Since the late sixties, feminists have argued, in different ways and to different degrees, that representation—visual, verbal, or any other kind—profoundly affects women's lives. As far back as can be traced, the idea of the feminine has been represented and, some would claim, controlled. Feminism questions how representation shapes women's lives, for twenty-five years consciously and vigilantly attempting to articulate what is at stake for women in visual representation. Although these attempts have not always been harmonious—one need only consider feminist debates over pornography, for example—feminists do not doubt the significance of representation, in particular visual representation.

Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies is a collection of contemporary photo artworks and critical essays grounded in feminist analyses of visual representation. The essays and the artworks explore the dynamics of visual images and ideology, how each is embedded in the other, and how together they contribute to the status of women. As a feminist artist, I have worked for more than a decade on these issues in the belief that solidarity depends on recognition of the struggles of *all* women. This principle has guided me in bringing together varied, even conflicting points of view.

The essays and photographs in *Reframings* explore a range of American feminist issues and experiences. The contributors, all women, include African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Latinas, and Native Americans. Although all the contributors in some way address gender, most identify additional differences of ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and age. At the same time the contributors bring their different feminist perspectives to bear on advertising, child care, the culture industry, everyday life, family life, food, health care, labor, public life, romance, sexuality, and myriad other concerns of women. Most often the artists in *Reframings* consider a constellation of indivisible and interrelated issues.

Most important, perhaps, the contributors to *Reframings* share the recognition that images embody, are indivisible from, politics. The artists whose works are included here make meaning through an awareness that receiving representation —working with the givens of visual culture—is a negotiable social process. Most of these works visually debate received representation. Their debates are a form of social intercourse that is also political participation. These artists share a consciousness that historically, women have been "framed" through the process of representation and can be "reframed" through the same process. They also share an understanding of photography's role in the framing and reframing processes.

Photography, including its immediate offspring film and the contemporary electronic variant video, is crucial to any investigation of the politics of representation. From its nineteenth-century advent, photography figured prominently in the transition to the modern world, dramatically participating in new sciences and explorations, in new forms of leisure, and in the new commercial order. Readily reproducible—a fact that facilitates the publication of this book—its vernacular visual status makes it a relevant, practical medium for an activist artist, just as it is the visual medium of choice for mass culture. Photography's efficiency as a representational tool makes it a likely medium for the artists in *Reframings*, but for these artists, photography also is an assertion of power, a way of seizing the means of production.

In Western culture, photographic images of women exist on a continuum from valued personal objects (snapshots and studio portraits) to seemingly objective documents (driver's licenses and passports) to impersonal and objectable commodities (advertising and pornographic images). At any point on the continuum of representation, however, women are objectified in a way distinct from the ways in which other groups (men, students, old people, people of color, bankers) are objectified. The determination of a woman's sexual desirability by the age and shape of her body is perhaps the most vulgar and common mechanism of the objectification of women facilitated by photography. However, the authority with which men are often represented, and the masculinized affects of the representation of authority, also profoundly affect women. For example, it is impossible to imagine pictures of the U.S. Congress or of any corporate executive officers in an annual report without imagining photographs of white men in dark suits. Absence—what we don't see—as well as presence—what we do see—in representation are formative.

In greatly varied approaches, the photographers in *Reframings* have strategically claimed photographic representation for their own ends. It is not surprising that sophisticated uses and discussions of photography lead to corrective personal applications. Self-representation—a vigilant response to oppressive patriarchal methods of representation—is at the heart of many of the essays and images collected here. The essays illuminate and interpret this activist phenomenon. Deborah Willis considers autobiographical photographic projects, whereas Julia Ballerini considers the collaborative possibilities between the photographer and photographed. Theresa Harlan and Valerie Soe respectively examine the self-assertion of Native American and Asian American women. Moira Roth explores the self-representation of women's bodies, and Lucy Lippard investigates how women identify with or are counterposed to their environments. Abigail

Solomon-Godeau theorizes the politics of self-representing social difference. Catherine Lord addresses the problem of conflicting identities and ways in which the subjugated are poised against each other, maneuvered to identify themselves against each other and ultimately against themselves. Clearly, the issue of self-representation is not restricted to literal self-portraiture. The issue is not what one looks like but how and by whom one is represented.

The possibilities of self-representation that are consciously negotiated within this book were already implicit in *The Woman's Eye*, Anne Wilkes Tucker's unprecedented collection of women's photography, published twenty years ago. The very existence of a volume that isolated women's photographs challenged received opinion about women's experience. Much has transpired since then. Today it is possible for us to call ourselves not only women, but feminists. Just as the act of naming oneself through language is empowering, so, too, is the act of visually representing oneself.

Although consciousness of sexism is at an all-time high in the popular mind, the situation of women in the arts is in many ways unimproved. Indeed, there appears to be a backlash against feminism. I suggest we consider this anxious hostility to feminism an indication of progress. The right-wing cooptation of "politically correct," initially a self-critical consciousness-raising term used by the left, illustrates just how powerful the original application of PC is. While the right has been moderately successful, it has not yet succeeded in making the attempt to "do the right thing" shameful. Misogyny in the United States may be unrelenting, but at least for now it is popularly considered to be wrong. I believe that feminist-based consciousness-raising within U.S. society must be seen as a great victory.

Reframings reveals that many women photographers are attending to a variety of problems, including racism and homophobia, to name just two issues repeatedly addressed in this book. Particularly courageous have been some African American feminist critiques of patriarchal structures. Although the aim of *Reframings* is explicitly feminist, it is also by political and ethical necessity explicitly multicultural. It is undeniably a delicate matter for struggling subjugated peoples to work together in solidarity rather than seek to subvert each other. *Reframings* is intended to contribute to an open dialogue, however difficult, in which differences between women can be fruitfully addressed. It is essential that we not blame each other for our pain: Other women are usually not the driving force behind sexism, racism, and homophobia.

In part because of standard distinctions between the practice of art and the practice of art criticism, it is the critics in this book who most directly and uncomfortably address differences among women. Without exception,

in every essay—each of which was written for this volume—the writer struggles with the polemics of ethnicity, culture, class and sexuality. As editor, I solicited contributors from women art critics whose perspectives covered a broad range of feminist concerns, although I did not foresee their common concern with problematizing our multicultural society. I now believe it can be said that addressing differences in ethnicity, sexual orientation, and economic opportunity (or, more precisely and negatively, addressing racism, homophobia, and class privilege) constitutes feminist art criticism today.

Over the past twenty-five years feminist cultural criticism and scholarship have dramatically transformed both the art world and academia. The effect can be traced by noting the steady increase in feminist literature published during this period, the increased feminist content of academic conferences and journals, and the increase in activity of women's caucuses. Indeed, feminist inquiries have affected general lines of inquiry throughout the humanities. Nonetheless, the moment is no longer propitious for a feminist criticism of contemporary photography. Perhaps this reflects a stalemate in photography criticism overall, perhaps a plateau in the development of feminist theories of representation, or perhaps an effect of the 1980s privatization of cultural support and a decline in support for higher education, where cultural criticism frequently originates. For example, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Critics Fellowships were discontinued in the early eighties, a consequence of a right-wing attack on the NEA, and through it, on progressive intellectual life. There has been little other support of feminist photography criticism. Perhaps as an indirect result, several important feminist photography critics have chosen to make their professional contributions through the discipline of art history, where their attentions must largely be devoted to critiquing a history that has denied women subjectivity, relegating them to subject matter. Ironically, addressing photography's second-rate status within art history is a real threat to that discipline, just as addressing women's second-rate position in society is a real threat to male domination.

Feminist theory has offered analytical models of mass culture upon which feminist image-makers rely, yet it has been far less thorough in its analyses of alternative feminist images. Although feminist artworks are directly informed by the intellectual work of feminists and progressives across a wide range of disciplines, the works themselves are not widely seen, even by other feminists. For the most part, feminist academics seem more interested in producing feminist critiques of dominant cultural production than in critiquing feminist alternative cultural work. This is discouraging, especially in light of the existing high level of feminist critique

of dominant cultural production and the underexamined high level of existing feminist artworks. Simply put, most feminist image-makers cannot get an audience with feminist critics. Feminist cultural critics infrequently look at, much less seek out, the work of a full spectrum of feminist artists. Writers rarely view exhibitions, critics rarely visit studios. As a consequence, we are left with the frequent examination of the market-driven gallery work of a few famous feminist artists (some of whose works are reproduced here) and nearly no examination of the works of most of the artists represented in *Reframings*. Rather than hearing the system blamed for its sexism and unwillingness to reward more than a few women, we hear criticism of the rare famous feminist artist as if it were she who took something away from other women. Therefore I want to state emphatically that it is not the great success of a few women artists that causes the lack of success of other women.

Feminist academic publications are frequently ironically illustrated with sexist images "we love to hate" rather than with works by feminist artists that would make similar interventions or offer other insights. We must ask whether this eclipse of feminist artworks is a result of the powerful seductive properties of sexist imagery, is a result of ignorance regarding feminist images, is a response to marginalization on the part of feminist academics, or is an indication of failure on the part of feminist art practices to compel even a feminist audience. Toward remedying the problem, *Reframings* seeks to expose the work of feminist artists to other feminists and calls for a more developed feminist critique of feminist art documentation and distribution practices.

As another remedy to the scarcity of feminist photography criticism, some artists, such as Deborah Bright, Martha Rosler, and I, have tried to take on the task of writing ourselves, in part because feminist photography (including our own production) seldom is analyzed. While this multiple burden can strengthen both practices, it sometimes has the reverse effect, since the double burden is born at great cost. (Martha Rosler's photography and video have influenced contemporary feminist art practice as fundamentally as her critical and theoretical writing. Precisely because of its ground-breaking historical and theoretical significance, I invited her to present in a feminist context her previously published work, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, which, while it has been recently reissued, is the only project in *Reframings* that can be classified as historical.) Ultimately, however, I do not wish to argue that the practices of criticism and art-making are separate, much less contradictory. The artists in *Reframings* are clearly informed by multiple theories, although in many cases they oppose the tyranny of jargon that is sometimes associated with theory. Art and criti-

cism are not only mutually generative but are often dependent. The crossover practices of Bright, Rosler, Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, and Adrian Piper exemplify the successful joining of art and theory. The benefit of their multiple practices is especially evident in their artists' books and other phototext works that combine the visual and the verbal.

Awareness of critical work, even that which is not current, is possible for artists because of the relative accessibility of published criticism (and photocopying machines). Unfortunately, it requires much more effort to see artworks, which are usually not conveniently accessible. A primary goal of *Reframings* is to offer exposure to work that is not otherwise easily seen. *Reframings* is intended to make more visible a range of nearly invisible feminist visual art production.

In organizing *Reframings*, I became keenly aware of the differences in opportunity faced by writers and by artists. On the one hand, writers are greatly burdened by demands to publish new work; several wonderful writers wanted to but were unable to commit to this volume. Feminist writers are overworked, overcommitted, and overextended. While this is true for some feminist artists as well, the service that is demanded of writers is uniquely draining: new manuscripts are continually required to meet the needs of institutions and publications. Most artists face the opposite problem: they have little opportunity to exhibit or publish work that already exists, and even less often are they commissioned to produce projects. Thus, while a number of artworks were produced specifically for *Reframings*, many more existed well before being published here for the first time. The working conditions for artists and the systems of exhibition and distribution of their work are exceptionally uneven. I recently sat on a jury selecting work for a series of one-woman exhibitions and was stunned by the volume—thousands of slides—of works by artists with whom the entire jury was unfamiliar. Although some of the women artists included in *Reframings* are sought after like movie stars, most must solicit exhibition venues and submit slides, submit work, submit résumés, submit entry fees—submit, submit, submit—to be exhibited.

This system of distribution bears directly on the artwork itself. Those whose work circulates in pricier venues can produce pricier work. It is in the interest of the art market that successful artists work on a larger, more expensive scale—although it is often not to the works' advantage. I do not belittle the accomplishments of hardworking successful artists, nor do I chastise unknown artists for not marketing themselves better within a saturated market. For example, Cindy Sherman's earliest small-scale black-and-white work was inexpensive for her to produce, but as her success and prices increased, she could afford to hire commercial labs to make large-

scale color work, which is very expensive to produce. Interestingly, as her production values and methods became more and more upscale and costly, the militancy of her works' feminist position strengthened.

The material terms of art production are directly connected to the formal material character of that production. In the arts this is nothing new: Sistine ceilings and Hollywood blockbusters alike are not private acts of individual genius; on the contrary, they are socially produced. Like all artists everywhere, feminist artists are hostage to the economic order. Thus, feminists whose work challenges patriarchal structures need to be especially efficient in means. And this collection is a testimony to clever efficient means! Twenty-five years after feminism observed that most women's art is produced not in artists' studio lofts but in kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms, the observation still holds true. Although we may be encouraged by the success of several well-known women artists or discouraged by the unofficial quotas that seem to accompany that success, a new problem has developed: the professionalization, privatization, and commercialization of the visual arts. Coincident with the demand for expensive methods of distribution and self-promotion is the declining economic order that further pinches artists. The lack of public support of artists and the concomitant market-driven standards of the art world force most artists to promote themselves at great personal cost or to remain virtually unexhibited.

The most interesting discovery for me during the process of assembling *Reframings* was a void: in my exploration of contemporary feminist photographic works, I didn't find direct, enthusiastic expressions of feminine heterosexual desire or pleasure. I did find a few explorations by women of the female body, most often as an isolated body outside of a social or psychological context. Lesbian explorations of sexual pleasure made great leaps in the past decade and have much to offer. Straight women, however, frequently address sexuality within a context of hurt, anxiety, or rage. Perhaps the expression of feminine heterosexual desire lags behind, since straight women still must negotiate difficult power relations with men. Among other problems, they (like everyone else) must contend with the history of what passes as the expression of masculine heterosexual desire. Perhaps the expression of their pleasure is (still) limited to display to a masculine audience in which feminine agency is contingent on masculine desire. Perhaps women's desire is (still) the desire to be desired. Possibly the fear of acknowledging such dependency (acknowledging either to potentially rejecting male viewers or to potentially unsympathetic feminist politics that has yet to work through the enormous problem of sexuality with men) has yet to be overcome. I hope this is an area that will soon see exciting new work.

The process of assembling *Reframings* yielded many other surprises as well. Not only did the collection as a whole take its own shape, but it became evident to me that many of the artists and writers went forward with their work for this volume without knowing what a particular project would become. In that sense, *Reframings* is truly vital. In selecting artwork I solicited suggestions from every imaginable source, including the most peculiar. Even my work in Russia over the past three years led to the contribution of three American women photographers represented in these pages. From the beginning, my intention was to gather a very wide, even a contradictory range of practices with which no individual, including myself, would be familiar. While the premise for *Reframings* was that gender would be central to all the works selected, it is not clear to me how many of the women included here actually identify themselves as feminists, although most certainly do.

Not all of the women included in this volume consider themselves to be photographers, either; often they are artists who use photography only in some circumstances. The formal means of expression are as diverse as the range of ideas expressed, since the choice of photographic process is always a crucial component of the formulation and articulation of the expression, whether it be black-and-white or color, documentary, photomontage, staged studio works, gallery installations, artists' books, appropriated photographic materials, or any other method, form, or process. There is no agreed-upon single principle of how to use photography well, nor are there necessarily significant differences between those who use the camera themselves and those who find and rearrange others' pictures.

One volume cannot be comprehensive, and I am extremely uncomfortable about many exclusions, intentional and otherwise. The decision to restrict myself to photographers working in the United States was based on my familiarity with the richness of what is available here. Despite the scarcity of opportunities for women in the arts, I believe that this is a historically opportune time and place for feminist art-making. I look forward to other local and international collections and to other volumes that include the work of male feminist artists who also address issues of gender. It is in the spirit of "affirmative action," especially in light of continued underexposure of women's art in America, that *Reframings* is framed.

Reframings has been organized into eight sections. However, most of the contributions could easily be moved from one section to another, and in the preparation of this book that is exactly what happened. The complexity of the projects gathered here is not restricted by their location in the book. The sections are intended to encourage the works to interact

and thereby promote a kind of discussion within and among the sections.

The opening section, "Gendering Space," explores women's agency regarding social space. Contemporary theories of how social space is gendered have advanced feminist social analyses. The artists represented in this section break down earlier analyses of social space that associated feminine with domestic and masculine with public. Barbara Kruger opens with documentation of her aggressive, feminist, "woman-empowering" public billboards, bus signs, and other projects through which she reinserts into the public sphere the visual material she appropriates from it. Marilyn Nance, through classical black-and-white documentary, and Anne Noggle, through classic black-and-white studio portraiture, celebrate the strength of communities of women, in one case the women of African American spiritual congregations, in the other World War II Soviet and U.S. women pilots. The photo novella of Kaucyila Brooke transforms space by staging an erotic lesbian fantasy. Sherry Millner's photomontage redefines the space to which the media has confined women. Carol Simon Rosenblatt consciously differentiates herself from the space outside herself. In a twist on the masculinist model, Lucy R. Lippard's essay, "Undertones: Nine Cultural Landscapes," lays feminist claim to the genre of landscape.

For most women, the self-conscious identity as "female" originated in the home, a site where gendered limitations are frequently set. Thus, "Domestic Production/Reproduction/Resistance" explores some feminist relationships of women to home. Linda Brooks's black-and-white phototexts and Gail S. Rebhan's color stills from family videos consider their current family lives from their vantage points as mothers of young children. In equally complicated but graphically very different montage techniques, Nancy Barton, Clarissa Sligh, and Susan Meiselas address ways in which patriarchy orders the roles of men within the family. While Barton explores the ambivalence related to this authority, Sligh confronts its secret dangers, and Meiselas condemns its violent horror. Through her color phototexts S. A. Bachman draws out the nightmare induced by media-made fantasies of women's roles in middle-class family life. In her essay, "Women's Stories/Women's Photobiographies," Deborah Willis examines the making of alternative histories by featuring artists whose strategic placement of photography within other archival systems contextualizes personal history within a social framework.

"Identity Formations" explores ways in which identity is socially produced, even if it is individually experienced. The role of family life in producing gendered children and ultimately gendered society is examined by Sarah Hart, whose color documentary photographs investigate the

everyday lives of suburban girls in consumer culture, and by Leigh Kane, whose black-and-white photomontages consider the emotional damage done by repressive sexist socializing of boys and men. Through other photomontage techniques Adrian Piper and Lorna Simpson address the centrality of racism to the complex identity formation of African Americans, and Diane Tani foregrounds the confusion and rage of an imposed immigrant identity in America several generations after the family immigrated from Japan. "As in Her Vision: Native American Women Photographers," an essay by Theresa Harlan, discusses the representation of Natives by Native women—an issue long overlooked by most critics.

"Postcolonial Legacies" assembles a range of photomontages that address specific incidents of U.S. imperialism and the inherent racism of such a policy. Martha Rosler contextualizes the Vietnam War within sexist American society. Esther Parada analyzes the sexism of media images during American actions in Nicaragua. Yong Soon Min examines ways racism alienates the Korean American community, particularly its women. Hulleah Tsinhnanjinnie explores the continuing role of the media in the eclipse of Native American culture. Pat Ward Williams's large-scale installations investigate the politics of looking and being looked at for African American men today. An essay by Julia Ballerini, "ODELLA/Carlota," complicates the dynamics of domination by investigating the politics of representation by another versus self-representation. Through her close examination of one collaboration between a photographer who makes traditional black-and-white images and an actively engaged subject who both directed and wrote about the resulting images, Ballerini problematizes issues of self-assertion, trust, and fantasy.

"Rationalizing and Realizing the Body" brings together conflicting perspectives on the experience of the body. The range of work in this section explores theories of the body by addressing bodies with which we are familiar: our own. Martha Casanave's black-and-white pinhole photographs and Linn Underhill's studio-style black-and-white photographs depict flesh-and-bone bodies, lived-in bodies. Ann Meredith's black-and-white documentary portrays women in different places and circumstances who are living with AIDS. Jin Lee and Carla Williams use graphic arts techniques to investigate how racism and sexism are rationalized through the process of representation of the body. Dorit Cypis, through complex projection installations, daringly, anxiously investigates the reality and potential of her own isolated, sexual body. Finally, an essay by Moira Roth, "A Meditation on Bearing/Baring the Body," considers how the work of feminist artists can reveal their own bodies.

"Sex and Anxiety" explores the suppression of female sexuality. Black-and-white photographs by Connie Hatch verify the tyranny of the male gaze over the female body. Through black-and-white phototexts, Carrie Mae Weems confronts the compromises strong women negotiate when engaging with men, and Tamarra Kaida cooly registers feminine heterosexual disappointment. As if excess could satisfy the problematic of desire, Cindy Sherman's color studio photographs grotesquely exaggerate the display of body parts in which culture trades. Hinda Schuman's photodiary also presents sexual anxiety: the nervous passionate budding of a lesbian love affair. As I observed earlier, not pleasure but hurt, anxiety, and rage most often appear in photographic explorations of sexuality by heterosexual women. The riskier models offered by lesbians also take their toll. By chronicling her own and the experiences of her friends, Nan Goldin insists upon the urgency of sex—privileging neither hetero- nor homo-sexuality. An essay by Catherine Lord, "This Is Not a Fairy Tale: A Middle-aged Female Pervert (White) in the Era of Multiculturalism," investigates the censoring and silencing of "queer" sexualities.

In "Crossing Over: Reimagining and Reimaging," Laura Aguilar gives voice to Latina lesbians by inviting them to write directly on the black-and-white portraits she makes of them. Through interactive installations Margaret Stratton invites her audience to resist media images of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas by labeling Hill and Thomas as they wish. In the playful, flirtatious, hand-colored stagings of Carm Little Turtle, "Earthman's" anxious passionate desire for woman is monitored, perhaps by a distanced female audience. Catherine Opie and Coreen Simpson use disruptive portraiture to imagine and image what seems unimaginable. In her essay, "Turning the Tables: Three Asian American Artists," Valerie Soe features the work of contemporary Asian American women artists who resist racial and gender stereotypes through their complicating, analytical photomontages that assume that identity is social, not an individual thing, yet insist it is open to individual reconstruction.

While the entire book addresses the problem of representation, the section "Rerepresenting Representation" focuses on interventions with specific, existing authoritative images. Through a variety of photomontage techniques Ann Fessler, Betty Lee, Deborah Bright and I rewrite classical art historical canons, revealing the European patriarchal biases of those standards. Susan Jahoda's phototext exposes and subverts images of disease that have been deployed against women for more than a century by the medical establishment. Mary Kelly strategically withholds visual representation of women's bodies in order to explore how feminine socialization,

including the distancing of women from their own bodies, takes place through the process of representation. An essay by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Representing Women: The Politics of Self-Representation," considers how identity is constructed through representation and how that process can be complicated and interrupted through self-representation.

Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies is not only a collection of individual artworks and critical essays. It is a collection of pro-active works that seek social redress through representation. In aggregate the diverse feminist work presented in this book constitutes a self-consciously engaged and, I hope, engaging political practice.