What should a feminist who thinks about art do with the concept of "aesthetic value"? The phrase has such a dirty philosophical history as to render it thoroughly problematic to feminists of all descriptions. Should we junk the notion of evaluation altogether? Re-define it? Re-define it (assigning it a place in some dialectical relationship with "feminist values")? These two final positions are not necessarily alternatives; both are out of step with the purist view which would reject the whole tradition of "art-history-as-appreciation".

This is the position argued by Giselda Pollock in Vision and Difference. (1) Pollock believes that there is no point in feminist art criticism seeking to insert women artists' within a framework that distinguishes between the major and the minor, the good and the bad, the eternally valued and the fashionably momentary. An art work with quality - i.e. positive and negative evaluations of artefacts - is suspect; an "alternative" (feminist) standard of appreciation would merely result in another way of consuming art; the effect is to leave intact that very notion of evaluating art, and of course the normative standards by which it is done. Instead, Pollock adopts a sophisticated form of Marxist analysis: I am arguing that feminist art history has to reject all this evaluative criticism and stop merely judging the aesthetic criteria for appreciating art. Instead it should concentrate on historical forms of explanation of women's artistic production.

My impression as an outsider (I'm a philosopher, not an art historian) is that, in this country, Pollock's position on evaluation represents that of the feminist academic mainstream. It certainly represents the position which has been theorised in the most sophisticated and compelling ways. But I will be arguing that it is neither practically desirable, nor theoretically possible to opt out of the whole arena of aesthetic evaluation. What I will be suggesting is not that feminist art criticism is to be simply seen as insert women artists within the "canon" of great artists, but that there is no value-neutral critical space in which feminist critics can reside. And that present-day women artists will suffer unless feminist art critics employ those dirty evaluative words for feminist ends. What is needed is an excursion of notions of aesthetic evaluation, but a revision of such notions: a revision radical enough both to insert women artists into the "canon" of great artists, and to bring to the notion of a universal, historically timeless canon into question.

I am not, in any sense, intending to devalue or condemn the kind of Marxist-feminist practice that Pollock recommends. The analysis of art institutions and the material conditions of artistic production has revolutionised (and surely will continue to revolutionise) feminist art historians' understanding of their discipline. But, I do think we should learn from Balthasar Brecht's working slogan for a revolutionary art: "Use what you can!" And I believe that feminist art critics who seek to revalue the work of female (and male) artists also have a role to play in transforming artistic display and practice. We can't just afford a new feminist orthodoxy (whether Marxist, psychoanalytical or "deconstructionist") that rejects as merely "feminist", "individualistic" or "humanist" the whole tradition of art-appreciation.

It is depressing that feminist art theory in this country should have had such a limited success in changing the idea that there have been few interesting women artists in the past. We haven't even got far in the limited task of assessing the (small proportion of) works by women artists that are already in public ownership. There have, of course, been the occasional exhibitions of Women's Art. But, important though such exhibitions are, they cannot be the primary tactic for changing what is on display in our galleries, since it is the notion of a "great artist" that remains integral to the acquisition and display of art in our culture.

At present those interested in assessing art by past generations of women must, in general, and their tours of U.K. national and provincial art galleries with a feeling of defeat. But, for all that, it is possible to be too despairing about the possibility of changing the way that British institutions manage their collections. The Tate Gallery, for example, seems to have embraced one portion of a revolutionary aesthetics in its first major re-hang for twenty years (opened 29 January). For Nicholas Serota, the new Director at the Gallery, has rejected the notion that artistic values are pre-given and that the function of a museum is simply to provide a record and display of some single, monolithic canon of "great art". Serota intends to change the artistic display every nine months, and in a kind of permanent revolution keep alive the question of what is and what is not appropriately relegated to the basements or allo-
which women produce their art. Inherent in the notion of an occurrence - and hence built into the notion of an occurrence - is the value judgement... a notion of a significant, important or (at least) interesting expression of a fully-human self. But since the notions and ideas for human personality are based on the development of the male psyche, women have to struggle to get their art works interpreted in such generous ways.

Thus, in addition to work on collectives, we need work on women as individuals of the type that, in recent years, has allowed Gwen John and Frida Kahlo to emerge from the shadows. We need exhibitions (and critical 'appraisals') which allow us to see how the artist developed (or failed to develop, and suffered) so she struggled to create in an environment in which the forces for creativity (and for individuality) privilege the male. These, of course, have been some exhibitions of this type in our smaller galleries. But even there the work is often displayed in ways that make it hard to understand the particular and peculiar difficulties faced by women who are artists.

For example, the 1988 exhibition of work by Hannah Hoch (1899-1978) presented her as if she were merely a Dadaist and creator of collage. The oil paintings, watercolours and sculptures that were an integral part of her remarkably lengthy artistic career (and which were contained in the much-larger German exhibition of her work) did not tour the U.K. By contrast, the 1989 exhibition of Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985) at the I.C.A. contained work from a variety of media and the whole of her artistic life. But it was nevertheless obfuscating, for the display was organised round similar thematic and formal categories and not, chronologically. This can, of course, be a valuable philosophy of display for artists whose work has become over-familiar; but Oppenheim certainly does not fit into this category.

In fact, a chronological account of a female artist's life can surprise much more than thematic display. This is shown by a current retrospective of the Dutch painter Else Berg (1877-1942) in the Netherlands Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, 27th October-26th January 1990. In her earliest paintings, Berg is at her most abstract, the vibrant colours and simple lines suggesting affinities with Matisse. But by the time of her death in 1942, Berg's life as a Jew and a woman had made her work not (always successfully) to combine strong elements of social realism with her more formalist concerns.

It is important that we should understand the processes that might pressurise a woman to live her artistic life in ways that we generally think of as a 'backward' direction from abstraction to realism. Since women artists have often access to display-spaces which have been organised around the principle of genius - and since typical 'genius' was theorised as an ethereal, often feminine medium - it is important to learn from the way that past generations of women artists coped with the paradoxes of being both female and creators (4). A chronological account of Hoch's and Oppenheim's lives would, I think, have revealed these as the tension at the heart of their fractured oeuvres.

In the Ruben Family (1341, Ichet Colomun (1965-1999) has provided a counter to the dominant view of genius as super-male fan endogamy, with strong male lusts and a courtier working售后) and women working 'en masse'. But the concept 'behave'. It has been used in gender discriminatory ways. Women's works have been scattered and dispersed to a much greater extent than those of men. Nor is this simply because of the material disadvantages under which they work. It is both the understanding of the need for a different kind of information, experience, and emotion that are appropriate for the picture under observation. It is against this ideal that all one's responses to the picture have to be judged, since there is no such thing as an artist's intention. In this case, one is not concerned with the kinds of questions that arise when one is looking at a photograph, but with the kinds of questions that arise when one is looking at a painting.
which is not to say, of course, that all responses are equally valid.

I hope this explanation goes some way towards making the notion of feminist aesthetic evaluation more acceptable. For what I am demanding is not a complete unanimity of feminist response: but also not an infinite variety of critical response. I am simply building into the notion of an 'ideal observer' a person with a range of experience, a sensibility and a body of knowledge that has been shaped by an engagement with feminist politics.

I think the hostility that feminists (and Marxists) often feel towards the notion of aesthetics comes, in part, from a confusion of 'aesthetics' with 'aestheticism'. In its original (eighteenth-century) meaning, the subject-matter of aesthetics was the 'science of the senses'. The German inventors of this branch of philosophy were concerned to discover how it might be possible to reach universal conclusions (valid for all persons) on the basis of individual, immediate (= passive and unconceptualised) sense experience. I have already said that I do not believe that it is necessary to demand that aesthetic judgements be universals. But neither do I believe in the notion of 'immediacy' which philosophers like Immanuel Kant used to justify the claim that the pure aesthetic response must abstract from all sensual appeal, and concentrate (in an utterly 'disinterested' way) on the 'form' of the object.

It is, I believe, this notion of a 'disinterested' withdrawal from all material and use value that has done most to bring the notion of the aesthetic into disrepute. For, during the nineteenth century, the aesthetic movement developed this notion of Kant's to an extreme. The aesthetic was equated with a particular attitude of mind: with a determined blindness to moral, social and political considerations... and even with an indifference to bodily dictates and needs. But this is a perversion of the notion of an aesthetic, and is a mode of artistic evaluation that feminists can and must revise and resist. For it by no means follows that to deny that aesthetic judgements are universal, disinterested or immediate is to deny that there are no evaluative standards that can be developed to discriminate between adequate and inadequate response to art-work... or good and bad art-works.

The Director of the Tate has said 'Art is not just data, just information... The point is that the contents of a museum, the values that a museum embodies, are not givens.' (5) I agree. But, when I look round the re-hung Tate one of the things that upsets me at least as much as the absence of female artists, is how many of the art-works on show seem to represent the perverse variety of aestheticism. Matter (flesh, but also natural objects) is endlessly prettified and idealised in ways that reveal how much real bodies are disdained. It comes almost as a relief to move into rooms of blank abstractionism... or even to those artists who vigorously assert the value of male lusts. Remarkably few of the art-works on display laugh at, reject, or counter the (false) polarities: either form or matter; either art or politics; either god or beast. Which is why I want to say (very firmly) that the values of this first re-hang at the Tate are unacceptable in terms of a feminist aesthetic.

FOOTNOTES: