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## **Electronic Article**

### **Whither Feminist Aesthetics** An Essay Review of Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*

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## Whither Feminist Aesthetics?

### An Essay Review of Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*

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Feminist aesthetics is a field of study that has developed primarily over the last thirty years, as the influences of the feminist movement and its academic corollary of feminist theory have entered into and influenced our major academic disciplines. Contrary to the appearance of the name, and possibly confusing to many as a result, the field of feminist aesthetics is not directly connected with advancing feminism in the political sphere. Nor, strictly speaking, does feminist aesthetics deal with the notion of a specifically female approach to aesthetics or aesthetic appreciation, the so-called “feminine aesthetic.”

Rather, feminist aesthetics is an academic field of “inquiries into the ways that gender influences the formation of ideas about art, artists, and aesthetic value” (Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “feminist aesthetics”).<sup>1</sup> Such inquiries into gender identity and its associations in aesthetic concepts and judgments have been largely ignored within the traditional discipline of aesthetics, which itself only goes back to the eighteenth century (though ancient writings of Plato and others on beauty have often been enlisted in aesthetic debates). Given its development as a subdiscipline of philosophy during the Enlightenment, traditional aesthetics reflects that era’s emphasis on clarity of categories and definitions, as well as philosophy’s emphasis on logical argument. Yet this clarity is resisted by the stunning breadth of the subject matter of aesthetics: namely, the study of sensual perceptions and judgments of taste in

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the whole wide world of all human sensual experience, including experiences of the arts and of nature.

Because of the enormous breadth and subjectivity of the aesthetic realm, philosophers in the field have generally been at great pains to hold its subject matter still enough for logical reasoning, particularly the rigorous “analytic” variety of reasoning that has dominated Anglo-American philosophy over the last half century. Typically, they have focused on the fine arts (witness “philosophy of art” as a frequent title for courses and texts in aesthetics), and have worked to fix and debate definitions for terms such as “taste,” “beauty,” “sublimity,” “aesthetic judgment,” “aesthetic experience,” “expression,” “artist,” “greatness,” “genius,” and “artwork.” Thus, with some exceptions, philosophical aesthetics has been a discipline much removed from the “messier” sensual activities of everyday life: experiences, like sex, eating, cooking, gardening, dancing, wherein it is difficult to fix on a single artist and artwork. Largely ignoring practical arts and crafts and everyday experience, the field of philosophical aesthetics has often smacked of elitism and idealism, and its debates have repeatedly dealt with a canon of great artworks by the dreaded “Dead White European Males.”

One of the most important issues ignored under traditional aesthetics has been gender: the way that a person’s gender identity may affect perceptions and judgments of aesthetic value. Under traditional aesthetics, gender is not a category of concern. Rather, it is assumed that key aesthetic concepts such as “taste,” “beauty,” “sublimity,” “aesthetic judgment,” “expression,” “artist,” “greatness,” “genius” and “artwork” are all gender-neutral. In fact, the assumption of gender neutrality is characteristic of philosophy in general. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer in her introduction to *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, philosophy “traditionally is typified by the aspiration to universality, that is, to the formulation of theories that pertain to all situations, all human beings, at all times.”<sup>2</sup> In theory, universalism sounds like an appropriate academic stance, but in practice, it often translates into blatant masculinism: for example in the continued insistence by some conservative (mainly non-academic) writers, despite feminist

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objections, that the pronoun “he” is gender-neutral.<sup>3</sup> Philosophers don’t go so far as to make that ridiculous claim, but, given their historic leanings to universalism, philosophy in a general sense has been more resistant to the challenges of feminist theory than have other disciplines within the humanities. (It is more similar to the gender-neutral stance of the natural sciences in this regard than it is to the humanities.)

Thus, the challenge for feminist aesthetics has been to counter the gender-neutral claims of philosophy by exposing universalism as masculinism and by exploring ways in which gender identity and its associations influence our aesthetic frameworks, terms, and definitions: both negatively in the past devaluing of certain arts, artworks, senses, and sensual experiences associated with women and femininity; and positively, in seeking better to understand the interactions of gender identity and aesthetic judgments in the present and future. The challenge inevitably has involved going beyond pure philosophy into history, because, although history itself has suffered from masculinist biases, it is still the details of history that can reveal and explain our biases, and the ignoring of history that blinds us to them. Not surprisingly, historians and theorists of literature and the other arts have been prominent in raising these challenges, in most cases long before philosophers in aesthetics recognized them.

One such early challenge appeared in art historian John Berger’s 1972 BBC television series, *Ways of Seeing*. There, Berger challenged the gender-neutral claims of traditional art scholarship, typified by Kenneth Clark’s failure to take the gender identity of subjects, artists, and viewers into account in his classic *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (1956). Noting the predominance of males as artists and viewers of the nude and of females as objects of their gaze, Berger argued that women have been “depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him.” Continuing with a challenge to gender-neutrality that has become typical in feminist theory, Berger said, “If you have any doubt that this is so, make the following experiment. Choose from this book an image of a traditional nude.

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Transform the woman into a man. Either in your mind's eye or by drawing on the reproduction. Then notice the violence which that transformation does. Not to the image, but to the assumptions of a likely viewer.”<sup>4</sup>

Berger's argument has since grown into a vast literature of feminist-aesthetic writing on the concept of “the male gaze,” and has entered the discourse of other visual art forms as well as that of literature and music. But it wasn't until 1990 and the publication of a special issue on “Feminism and Traditional Aesthetics” in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (organ of the American Society for Aesthetics) that the

feminist-aesthetic concept of the “male gaze” found voice in philosophical aesthetics.<sup>5</sup>

By then, a large number of seminal works of feminist aesthetics had been written by literary theorists and arts historians, many of which were referenced in *JAAC*'s “Feminism and Traditional Aesthetics”: including works by literary theorists Elaine Showalter, Gisela Ecker, Toril Moi, Naomi Schor, and Christine Battersby; art historians

Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock; and musicologist Susan McClary.<sup>6</sup> Since 1990 and that special issue, philosophers have become more active and influential in feminist aesthetics, approaching concepts and issues raised by others in their rigorous, logical manner, and raising challenges of their own to the supposed gender-neutrality of concepts in traditional aesthetics, concepts such as “genius,” “disinterestedness,” “form,” “ornament,” “artwork,” “artist,” and the traditionally-supposed aesthetic primacy of the visual over other artistic and sensual expressions. While feminist-aesthetic work by arts historians and literary theorists has continued and increased since 1990, there has been a “philosophization” of feminist aesthetics, as the discipline, journals, and practitioners of philosophical aesthetics have taken notice of the challenges posed by feminist theory to the field.<sup>7</sup>

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One of the leaders in the “philosophization” of feminist aesthetics since 1990 has been Carolyn Korsmeyer, a philosophy professor at the State University of New York in

Buffalo and current president of the American Society for Aesthetics (2004-2005). Co-editor of the 1990 special issue of *JAAC* (with Peggy Zeglin Brand), Korsmeyer has since co-edited the 1993 *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* with Hilde Hein. She has also authored *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (1999), which argues that the neglect of the senses of taste, smell, and touch in traditional aesthetics is linked to masculinist assumptions in the history of Western thought about the superiority of mind over body.<sup>8</sup> With this background, Korsmeyer would appear to be an excellent choice for the authorship of a major new introductory text to feminist aesthetics, part of a series of Routledge texts on “Understanding Feminist Philosophy” designed for use by “students who have typically completed an introductory course in philosophy and are coming to feminist philosophy for the first time.”<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, the content of *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* suggests otherwise. In a word, the book is disappointing. The problem is not in the writing: Korsmeyer’s style is clear enough for the intended level of readership, and that is no small feat for a text in philosophical aesthetics. Many other aspects of the appearance of the book—the typeface, color, weight, headings, and subheadings—are pleasing as well: not insignificant matters for an aesthetics text. On the other hand, the endnotes are very difficult to use. Although they are separately numbered in each chapter, they appear all together at the end of the book (155-74) without any clues at the tops of the pages as to which chapter they represent. One turns a lot of pages in order to run down a single reference.

However, far more serious problems are found in the organization and substance of the book. Most disappointing is the fact that Korsmeyer, while covering many colorful and provocative case studies of feminist-inspired artwork, does little to cover the scholarly work in the area of feminist aesthetics over the last thirty years, since the entry of feminist theory into the academy, or in the last fifteen years since it entered philosophical aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, aside from the emphasis on feminist art (or a rather lurid subset of it, as we shall see), Korsmeyer’s book could easily be entitled *Aesthetics:*

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*An Introduction*, because its coverage of gender and feminist theory in aesthetics is no more extended than one might currently expect from a general introductory text to aesthetics. In the context of a general aesthetics text, it would be perfectly appropriate to spend, as Korsmeyer does, much of her time on mainstream aesthetic theories and writings such as those of Plato (pp. 18-22); Collingwood (32-33); Hume (40-41); Burke (41-43); Kant (44-46), Dickie (116-17) Danto (117-118); and only a brief section in Chapter Six on feminist aesthetic theory (130-40), mainly on the work of French psychoanalytic feminists Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. However, in a monograph on gender and aesthetics, the neglect of almost all avenues but one of feminist-theoretical work is hard to understand.

To be fair, Korsmeyer's introduction suggests an aim more limited than her book title or the stated purpose of the Routledge series to which it belongs, claims. On page one, she says the book "examines the theories and conceptual frameworks that operate in and around art and aesthetics . . . from a feminist perspective, that is, with attention to the roles that gender plays in the formation and application of ideas about artworks, creativity, and aesthetic value." Yet, even with the relatively greater emphasis these words place on traditional aesthetics as compared to the feminist, gender-conscious perspective, this book disappoints, because the space for the latter is so very limited. Just from the point of view of structure, there is only one reference to gender among six chapter headings and only two gender-related references among thirty-four chapter

subheadings.<sup>11</sup> In terms of content, there are only thirty pages—one fifth of this 150-page text—devoted specifically to feminist-aesthetic research or argument. While there are other references to feminist aesthetic work in the notes, these are difficult to locate and not very helpful. In one such reference, the reader is directed, as part of an endnote to the author's discussion of Kantian aesthetics, to articles by Jane Kneller, Marcia Moen and Kim Hall in the 1997 *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* (edited by Robin May Schott), but without any indication as to what their arguments are.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the index lists all three authors and directs the reader to the note gives the impression that

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their work is discussed. It isn't, and neither is a lot of other feminist-aesthetic work that is referenced in the index and the endnotes.

Unfortunately, Korsmeyer's neglect of feminist research in *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* is reinforced by a thematic organization that leads her to introduce, debate, and return to traditional masculinist definitions and theories again and again: an approach that serves to reify them at least as much as it serves to challenge them. (Note: "reify" means "to regard [something abstract] as a material or concrete thing"<sup>13</sup> and is commonly used by feminist theorists to expose the presence of masculinist assumptions.) Nor is Korsmeyer's thematic organization a particularly logical or complete one. Instead of beginning, as many general texts in aesthetics do, with a general definition and discussion of aesthetics in its broadest terms (involving sensual perception of everything, not just the arts), Korsmeyer starts with the theme of "Artists and art" in Chapter One, then continues with "Aesthetic pleasures" in Chapter Two, "Amateurs and professionals" in Chapter Three, "Deep gender: taste and food" in Chapter Four, "What is art?" in Chapter Five, and "Difficult pleasures: sublimity and disgust" in Chapter Six. The primacy of questions about the gender of artists in this organization is obvious and rather regressive, for it involves a revisitation of misleading clichés about the existence of women artists in history, and a repetition and reification of all the definitions that have allowed the artistic work of women to be ignored. Since 1970 and the rise of feminist theory in academics, these questions have been illuminated far better elsewhere, primarily in works by arts historians who have shown that women practitioners of art have existed in every known culture, despite exclusionary definitions, institutions, and historical canons.<sup>14</sup> Thus, what seems to be Korsmeyer's primary question, "Why were there so few women artists in the past?" comes across as more of a regressive reification of masculinist assumptions about the dearth of women artists than a debunking of those assumptions.

There are masculinist reifications amidst Korsmeyer's discussion of traditional aesthetic concepts, as well. For example, under the subheading, "genius" in Chapter One,

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Korsmeyer describes “the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement” as a period during which “genius was ferociously guarded as a male preserve,” citing Battersby’s *Genius and Gender* as her source (29, one of the few citations of feminist aesthetic writings). On the other hand, she goes on to say,

The gender of genius is founded on special capacities of these few extraordinary persons, capacities that are grounded in overall differences in the abilities of men and women. While artistic creativity is not merely a function of superior reason, it is a feature of a superior mind; and the model superior mind is a male mind: one that is strong and capable of independence from tradition and social norms, and that rises above the quotidian concerns that shape ordinary activities.

By “model superior mind,” Korsmeyer no doubt means the reader to understand that the traditional aesthetic model of genius as male is biased and should be challenged as such. But, particularly in the case of students, the passage may easily be read as a restatement of, rather than a challenge to, masculinist assumptions about mental and artistic abilities and the lives of men (potentially “extraordinary”) and women (likely “quotidian” and “ordinary”). Feminist theorists have long known that the repetition of binary oppositions, even in the attempt to challenge them, just leads to more reification of those oppositions, as it does here. Instead of repeating and reifying the binary view of gender, Korsmeyer could have challenged it by mentioning some cases of dreary lives and dull work from male artists and some cases of extraordinary lives and genius in female artists: such as Hildegard of Bingen and Artemisia Gentileschi, both now widely recognized as extraordinary geniuses despite many centuries of canonic omission.

Instead, she goes on to say that “genius” may be a male-defined attribute in physical as well as social terms, followed by a discussion of (female-defined) hysteria. As a result, an unsubtle reader (most students!) may come away from this passage associating men with genius and women with hysteria, perhaps even more than they did before they read it.

A similar binary opposition appears in Korsmeyer’s discussion of 18<sup>th</sup>-century views of aesthetic taste in Chapter Two, and once again, the masculinist generalizations of past aesthetic thought are repeated and reified as much as they are challenged:

Although women were considered capable of developing fine taste, arguably the model of the ideal aesthetic judge, the arbiter of taste, was implicitly male, for men's minds and sentiments were considered to be more broadly capable than women's. Here we find once more the combination of theoretical assumptions and social norms that produces the opinion that higher mental powers are asymmetrically exercised in males and females. The greater mental facility of males supposedly renders them more capable of judgments of taste for complicated subjects, according to philosophical tradition; and the socially-grounded assumption that women's experience is appropriately narrower than is men's means that they are unlikely to have the breadth of expertise to render their taste on tougher subjects as insightful as men's is likely to be" (46-47).

The brief objections that Korsmeyer does raise to the traditional masculinist assumptions in the above are weakly argued, with no specific identification of the counterarguments raised by feminist scholars and with no historical counterexamples to expose and clarify the gender-biased nature of the "theoretical assumptions and social norms" she mentions. Many students will come away from this and other such passages thinking that Korsmeyer's arguments against gender bias in traditional aesthetic concepts are not well supported, and thus suspect; others will only remember that most people think men are more discerning than women.


Generalizations may be unavoidable in an introductory book like this (or anywhere), but a thematic approach to structure exacerbates their dangers. It's too easy in a thematic or otherwise ahistorical approach to put forward generalizations and avoid or cherry-pick the historical details that would ground or un-ground them, as lying beyond the range of a philosophical study. That ahistoricity has allowed misogynistic assertions (for instance, the common claim in Western thought of woman's affinity for things of the flesh rather than the mind) to pass for unassailable truth. That is why feminist philosophy has been so sorely needed, and why the most effective feminist philosophical challenges have raised historical contingencies as well as logical argument. Simply stated, the facts of history are necessary in order to deconstruct "pure" and "universal" philosophical claims as the masculinist assumptions they often are. Without

that deconstruction, the same old claims keep getting raised and repeated, even, as in this case, when the author's purpose is to challenge them.

There are other unintended masculinist reifications, as well, that, in my view, should have been recognized by the editor, if not the writer. Most disappointing is Korsmeyer's trivialization of a self-portrait by a scribe named Claricia in a 12<sup>th</sup>-century psalter during her discussion of expression. "It would be unfounded, however, to conclude that some universal drive for individual artistic self-expression burst forth in this letter, as enthusiasts of the expression theory art might venture to claim. In fact, Claricia may have just been a bit bored at the time, indulging in a piece of doodling that turned out well" (p.23).

Here, Korsmeyer's argument against assuming that Claricia's self-portrait demonstrates a universal drive for artistic expression may be sustainable (though I doubt it, given the pride shown by the signature and picture, highly unusual for its time). Yet, even if the argument is sustainable, it need not be made in a manner that so casually dismisses the work of a woman artist: a manner that adds to, rather than challenges, a history of masculinist dismissal of female artistic capacity and activity. Why not, to borrow the classic feminist-theoretical game in this context, make the argument using the work of a male artist? Unfortunately, trivialization of the artistic activities of women has been a standard fault in aesthetics, a fault that should not, to say the least, have been repeated in a work that purports to convey the feminist perspective.

Another problem in this book is its emphasis on "disgust" as a major focus of feminist aesthetics. This occurs in two ways: as the main focus in Chapter Six, "Difficult Pleasures: Sublimity and Disgust," which is also the only chapter of the book that specifically addresses feminist scholarship; and as a recurring element of the feminist artworks that Korsmeyer chooses as illustrations and case studies. While it is true that some, or perhaps many, feminist artists have explored aspects of female sexuality that have been considered disgusting under traditional definitions of art and aesthetics, Korsmeyer's emphasis of that connection in feminist art in an introductory book on



feminist aesthetics is misleading, because “disgust” is not a leading issue in the discourse on feminist aesthetics, outside of works by Kristeva and Irigaray that are not, strictly speaking, works on aesthetics, let alone feminist aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> It’s understandable that Korsmeyer, whose major work in feminist aesthetics has been on the sense of taste, would want to enlist Kristeva’s writings on disgust in exploring the neglect of that sense. But the emphasis on disgust as a feminist-aesthetic issue is overdone, particularly when coupled with the rather disgusting examples of feminist art Korsmeyer explores—in far more detail than any other artwork she discusses.

For example, there is much discussion of performance pieces that eroticize menstrual blood by the otherwise somewhat obscure art professor Joanna Frueh (143-44, 151); of the photographs of Hannah Wilke documenting her own stages of cancer (151); and, more canonically, of the fecal smearings of Karen Finley (101, 126). There is also much discussion about Jana Sterbak’s *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, in which a garment sewed from sixty pounds of raw steak are draped on a model and allowed to spoil in the course of an exhibition of the work (101, and again on 105-6). And then there’s Carol Schneeman’s *Interior Scroll*, in which the artist stands naked in front of the audience, smears her body with mud while reading from a text and then extracts “a long, rolled strip of paper from her vagina, reading aloud the message written thereupon” (105, and again on 126-27).

Since Korsmeyer also mentions Andre Serrano’s *Piss Christ* as an example of the artistic exploration of disgust, Korsmeyer knows that disgust is not purely an issue for feminist art. But her emphasis on it implies that interest in disgust is completely characteristic of feminist art work. On the contrary, there is wide consensus that feminist artwork cannot be easily categorized, other than as being art that has emerged from feminist viewpoints, of which there are many. Unfortunately, when almost all of Korsmeyer’s examples of feminist art works are of this nature it leaves the student reader with the impression that feminist aesthetics and art are about disgust, and perhaps, are rather disgusting as well.

This is the final unfortunate reification of Korsmeyer's book: while trying to problematize the Western philosophical association of woman and the body, as any number of feminist aesthetics texts have done, it actually has the effect of reifying that connection again and again, almost as if to suggest that feminist aesthetics = woman = body = disgusting. In the absence of substantive discussion of the actual research and writing that has appeared in the field of feminist aesthetics, *Gender and Aesthetics* cannot do otherwise. A truly effective introduction to the feminist-theoretical perspectives and scholarship in gender and aesthetics will have to wait for some other book; and students who are assigned this book in a college course on aesthetics, feminism, or gender studies, some other class at some other time. Probably, given the marginality of aesthetics, let alone feminist aesthetics, to standard college curricula, that time will not come.

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In the wake of this disappointing introduction to the field, whither feminist aesthetics? It is easy to be pessimistic about the future of feminist aesthetics after reading so little about its scholarly products in Korsmeyer's *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*. As for the possibility of any lasting influence of feminist aesthetics on philosophy, pessimism seems equally appropriate. After a brief flurry in the 1990s, the popularity of feminist theory in philosophy appears to have waned, and the center of philosophy's universalist claims, so aptly noted by Korsmeyer elsewhere, appears to have held. The hot topics in philosophy these days—the topics that advance careers—have to do with philosophy of mind and science: fields in which masculinist emphases on “pure” and “universal” assumptions are even more pervasive than in aesthetics.

On the other hand, ideas from the field of feminist aesthetics have had lasting influence on the scholars and subject matter of literary theory, art, and musicology. For example, in the case of the latter, dissertation topics on great works by great (white, male) composers are in the past, and issues of gender and other cultural contingencies are frequently foregrounded in the major journals and disciplinary meetings.<sup>16</sup> Many music



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theorists still cling to philosophy's beloved universalist assumptions, but even there, assumptions about the irrelevance of culture to aesthetic judgment have waned.

In its strong opposition to universalist assumptions about sensual perceptions and judgments, feminist aesthetics has also been influential in the rise of other challenges to traditional mainstream aesthetics. There are now arguments, articles, and conferences about Native American aesthetics, Black aesthetics, and queer and lesbian aesthetics, all of which propose and explore aesthetic values omitted or denigrated under traditional aesthetics. More than through philosophy, this non-traditional work in aesthetics has reached American students through K-12 humanities and social studies lessons, as part of the multi-cultural movement in primary and secondary education. Young people may get little formal education in aesthetics or philosophy, but they are now learning, more than in the past, that there is beauty in the artworks and activities of multiple cultures and subcultures. The change is not universally (there's that word) greeted or understood: conservatives continue to claim that there should be firm standards for truth and beauty, and that relativistic or pluralistic valuations of multiple cultural traditions amount to the loss of standards. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the conservative turn of the United States since 1994, demographics of rising color and diversity are winning the battle against the assumption of a single standard in judgments of artistic beauty, and will likely continue to do so. In this sense, then, feminist aesthetics has been a successful, if unsung, revolution in the way we practice aesthetic judgment on works of art.

In the larger sense of aesthetics, though, involving all sensual perception, much feminist-theoretical work remains to be done in challenging mainstream standards and values. For example, take the standards of physical beauty that are now expressing themselves in a virtual epidemic of plastic surgery on the one hand, even as we continue to accept the ugliness of poverty, sickness, starvation and other forms of sensory deprivation on the other. In 1990, philosopher Hilde Hein predicted that feminist aesthetics could help feminist theory and the world "to appreciate old things in new ways and to assimilate new things that would be excluded by traditional aesthetic theory."

Further, she argued, “feminist aesthetic theorizing also promises to yield positive and practical consequences in nonaesthetic dimensions because it illuminates and corrects certain imagery that has exerted a powerful influence upon our conventional

understanding of the world.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, what we regard as important in the sensual realm—what we do or do not see, hear, taste, smell, and touch—is the key to our collective futures, and feminist aesthetics can help us do better than we have in the past. If, for example, feminist aesthetics could help us learn to imagine a god that is broader, wider, and more generous than your average bourgeois father, what a difference that could make to the treatment of the poor, the planet, and the half of its population too often regarded as breeders or sex slaves.<sup>18</sup>

That ambitious goal for feminist aesthetics remains an important one. Whether we reach it even in part remains to be seen.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Korsmeyer, Carolyn, "Feminist Aesthetics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2004 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/feminism-aesthetics>>. For further discussion of the earlier mentioned “feminine aesthetic,” see Sylvia Bovenschen, “Is There a Feminine Aesthetic,” and Heide Göttner-Abendroth, “Nine Principles of a Matriarchal Aesthetic” in Gisela Ecker, ed., *Feminist Aesthetics*, trans. Harriet Anderson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 23-50 and pp. 81-94, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Introduction: Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Feminist Scholarship,” in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), vii.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the 1977 and 2000 revisions of Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1977, 2000). In the 1977 edition the authors insist on the correctness of “he,” as a gender-neutral pronoun, and in the 2000 edition they still argue for “he” as universal, but they also admit that “currently, however, many writers find the use of the generic ‘he or his to rename indefinite antecedents limiting or offensive” (p. 60). Actually, philosophers have been quicker than many scholars to adopt gender-neutral linguistic standards, but “he” continues to appear in other disciplines, including theology.

<sup>4</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972) 64.

<sup>5</sup> See *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, 48 (1990), republished by Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995; especially Mary Deveraux, “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator: The ‘New’ Aesthetics,” 121-141.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” in *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, (1979) pp. 22-41; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (Methuen, 1985); Gisela Ecker (ed.), *Feminist Aesthetics*, trans. Harriet Anderson (Beacon Press, 1985); Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (Methuen, 1987); Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Indiana University Press, 1989); Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power, and Other Essays*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of the Arts* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, recent articles in the special issue on “Women, Art, and Aesthetics,” Peg Brand and Mary Deveraux (eds.), *Hypatia* 18/4 (Fall/Winter 2003); and Jane Duran, “Aesthetics, Epistemics, and Feminist Theory,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37 (2003) 32-39.

<sup>8</sup> Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). While “feminist” and “gender” do not appear in the title, many of the arguments are based on feminist theory, some of which were presented in a panel on feminist aesthetic research and have been discussed at feminist caucus sessions at meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics.

<sup>9</sup> *ii*, brief series introduction (presumably by editor Linda Martin Alcoff).

<sup>10</sup> Note again, the terms “feminist theory” and “gender and aesthetics” are used interchangeably in this review and in Korsmeyer’s book (p. 1, for example), since feminist aesthetics problematizes the issue of gender, previously ignored by traditional aesthetics and philosophy in general).

<sup>11</sup> “Feminist critiques of aesthetic perception” in Chapter 2 (51-57), and “Feminist work and changing concepts of art” in Chapter 5 (117-28).

<sup>12</sup> “For feminist analyses of this claim,” Korsmeyer writes, “see Jane Kneller, ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Kantian Autonomy;’ Marcia Moen, ‘Feminist Themes in Unlikely Places: Re-Reading Kant’s Critique of Judgment;’ Kim Hall, ‘Sensus Communis and Violence: A Feminist Reading of Kant’s Critique of Judgment’” all in Robin May Schott (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997): 173-89, 213-55, 257-72.”

<sup>13</sup> *Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2005).



<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” in Nochlin’s *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays* (Harper Collins, 1989) 145-78; and see Julie Ann Sadie and Rhian Samuels, “Introduction,” *The Grove/Norton Dictionary of Women Musicians* (Norton, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> For example, Kristeva resists identification as feminist (as Korsmeyer herself indicates, p.173 n.42), and her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia Press) is not explicitly feminist in its approach. On the other hand, Luce Irigaray’s writings are foundational works in French psychoanalytic feminist theory, but they are not oriented primarily to aesthetics; rather, they are addressed to academics and intellectuals in general. Moreover, both Irigaray and Kristeva were more active and influential before 1990 and the “philosophization” of feminist aesthetics, so the emphasis here on their writings, without discussion of more recent, explicitly feminist and gender-conscious research in aesthetics, is indicative of an imbalance in the Korsmeyer text.

<sup>16</sup> The change is discussed and partly attributed to the rise of feminist theory in musicology in Joseph Kerman, “American Musicology in the 1990’s,” *Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991) 131-44.

<sup>17</sup> Hilde Hein, “The Role of Feminist Aesthetics in Feminist Theory,” in *Feminism and Traditional Aesthetics* (462).

<sup>18</sup> Signs of a more expansive approach to feminist aesthetics have appeared, notably in the recent special issue of *Hypatia* (18/4, 2003) on “Women, Art, and Aesthetics,” including Sheila Lintott’s “Sublime Hunger: A Consideration of Eating Disorders Beyond Beauty.” But, given the primary focus on art and artists in Korsmeyer’s *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, the more expansive approach is largely missing there.

### **Biographical information**

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