poetical work and critical writing, tracing an encounter with the foreignness of the familiar that leads from the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and Carlos Drummond de Andrade to Strand's discussion of the connections between poetry and photography. In "'I Know It Hurts to Burn": Adrienne Rich's Body in Pain,' Marta Soares also problematizes the boundaries of identity, presenting pain as a shared trait of vulnerability that allows Rich to expand the limits of self and to connect emphatically with others who suffer. Soares underlines that the phenomenology of the sick body cuts through gender, racial, and social lines, and also comes to represent the U.S. imperialist politics that Rich repeatedly criticized throughout her career.

The last section pinpoints some '**Narrative Strategies**' that contemporary U.S. writers use to negotiate identity in a multicultural world where master narratives of imperialistic hegemony no longer hold. In 'Jamaica Kincaid's Garden of Words,' Isabel Fernandes Alves investigates the prolific

meanings attached to gardening in Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)*; ranging from its correlation with textuality (the process of reading and writing and also the literary tradition) to its autobiographical implications. Alves alleges that the maintenance of a garden and the reflection inspired by this practice allows the U.S. and Antiguan writer to deal with the experience of colonization, resisting deterritorialization and asserting her creativity. In 'Landscapes of Change: Annie Proulx's Representation of the American West,' Isabel Oliveira Martins considers two short stories included in Proulx's trilogy of anthologies set in Wyoming, known as the 'Cowboy State.' In light of the mythological connotations of the West in U.S. culture, Martins underlines how the trope of the frontier, still productive in contemporary political discourse, is doomed in this fictional landscape, where individual identity is torn between nostalgia and a dystopic present.

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