There is nothing here of nostalgia, rather the opposite – the recovery of another time makes the present suddenly unreliable.

(Lively 1999: 5)

Time marks a history of feminism, and in that, its progress or accomplishment.

(Ferrell 2006: 209)

The year 2008 marked the twentieth anniversary of the formal academic study of ‘British Gender and International Relations’. A number of events were convened to celebrate this anniversary beginning with a talk by Cynthia Enloe – ‘Trying to Make Sense of Militarism and Wars “Without” Taking Women Seriously: Twenty Years on and It’s Still Risky’ – which was given as the plenary lecture at the annual conference of the British International Studies Association (BISA) in December 2007. This was followed by four workshops/conferences hosted by universities in the UK: the London School of Economics (LSE, January); Manchester (May); Birmingham (July); and finally in Aberdeen in October.

These commemorative events marked two decades of scholarship dating from the first British conference on ‘Women and International Relations’ held at the LSE in 1988. As was noted then and has been noted many (many) times since, the academic discipline of International Relations and the practices of international politics were/deeply marked by the predominance of men and traditional masculine practices and concerns (see Parpart
and Zalewski 2008). Moreover, the issues that ended up scoring highly on the priority list of IR and IP mapped extraordinarily well onto the traditional interests and concerns of men (most particularly elite men), while simultaneously mapping onto the interests of major powers in the world. ‘Where were women in all of this?’

After twenty years of pursuing this line of enquiry (with)in IR, is there much to celebrate? This has proved to be both a tricky and emotive question, at least depending on how it is asked. If assumed to be about feminism’s contribution to the study of IR, on what basis is feminism’s contribution to be judged? On the numbers (and seniority) of female politicians – a global fail? On the numbers of ‘women’s’ issues recognized as worthy of international political concern – another global fail, UNSCR 1325 and 1820 notwithstanding (see Shepherd 2008)? On the place of feminist work in the conventional canon of IR, or its core teaching curricula – another global fail? On the numbers of senior female academics in the profession of IR – yet another global fail? On the amount of work being done on and by women in international politics – surely a resounding success!? On the numbers of scholarly articles on feminism/gender/women published – another success!

The ‘trickiness’ of the question about contribution here, can be traced through the criterion of measurement. Conventional audits in IR have, predictably, measured feminism up against IR’s own methodological and political parameters. On this scale, feminism, unsurprisingly, has been found wanting (see Steans 2003; Ackerly et al. 2006; Zalewski 2006; Zalewski et al. 2008). Relying on conventional economies of measurement engenders a sense that feminists have failed to achieve fully (see Zalewski 2006) ... but ... failed to achieve what? Securing a feminist discipline of IR? What would a ‘feminist IR’ look like? In course text books and the teaching of IR, gender is clearly ‘taken into account’. This takes different manifestations: a typical core IR undergraduate course may have a ‘week on gender’ (see Shepherd forthcoming); there may also be ‘gender options’ on offer in subsequent years of the undergraduate curriculum. But it is unlikely that the core undergraduate IR course in any university will be either a gender or feminist course. But whether there is or isn’t such a course isn’t really the point; rather what transpires as significant are the feelings provoked by the very idea or suggestion of such a course. Here the emotive character of questions about feminism’s contribution to IR emerge through the unsettling feelings ‘provoked’ by the idea that the central teaching mission of IR might be arrived at though feminism.

However we had not convened to consider feminism’s contribution to IR; rather we had convened to celebrate … but still … what were we celebrating? To address this question the main focus of this Special Section will be on the final event convened to mark this anniversary: the conference held at the University of Aberdeen in October 2008 – ‘Ending International Feminist Futures’ – an event which drew together and worked with the central themes raised in the preceding workshops. The title of the Aberdeen conference
was intentionally ambiguous as we thought it very important, pedagogically and intellectually, to invoke the idea of ‘the international/feminism – feminism/the international’ as something akin to a palimpsest – both emerging and emergent as simultaneously and continually written over, interwoven and multi-layered. At the same time, we wanted to discard the conventional placing of feminism and IR, where feminism is positioned in its ‘contributory’ role as responding or responsive to the political, epistemological and methodological order of the discipline of IR. The obvious way to do this was to place feminism centre stage – though not without provocation – which brings us back to the title … ‘Ending International Feminist Futures?’ The title was intentionally provocative, inviting reflection on the modernist inspired temporal and progressivist tenor of many of the debates about feminism’s progress (in IR). Moreover, the title was intentionally inquisitive, ephemerally evoking the suggestion of a question (has [international] feminism ended?) to which an answer was neither required nor expected; though one was ultimately, emphatically and celebratorily given.

To help us work with these desires, aims and provocations we turned to feminisms’ traditional political curiosities and associated methodological inventiveness. Feminist curiosities raise persistent questions; whose work gets considered important? What kinds of work or activities count as political; as intellectual; as sufficiently academic? What kinds of practices count as disciplinarily acceptable to spend time on; researching; writing about; teaching? How can pedagogic attention to the intimate relationship between the personal and political/international be maintained? What kinds of methodologies do feminists use to ‘get at’ – to reach – these questions? ‘What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken. Or we could say that orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach’ (Ahmed 2007: 152).

Sara Ahmed’s phenomenologically inspired approach moves us towards making some sense of the frustrations critical scholars/activists experience in the face of the ongoing devastating impact of the constituted category of gender (in its many intersectional modes) in spite of voracious contestations. These can come in many and varied forms but we can certainly find some shards of resistance/activism in the guise of methodological innovation and intervention. Feminists have been practising this kind of interventionist work for decades; though this work, particularly perhaps in IR, often materializes as simultaneously subtle and concealed (Soreanu n.d.). But a heavy question mark hovers over and around these interventions, perhaps especially within academia. In her impatience with relentless refusals of feminist knowledge, Mary Hawkesworth asks ‘how are we to understand feminist interventions?’ (2006: 1). Like Sara Ahmed, Hawkesworth (2006: 1) communicates a sense of frustration at the egregious, if ethereal, dismissal of feminist interventions in the ‘traditional disciplines of the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences’. Both of these scholars/activists/interventionists speak to the vast chasm between the wealth of evidence which demonstrates...
the harms gender does, and the failure to achieve anything remotely near adequate gender-change.

What is feminisms' role or place in this? How is feminism\textsuperscript{14} implicated in these inadequacies? There is clearly an implicit and explicit expectation that a central task of feminism is to produce effective and productive knowledge in a conventionally recognizably temporal and political manner; at least this expectation can be traced in the institutional narratives of ‘gender and IR’ briefly introduced above.\textsuperscript{15} Further, concerns about feminism’s contemporary theoretical and practical utility are not confined to the discipline of IR but are endemic within feminism (see Hawkesworth 2006); the seriousness of these concerns deserves our attention. Here I want to return to the idea – or haunting spectre – that the core module on the generic first year IR undergraduate programme might be on feminism/gender. My suggestion is most emphatically not that feminist work has failed (or is even on the margins\textsuperscript{16}) because it does not figure (in any meaningful way) in this core teaching context. Rather the idea of this ‘feminist core course’ is presented to readers as an invitation to methodologically re-imagine and to re-think and to reflect on how the subject matter of the discipline of IR came to ‘matter’ (Shepherd forthcoming) (and as a corollary what doesn’t (come to) matter).

To engage in this act of imagination and with the other questions and concerns introduced above, the Aberdeen conference addressed the political and international through the prism(s) of feminism and artistic imagination, aiming to re-enact the ‘bold adventures of the mind’ typical of feminist work (Soreanu n.d. – and for feminists, ‘minds’ necessarily involve bodies, both ‘fleshly’ and ‘of knowledge’). Recalling Sara Ahmed’s sense that the directions we take put some things and not others in our reach, we intentionally put things in delegates’ way – to move their feelings, thoughts, intellects and imaginations. This seemed to work – see Helen M. Kinsella’s comment later on in this section:

From the very moment of entry into the conference hall, the art bounded and infused the conversations among artists and scholars and explanations of intentionality, meaning, affect and effects were made three-dimensional through participation in making art, in photos and in videos vibrant in their demands ... literally and figuratively re-arranging worlds.

Feminists have been boldly breaking, remaking and re-arranging worlds for some time. But this is a slow and painstaking process and often occurs or is accomplished through small moves, reminiscent of the process of ‘detailed genealogies of struggle or the determination to engage in dialogue while not forgetting the ruptures that accompany difference’ (Edkins 2008: 29). But it was surely the case that one of feminism’s promises was to re-arrange/ re-orient knowledge and to move us to know – and act – differently. Working with this thought alongside thinking about international politics/feminism through the metaphor of, or as, a palimpsest we invited a broad range of
contributions to the Aberdeen conference. In the open call for ‘presentations/papers/participation’ we encouraged the submission of imaginative and provocative contributions which did not necessarily follow the pattern of conventional academic paper presentations. Subsequent to this call, we ‘found’ (or they found us) artists Charlie Hackett and Merlyn Riggs.

Charlie Hackett is an artist and lecturer at Gray’s School of Art in Aberdeen; Merlyn Riggs is an activist artist working in and around Aberdeen/Scotland. We worked with Charlie and Merlyn to introduce, use and centralize art practises – both exhibitions and interactive events – at the Aberdeen conference. To give a sense of how this worked and how it stirred and stimulated the conference space (literally, intellectually, metaphorically, politically) the remainder of this scene setting discussion will focus on a selection of the artworks. As space is limited, but also because we want to facilitate and nurture the interpretive possibilities forged through art(ful) imaginations, the ideas here are more indicated than (fully, methodically) described and explained. However, we ask readers to orient themselves towards a number of issues which remain crucially important to anyone interested in feminism/gender/international politics: (1) violence (and) (2) the everyday (and) (3) the political work of feminism in making us re-think both of these and their interconnections.

First we move to the work of Alex Brew whose artwork was centrally exhibited at the conference in the form of photographs and a recording available for all to listen to; additionally Brew spoke about her art in one of the plenary sessions. The anxieties about Brew’s project became clear in the questions that followed Brew’s talk – partly because of this and partly because of our aim to shift some of the spatial and temporal boundaries around the conference, we re-engaged Brew’s work beyond/outside the conference. Charlie Hackett interviewed Brew at Tate Modern in London; Charlie also conducted mini-questionnaires over email with a number of feminist activist/scholars: Alexis Hunter, Hsiao-Hung Pai, Jess McCabe and Sara Paloni. What follows is a collage combining elements from those conversations along with some of Brew’s writing about her work interspersed with my own reflections. After this we discuss some of Merlyn Riggs’ art practices and the pots of ceramic artist Claudia Clare. Consequent to this we include some reflections on art, feminism and politics by Helen M. Kinsella and conclude with Claudia Clare’s ‘conference blog’.
Alex Brew approaches men in the street, usually outside offices, pubs and 'gentlemen's venues' in London's square mile. She confronts them. She asks them if they will partially or fully undress for her in a more private space: in an alleyway, a car park or back at their place or hers. She follows her fear into these situations of potential male violence and disapproval; situations where passivity, acquiescence and submission feel safer or more appealing than taking control. What inspired her to do this?

In life drawing sessions she observed that women, including a majority of straight women, seemed to prefer to draw female rather than male models. Straight men also wanted to draw the female model. Didn’t women want to take up the opportunities that feminism (potentially) offered them? Thinking about the persistent ‘objectification’ of women particularly through their naked or partially naked representation, for example in mainstream newspapers and advertisements, Brew wondered why women didn’t objectify men. Her starting point then concerned questions of objectification in a climate of massive gendered power imbalance. Her end point was a ‘failure’ to ever fully objectify the men she approached, and instead a focus on power and on the risk of violence in the objectification of men.

(Some) men agree to go with her; she takes note of their behaviour, her feelings and what happens in the encounters; all of this engenders more questions. What happens, she asks, if a woman leaves the realm of object to put the focus on men and is not deferential, submissive or flirtatious either? The nudity brings to mind a close relationship, sex, and yet these are strangers. No sex is on offer. No money is exchanged. Her experiment throws up a series of confusions and contradictions and questions about what a stranger is, who is at risk and in what kinds of environments are risky (bringing to mind domestic violence and rape and the fragile/failed boundaries between public and private, between war and peace, between security and insecurity).
How do feminists and international political analysts (often the same) learn to think about safety, security and who to trust? How do we learn about fear? How do we know how to keep safe? How do we feel about gender and fear when looking at these images – the partially naked men, their faces ‘shrouded’ (some as if ‘hooded’). Did these men worry about their own safety?

Brew works to un-settle the usual professional boundaries as the photographs are not taken in a studio and she uses a small amateurish looking camera as a way to make the interaction as close as possible to an everyday interaction between a man and a woman. Are you going to mug me? – one of the men asks. In conversations with her after the conference, she is asked if she thinks the men might worry she will accuse them of rape. Brew’s response to this is animated – why would women lie? How interesting that this question can be asked. A 5.6 per cent conviction rate for rape in the UK effectively means that rape is legal. Does the assumption that women lie so readily offer a convenient alibi; one that legitimates violence as normal?

As the feminist commentators and activists interviewed by Charlie Hackett argue, the paradoxes of the binary of gender become viscerally apparent in Brew’s work. The gender of risk, of confrontation, of safety, of agency – how do these change when (the) gender is ‘reversed’? Male photographers are used to asking women to undress. The normality of this places it outside of the zone of (what we recognize as) confrontation. The reversal in Brew’s work ‘makes us think about the things we’ve always taken for granted as normal’ (Hsiao-Hung Pai). Brew’s project toys with notions of agency in the context of sexual violence. Has she taken control in this apparent reversal? Or was she ‘asking for it’? The phrase ‘asking for it’ has a ‘sorry history for women’ (Jess McCabe). Would Brew have been held to account (blamed) if she has been attacked by one of these strangers? Brew’s confrontational project illustrates the easiness to which we are societally led to ask this question, when really women face the risk of (ordinary) violence ‘every day’ (McCabe). Trying to remain secure/safe in that situation through conventional
feminized submission is, for Brew, the real suicide mission. ‘When and where are we really safe?’ (Sara Paloni). Laid bare in Brew’s project are layers of aggression and vulnerability, posturing and honesty – exposing further layers of power and fragility (Alexis Hunter).

‘MUSEUM OF ME’

Memories are fashioned in museums out of selected images. (Enloe 2004: 215)

Memories and museums are important in international politics, though we would be hard pressed to think of any feminist museums that would count as museums of international politics (women are remembered – sometimes – but usually in specific femininely appropriate roles). More often, women/gender quickly evaporate from the roll call of international political significance. The celebration of twenty years of the academic study of ‘gender and IR’ invites reflection on acts of commemoration; on questions about *who* we remember (and forget); on *how* we remember (and what gets eviscerated through our methodological/political choices); and on what artefacts get chosen to act as legitimate and authoritative memories/memorabilia, important enough to curate.

One of Merlyn Riggs’ art practices is to curate museum exhibitions with a ‘difference’; though it’s more through, with and ‘of’ difference. This involves asking women to select an item which represents them which she then puts together and exhibits in the *Museum of Me*. One aim of this is to highlight and focus on the personal; the item chosen has to reflect the person they are – not as they are perceived by others or how they brand themselves culturally. She asked delegates coming to the Aberdeen conference to bring an item with them; some had much difficulty choosing, others were spoilt for choice.

Photo credit: Marysia Zalewski
Photo credit: Marysia Zalewski
Delegates brought pens, toys, hair, music, photos and much more; many of these objects seemingly personal items from everyday lives. There wasn’t a plane, tank or medal in sight; or rather there were no grand invocations of heroic endeavour. This eclectic and (deceptively) simple range of objects in the *Museum of Me* gestures towards the idea that ‘life is complicated’; a ‘profound theoretical statement’ (Gordon 1997: 3). The illustration of complexity through the everyday simplicity of these objects moves us to reflect on how the complexities of life are so often obscured through the conventions of academia and traditional political practice. International politics is full of grand theories, grand people, grand events – yet it is in the complexly layered realm of the ordinary we perhaps find the concealed mechanisms which keeps power regimes in place. As feminists and as scholars of the international, the political, the personal, we aim, with some interventionist persistence, to illustrate how power egregiously re-asserts itself.

The *Museum of Me* isn’t about remembering the past, rather it gestures towards the way the past inhabits the present but in a more complex temporal form than the idea of anniversary reflections conventionally imply. It also makes methodological space for recognizing the vast importance of the ordinary, so often equated with ‘women’s realm’. Returning to, or revitalizing the importance of the ‘ordinary’ (Soreanu n.d.), takes a particular form of political/personal courage. The re-valuing/re-signifying of the everyday in the *Museum of Me* throws us a life-line with which we might recover some of the lost – or rather obscured – connections between gender, knowledge, truth and power.

**SHATTERED**

Claudia Clare uses clay pots to tell stories about surviving sexual violence. She stresses that:

> It’s the ‘surviving’ bit that’s important. Clay pots are long lasting. They invite contemplation. They are a primary source of evidence from archaeological sites. They can be shattered and pieced back together. These pots tell the forgotten stories, the ones left behind after the journalists and NGOs have departed, the ones the editors ignore because they don’t fit the ‘real rape’ template. The perpetrators are known, they are not the mythical strangers in the dark alley; the woman survives, lives on beyond the aftermath, into a slightly altered life. Or it might be dramatically altered. Or she may not have survived, or not into the long term.

(Clare 2007a)

Clare insists that fear has made us far too tolerant of male violence, too afraid to name perpetrators. Like Alex Brew, Clare suggests we have a criminal justice system, at least in Britain, which has proved itself incapable of condemning rape, at least in the vast majority of cases.
Shattered
Photo credit: David Freeman

*Shattered* is an act of mourning, a memorial, a protracted mending process, and an exploration of the different form that emerges from the mending. It celebrates survival, but it’s also a call for action (Clare 2007a). Claudia Clare creates and crafts immensely beautiful and dramatic pots, which she then breaks; shatters.

War Crime
Photo credit: Claudia Clare
Students and scholars of feminism/international politics are used to thinking about violence; about violence in wars, about what happens when wars end. How is it possible to make the violence stop? Peace, reconciliation, rebuilding – these are some of the post-conflict buzzwords. In post-conflict scenarios, there is usually a time-limit to remembering which often runs out when societies have to be re-made. Metaphors on time are interesting in this context, with some examples including: ‘in time you’ll forget’; ‘time is a great healer’. How does time heal – through erasure of memory? Does time have agency? Does time have (a) gender?

Even when hostilities have supposedly been forgotten, they – oftentimes – get exposed or re-emerge as barely concealed in the post-conflict time. The suggestion that the families of all those killed (including paramilitaries) in the conflict in Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland should receive financial compensation of £12,000 has been rejected by the UK government, the claim being that, ‘the time is not right for such a recognition payment’ (McDonald 2009). There is something disturbing about the persistence and consistency of temporal framing and temporal reasoning in our thinking and acting.

To make some connections between memory, time and gender, we include some reflections from and on Slavenka Drakulić’s (2004) book on war criminals on trial in The Hague. In her book she describes scenes from the daily lives of the men in the Scheveningen detention unit; on a recent visit, one of the men’s wives had brought food from Croatia, ‘Dalmatian prosciutto, olive oil, and fresh fish from the Adriatic Sea’ (Drakulić 2004: 197). Rahim Ademi (Croatian Army General) is the best cook and none of the men seem to mind if the meal is Bosnian or Serbian or Croatian. The men can order food in; on special occasions, like a birthday, a whole lamb or piglet might be roasted. They eat together, pass round newspapers, work out in the gym or take strolls in the courtyard; Slobodan Milosevic particularly enjoyed the latter (2004: 200). Though they have their own languages, they all understand each other. The men are pleasant to each other, mostly. They seem to be having quite a nice relaxing time. They even had a ‘love room’, where the men could ‘receive their wives and be together with them’ (2004: 203). Drakulić describes the men’s little world inside the detention walls as something like a miniature Yugoslavia, one united by ‘brotherhood and unity’ (2004: 206).

Drakulić notes that the men are united by many things – food, language, sport, brotherhood – but also that they were accused of having committed the worst war crimes in Europe since 1945 (2004: 204). She ponders their ordinary ‘homely/domestic’ lives and asks,

But if the brotherhood and unity among the sworn enemies of yesterday is indeed the epilogue of war, one wonders what was it all for? Looking at the merry boys in the Scheveningen detention unit, the answer seems clear: for nothing.

(Drakulić 2004: 207)
Of course ‘something happened’ in the former Yugoslavia – but in the cosy fraternity of the Scheveningen detention unit, a gendering of the past (–present–future) and of violence, time and memory is brought to the fore. Claudia Clare’s clay pots speak to this; they make us feel this – and feeling is (a kind of) knowing which we regularly methodologically obscure. Clare’s commentary accompanying ‘War Crime’ states:

I don’t live in the past, but the past lives in me. And anyway, who the hell are you, callow youth telling your mother and grandmother to forget it all, put it behind us and build your civil society surrounded by criminals and their collaborators? (from ‘Cherry Blossom’, Clare 2007b)

Crafting memories (and futures–pasts) is radically political. Encouragement to forget – some things, some events, some people – illustrates the politics of this. But it seem that for what we come to think of as regular (international) politics to take place, it becomes imperative to forget the ways in which that political (personal) situation came to be in the first place (Edkins 2003: 229)
– and who came to matter. Shifting personal intellectual, methodological and political boundaries are necessary to help access some of these ‘forgettings’. These shiftings can be (experienced as) violent: ‘The violent one, the creative one who sets forth into the unsaid, who breaks into the unthought, who compels what has never happened and makes appear what is unseen …’ (Heidegger, quoted in Žižek 2008: 59).

Claudia Clare lovingly, skilfully makes beautiful clay pots and then breaks them – she does not destroy them, but creates quite something other instead. Alex Brew violates conventional boundaries: she asks men to undress for her in private – for nothing (though again, of course, nothing is never nothing). She doesn’t care what the men think of their photos or of what she’s doing. Indeed she actively and purposefully works to violate the societally prevalent sense that men are ‘the centre’, ‘the subject’; the ones who need to give permission – her activism is complexly transgressive, both inviting and resisting the ensuing shock. These violent disruptions of/by feminism move to keep the violent constitution of what we come to think of as political, as international, as personal – visible.

CONCLUDING RUMINATIONS ON FEMINIST (INTERNATIONAL) POLITICS, REMEMBERING, NETWORKS AND ARTISTIC IMAGINATIONS

the gendering of IR has produced a great number of traces in academic publications … but it has also produced less recordable … trace[s], in the form of intellectual networks structured around feminist ideas.

(Soreanu and Hudson 2008: 124, emphasis added)

Consequent to the series of events organized to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of ‘British Gender and IR’, intellectual, artistic, professional and community networks, new and old, have grown and developed. ‘The F-Word’ (a feminist DVD available for viewing at the conference) has indeed been spread: of the keynote/plenary speakers at the Aberdeen conference, Robyn Wiegman uses ‘The F-Word’ DVD in her women’s studies classes at Duke University; inspired by the conference, Helen M. Kinsella has her students in Madison-Wisconsin creating cyborgs and collages gender from random images cut from newspapers of the day; and a couple of days after the conference ended, Rekha Pande introduced her students in Hyderabad to the Museum of Me. The conference Zine has travelled to various parts of the globe and on International Women’s Day 2009, working with and building on the ‘intellectual networks structured around feminist ideas’ in a very practical sense, Merlyn Riggs and Marysia Zalewski gathered a group of friends, students and colleagues together to stage an interactive ‘photographic/performance’ in ‘downtown Aberdeen’ inviting members of the public to take part. None of the women we spoke to in Aberdeen that day knew it was International Women’s Day – though they do now.
The artistic political imaginations we engaged in our conference practice helped to shift temporal, spatial and intellectual boundaries. Shark fins, duvets, dolls houses, plates, life size doorways (to walk through) all had a place. So too did cheesecakes. A week before the conference we (some academics and students) made cheesecakes with Merlyn Riggs. There were no written instructions – only images, ingredients and equipment were supplied. A week before another group of women from the drop-in centre in Aberdeen made cheesecakes with Merlyn. The process of re-valuing the everyday and the overlooked is at the heart of Riggs’ art practice. Using the invisible materials of feelings, thoughts and dialogue and with her primary resource as people she raises awareness of social issues through active participation not passive observation. Photographs of all the cheesecakes were on display at the conference along with ‘anonymous’ personal statements from the women who made them. We end this piece with the first two stanzas of a poem written as a gift to Merlyn:

A woman with wild red hair is talking about
How she will make prostitutes and professors makes cheese cakes together.

No one will know
Whether the cheese cake
They are eating was made
By a prostitute
Or a professor.
Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time.  

(Agamben 2007)

*Ending International Feminist Futures?* This question is one with which I have spent no little time. To begin, I simply imagined a range of possible responses — as simple as affirming or denying the precept of ending international
feminist futures or not. But, then, as I turned the question around, I wondered to whom is such a question posed and for whom did it, does it, or will it, matter?

I am certainly not the only feminist to whom the question was asked or upon whom the future of such futures would or could rely. After all, even as the phrase feminist futures implies a singular possession of sorts – e.g. feminist’s futures or feminists’ futures – feminist futures suggests a pluralization that could and should include the plethora of feminists – e.g. feminists futures – and, accordingly, more than one potential ending, if there is to be an ending at all. Among them to whom the question was posed and to whom it mattered would be those called to respond. But, to what would they be responding? After all, the initial significance of this question, its impetus for articulation, derives from a moment twenty years past and a future then imagined. Indeed, insofar as this question marks an anniversary, it also equally marks an anxiety about time since spent and marks confusion as to how to value its worth. Was it worth it?

At the moment in time at which this question was posed, there were at least three identifiable narratives of time and international politics. Each implicitly, if not explicitly, bore upon this question. The three were: a crisis, in the form of an international economic recession; a choice, in the form of the United States presidential election and its impact on international politics; and, a continuation, in the form of armed conflicts occurring, most pressingly, in the Congo, Darfur, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Crisis, choice and continuation all suggest an angle on time and future and an accompanying mode of conceiving the past, taken together they may create the narrative of the present. For example, what if feminist futures were to be the new commodities traded, the uncertainty and risk set by market pricing in the midst of global recession? What if feminist futures were bought too high, sold too low or speculated in error? Would it be the US vice-presidential candidacy of Sarah Palin that would offer the only index of feminist futures’ simultaneous devaluation and over-commodification? While, surely, the constancy of armed conflict, crises no longer identified as such, illustrated distinctly material negotiations of risk and devaluation.

Such replies to the query, though, simply accept its implicit and explicit temporization, charting linear relations of time to history, of crisis, choice and continuation, a continuum of quantifiable and qualitative instances that, inevitably, seem to circle around to begin again – crisis, choice and continuation. Yet, the physical space of the conference and the prioritization of art in and for that space resisted this imposition.

From the very moment of entry into the conference hall, the art bounded and infused the conversations among artists and scholars and explanations of intentionality, meaning, affect and effects were made three-dimensional through participation in making art, in photos and in videos vibrant in their demands. The very act of walking in and among art that pulled referents from past and present into its frame – some literally, some conceptually,
some only suggestively – became the palimpsest so desired by its organizers. Art, and the space created by it, broke open a moment in time by making physical the juxtapositions and fragmenting of politics and feminisms that were not solely interpretable in rectilinear time.

The conference convened in a building resonant with its own past as seating for the Scottish Parliament in earlier centuries. The magnificence of the site was matched most tremendously, if unintentionally ironically, with the awarding of first prize to its loo (or bathroom). This particular loo was the most beautiful in all of Scotland as attested to by its ornate and gilded plaque. Tempting as it is to read this as sheer jest, the juxtaposition of the two, the loo and, or more precisely, in, the hall made material, in time and space, the depth and breadth of feminisms and their histories.

Contemplate, for example, the contrast between the forcible exclusion of women, never-mind gender, from the putative ‘high politics’ of early Parliaments and compare it to this conference held in recognition of twenty years of scholarship specifically on gender and politics.

Or, imagine how the putatively ‘low politics’ of bodies, bodily needs, eva-
cuation and consumption by women and men are no longer relegated to such mundane matters. Indeed, recognize how the very accessibility and possi-
bility of opening and entering through the doors identified by signs of men and of women (mensroom) (womensroom) has become a precise site of feminist politics – the very negotiations never conceived of in times past.

The DVD of ‘The F-word’, meaning feminism, articulated this palimpsest of possibility, most clearly in its documentation of young women searching for the meaning of the F word on streets and theatres, in houses and history, and then returning to the archives of feminism to recreate its meanings. Likewise, the making of vessels, shattered and pieced back together, to make material the violations of sexual violence – that were beautiful and so utterly peaceful, I found myself refusing to accept their origins. This – all of this fragmentation, layering, beauty and imagery of words, deeds – is what I found most elusive and resonant about the conference for it both referenced and brought forth the past of feminisms’ own provocations through art, word and deed. It also reminded me that it is this sinuous interplay of time, space and history in which the conference art was entangled, and with which this art daily tangled: literally and figuratively re-arranging worlds.

Helen M. Kinsella
Department of Political Science
University of Madison-Wisconsin
314 North Hall
1050 Bascom Mall
Madison, WI 53706, USA
E-mail: hkinsella@wisc.edu
I was puzzled by the title of the Aberdeen conference too but, undaunted, high-tailed it off to Aberdeen, gorgeous, graceful, granite-grey city, glistening sea-side, stately trees and rushing, shining river, bright winter sun and magnificent (eat yer heart out Cambridge and Oxford), magnificent university campus, and had a whale of a time at the conference above named.

First things first, why Ending? It’s all in the question mark, of course. It seems that some feminist academics are engaged in one of those quasi-apocalyptic moments, a bit like the art world gets into about every ten years or so, when a bunch of people produce manifestos or articles or similar saying ‘the end of art?’ (craft/global capitalism/celebrity/religion/life/the universe – delete as applicable), and organize endless conferences, seminars, happenings and so on to discuss the matter and generally create much carbon emission.

So, I added my carbon footprint to everyone else’s and went and said, ‘hell no’, along with all the other speakers and everyone there who said, ‘hell no’ too. This was in fact the last of four workshops/conferences, which, I now suspect, were convened chiefly to say a monumental collective, ‘hell no’ very loudly. And we did. There certainly wasn’t any sign of feminism ending, quite the contrary; there were a great many new beginnings, much growing of small, feminist bean sprouts. Oh and some splendid making of cheesecakes.

The genesis of the four workshops/conferences was something to do with International Relations, although this conference was hosted by Marysia Zalewski and the University of Aberdeen’s Centre for Gender Studies and School of Social Science. There was an IR tinge to most of the papers, but not all. It was admirably varied, quite a bit of cultural studies, some media studies, a very cool genomics meets eco feminism via science fiction joint paper, a study of how women were pictured by Communist Poland and then by the Solidarity movement ‘women tractor drivers to Solidarity women’, I talked about Shattered. Actually, I talked about Traffic, which is one of the pots in Shattered, and there were several papers which were either about trafficking or touched on it somewhere.
A Dutch woman talked about feminist Egyptian (documentary) cinema (that one was really fascinating), a Turkish woman talked about the construction of Turkish masculinity through compulsory military service, also fascinating. Cynthia Enloe talked about post-war Iraq and post-wars going back to the First World War and how feminists need to intervene in these situations and in how the stories are told. She produced the quote of the conference in my estimation: ‘Widows make people very nervous.’ Too bloody right they do, you should see what they’re doing in Iran.

Some papers were very esoteric, exploring much chewy, involved, quite abstract theory, others were more like discussions of a much bigger research project. It provided an immensely diverse overview of feminism at work in the academy and of feminists, in every imaginable discipline, bringing their feminism to scrutinize and – in the case of IR in particular – almost re-invent it. One of the most imaginative and highly successful strands to this event was the part played by artists and some students from Gray’s School of Art (and others from further afield), who curated a show of their work, some of which was participatory.
Conferences are an extraordinary opportunity to listen to things I don’t normally listen to and meet people I wouldn’t normally meet, this one particularly so because of its interdisciplinary element. Academic departments are often entirely separate from one another, even within a single university, which limits the spread of knowledge because people can’t easily learn from each other. A truly interdisciplinary event such as this can capitalize on the broad dissemination of research which results from the mix and make a real contribution to the building and sustaining of knowledge in that it brings new ways of understanding the issues that arise within our own disciplines. I now want to encourage the visual arts and craft institutions that I’m involved with to be much more interdisciplinary in their approach particularly to the dissemination of our work and research. Academia is not given to this kind of interdisciplinarity and this conference was an object lesson in how to do it.

To return to a question raised at the beginning of this Special Section – was there anything to celebrate after twenty years of (British) Gender and IR? Hell yes!

Claudia Clare
Website: http://www.claudiaclare.co.uk/
E-mail: claudiaclare40@yahoo.com

Notes

1 This Special Section is something of a collage; discursively and practically feminist in a sense. The specific authorship of particular sections is indicated in the text, though sometimes the lines (of authorial voice/contribution) are blurred. The overall collation and editing of the section was performed by Marysia Zalewski. My thanks to Alex Brew, Claudia Clare, Merlyn Riggs, Helen M. Kinsella, Heather Morgan and Jindy Pettman for all their help.

2 See http://www.bisa.ac.uk/

3 ‘Between Past and Future: Feminist Debates in International Relations’, 26 January 2008, London School of Economics (convenor Kimberly Hutchings); ‘Violence, Bodies, Selves: Feminist Engagements in International Politics’, 23 May 2008, University of Manchester (convenor Cristina Masters); ‘Gender, Governance and Power: Interdisciplinary Debates’, 4 July 2008, University of Birmingham (convenors Laura Shepherd, Jill Steans and Lucy Ferguson) and ‘Ending International Feminist Futures?’, 24/25 October 2008, University of Aberdeen (convenor Marysia Zalewski). Many thanks to all the convenors for their hard work and for making all four events a success. For details of all these events see http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vf01.cfm?folder=110&toutfit=bisagwg. Many thanks also to the British Academy, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Gray’s School of Art (Aberdeen), the British International Studies Association and the Universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham, Manchester and the LSE for funding and supporting all four events.
See Grant and Newland (1991); Zalewski (1999); Hutchings (2008); and Zalewski et al. (2008).

It is common practice within the Anglo-American discipline of IR (which usually includes Australia and New Zealand) to distinguish between ‘IR’ (the academic study of international politics) and the practices of ‘international politics’ (IP). The nuances (semantic, intellectual, philosophical and political) have been feverishly debated over the past few decades – alternative suggestions have included: that the ‘international’ should be followed by ‘studies’ or that the moniker ‘globalization’ is now more appropriate. Perhaps more interesting and revealing for the readership of this journal is the comment made by J. Ann Tickner (heard by MZ) that ‘International Relations (IR) is neither international, nor is it about relations’.

To paraphrase Cynthia Enloe’s (1989) simple/groundbreaking question in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*.

And the ensuing complex plethora of questions about gender, sex, violence and power which are embedded within and around the question; readers of this journal will be acutely aware that asking questions ‘about women’ are never ‘simply’ or ‘only’ about women.

The move in the discussion from ‘gender’ to ‘feminism’ is not accidental or unreflectively made. In the context of western(ized/centric) academia the ‘f’ word (feminism) has regularly been displaced with the (allegedly) more inclusive (and the perhaps less politically evocative) ‘gender’.

See Angela McRobbie (2009) on the post-feminist (which for her largely equals ‘anti-feminist’) effects of taking feminism ‘into account’.

See my suggestions on the idea of such a first year course/module in connection with the recent conviction of Austrian man Josef Fritzl on http://www.theory-talks.org/

For highlights of the other events, please see http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vf01.cfm?folder=110&toutf=st=bisagw

Many people worked to make this conference a success. Especial thanks go to exemplary organizers, Heather Morgan, Lloyd Dodd and Bronia Flett; to the excellent curators of art Merlyn Riggs and Charlie Hackett; and to the inspiring plenary/key-note speakers, Cynthia Enloe, Robyn Wiegman, Rekha Pande and Helen M. Kinsella. Thanks too to all the conference delegates and not forgetting Fred Vasquez the French chef who delivered a splendid meal in candle-light at Castle Fraser in the midst of a stormy Scottish night!

See note 33 – Claudia Clare’s ‘answer’ was a celebratory ‘hell no!’

I do not mean to imply a singularity to feminism here. My focus here is on representations of feminism – moving to pluralize grammatically feminism in this discussion would make no difference to the arguments here.

See Stern and Zalewski (forthcoming 2009) for a further discussion of this.

Particularly as the idea of ‘a margin’ works with conventional boundary markers in IR; boundaries which feminists work to destabilize. See Judith Squires and Jutta Weldes (2007) for an intriguing interpretation (though not one I agree with) of debates around feminism, gender and ‘margins’.
Charlie Hackett trained at the Royal College of Art in London. His work lies in the realms of socially engaged practice. His interests engage with issues of identity and gender that are influenced by political and social issues of the day. His work directs itself towards working in public space, the street and through the Web, using interventionist methods to explore and question; scratching at the surface to reveal the hidden. He has worked on life story work for Glasgow Association for Mental Health; presented at Discourse Power Resistance conferences at Manchester Metropolitan University 2006–8; been artist and curator on community projects with the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) community in Aberdeen 2008, for Our Story Scotland; and presented at Arts in Society conference ‘Common Ground’ part of Documenta in Kassel, Germany 2007, discussing war on terrorism and border control.

An extract from Merlyn’s ‘artist statement’

I have a collaborative art practice, focusing on process-based participatory art works. They can be termed as events, performances, installations or happenings but essentially they are not just artworks concerning passive observation, but active participation – the art relies totally on the viewer to bring it alive. I identify relevant, common issues which deal with reality and produce pieces which stimulate dialogue and may provide a platform for further action.


Brew recorded her interactions with the men she photographed.

Alexis Hunter is a contemporary New Zealand painter and photographer who uses feminist theory in her work. She lives in London. Hsiao-Hung Pai writes on migrant labour issues; is perhaps best known for her book Chinese Whispers: The True Story Behind Britain’s Hidden Army of Labour (2008) which was short-listed for the 2009 Orwell Prize. Pai has lived in the UK since 1991, and holds master’s degrees from the Universities of Wales, Durham and Westminster. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei County. She contributes to the Guardian newspaper and many UK-Chinese publications. Jess McCabe is editor of The F-Word – http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/index. She has lived in London her whole life. If she can’t quite claim to have been a feminist her whole life, it’s not for want of her family trying. She has a BA in English and comparative literature from Goldsmiths and an MA in journalism studies from Westminster. She works as a journalist covering environmental issues. Sara Paloni is currently working on her dissertation on violence against women, culture and agency. She is active as a journalist on various queer-feminist magazines in Austria.

In producing this collage, we have had difficulties with the conventional practices of academic publishing. Who is the ‘author’ of collaborative, interactive and participatory events? Who owns words and ideas? How do academic interventionists work with the ever increasing, relentless and voracious demands from academic ‘accountants’ (in several senses) for evidence of dissemination / ‘knowledge transfer’ where authorial ownership is required and must be quantitatively proved? Readers will no doubt pick up on this contradictions and difficulties of this in the text.

23 Shattered is a series of five pots; Traffic is one of the pots in Shattered. See http://www.claudiaclare.co.uk/shatteredimages.html

24 The International Criminal Court’s detention centre located within a Dutch prison in Scheveningen, The Hague.

25 Readers are invited to reflect on a particular ‘elephant in the room here’ – what could make the study of IR ‘British’? Given the colonial legacies and present(s) of ‘Britain’ and ‘Britishness’ perhaps the absence of reference to this is apposite. Conversely, given the dominance of the intellectual, academic and political agendas of the USA in the context of IR and IP, the omission is perhaps problematic. Though unintentional (if discursively feminist), the omissions in the main text and the crucial stories embedded in these endnotes are offered as sites for readers to pick up for themselves and decide how to move with them.

26 A Pilton Video production, Edinburgh. See http://www.piltonvideo.org

27 In the open call for participation we invited national and international contributions for a collaborative Zine. This culminated in the production of a Zine entitled ‘In/Out’ (the whole ‘event’ around the Zine was choreographed by Charlie Hackett, it was curated by Donna Ferenth with a cover design by Claire Hamilton). The Zine has thirty-seven contributions (‘artists, writers, bloggers, creatives, academics and poets’) and was supplied (free) to all delegates at the Aberdeen conference.

28 The ‘performers’ (here Merlyn Riggs with her back to the camera) all dressed in red – the provocative and contradictory colour of violence, heat, passion. The imagery/inference here (one person in red; three ‘ordinary’ members of the public) is to indicate the ‘1 in 4’ statistic (women who will experience domestic violence in their life-time in Scotland). See the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2000). The figures are similar UK- and world-wide.

29 To see a selection of photos of these, go to http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=bisagwg&requesttimeout=500&folder=110&paper=111

30 Part of a poem ‘Reflections on a Conversation’ written by Maureen Ross and given as a gift to Merlyn Riggs.

31 My experience of Claudia Clare’s pots was through the images presented at the Aberdeen conference. The size of the pots and the detail are certainly not available in images, but to imagine my reaction to such size and detail made me almost dizzy.

32 This is a slightly edited version of Claudia Clare’s ‘conference blog’. See http://claudiaclare.blogspot.com/search/label/Ending%20International%20Feminist%20Futures%3F

33 See note 13 – the ‘answer’!

34 See http://www.claudiaclare.co.uk/shatteredimages.html
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