

A FEMINIST QUARTERLY FIREWEED

WINTER 1982

AFTER THE
DINNER
PARTY'S
OVER



SPECIAL REPORT ON WOMEN
AND WRITING IN CANADA

A FEMINIST QUARTERLY
FIREWEED

Feminist Aesthetics

Issue 15



fire-weed *n* : a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome weed which spreads like wild-fire invading clearings, bomb-sites, waste land and other disturbed areas.

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Features



9 After the Dinner Party's Over

Rosemary Donegan,
Joyce Mason

13 The Impact of Feminism on Aesthetic Theory and Practice

Kay Armatage

19 Image, Symbol and Sacrament

Carlyn Moulton

27 The Limitations of the Dinner Party

Lisa Steele

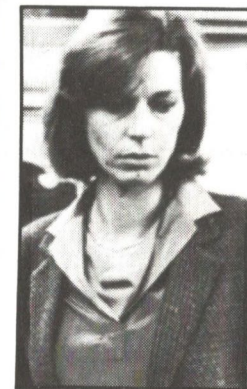
32 Defending the Dinner Party

Varda Burstyn

41 Washing the Dishes

Carol Condé

Review



61 The Silence Around Christine M. Renée Baert

Special Report

65 Bemused, Branded and Belittled Sharon H. Nelson

Portfolio



12, 18
Joyce Wieland

26
Joyce Wieland

26
Marilyn Fairskye

39
Sistren — Jamaican
Theatre Collective

40
Martha Rosler

46
Mary Kelly

48
Deborah Barndt

56
Linda Lok

80, 84, 103
Dawna Gallagher

Departments



5
Editorial

50
The Dinner Party
Panel

104
Ourstory

106
Acknowledgements

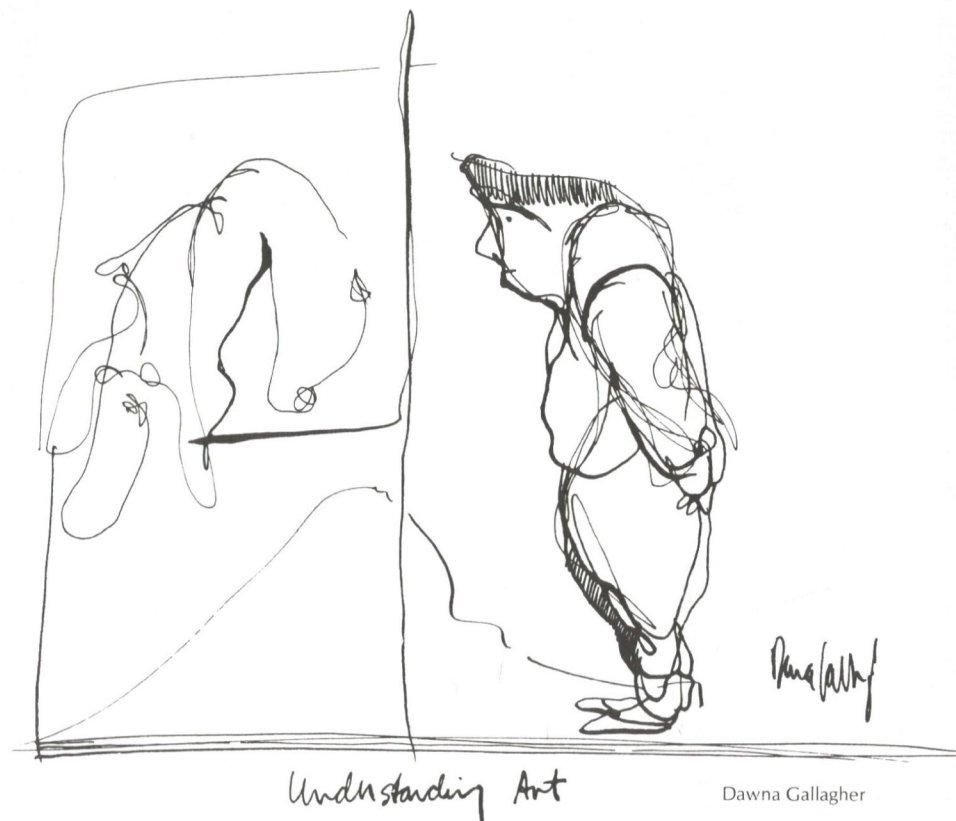
106
Contributors' Notes

107
Announcements

Poetry

What I will do
will answer
ask
when this mu
will answer

52
Ressemblance-s
Azélie Zee Artand



EDITORIAL

In some measure we are all critics. With the political decision to embrace feminism has come the power to choose for ourselves the directions our lives are to take, and to select the baggage we are to take with us. By this process we pronounce judgement; we act as critics. Yet all too often we find our luggage packed with other people's ideals. It is almost as if we are reluctant to have confidence in ourselves, to respect our own opinions.

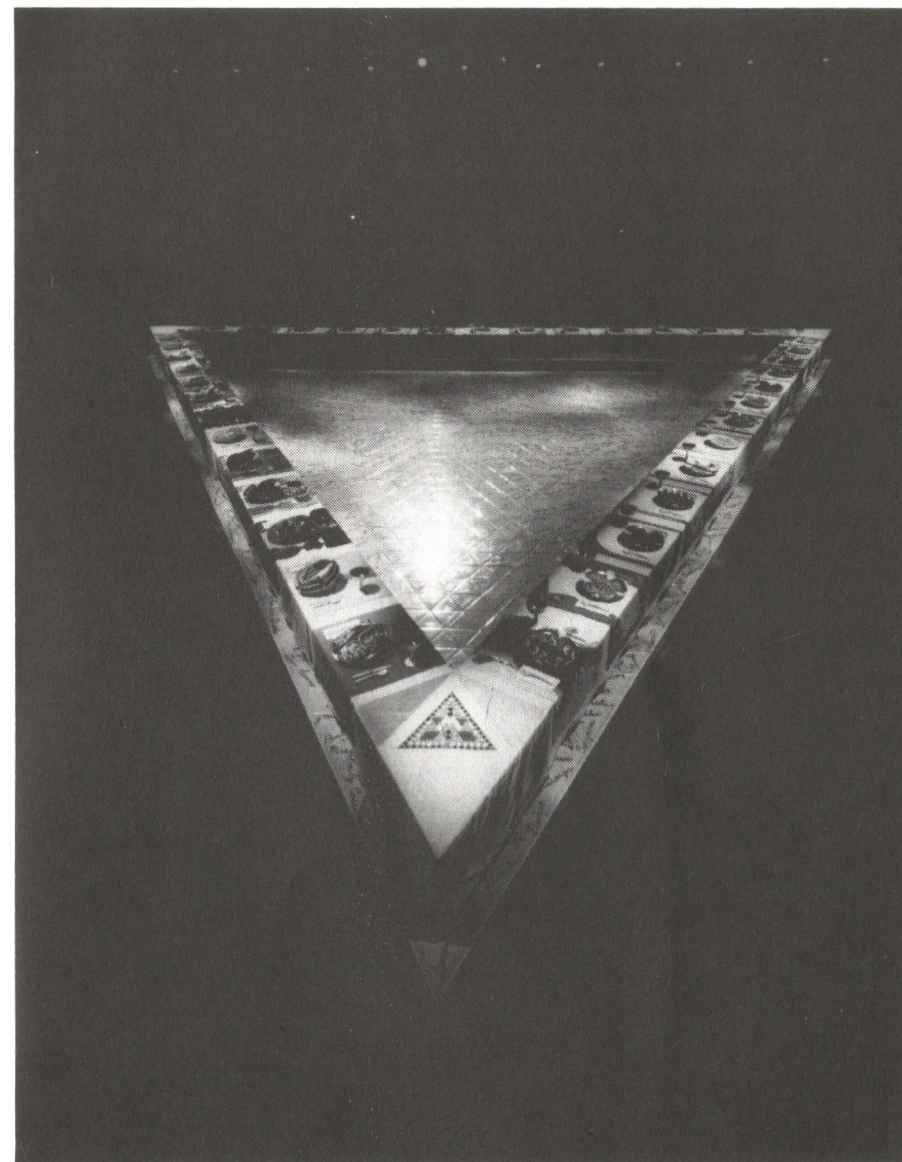
Issue 15 takes its point of departure from contemporary feminist aesthetics. But it brings into focus certain issues pertinent to all areas of women's lives, and addresses questions related not only to present day women but extending implicitly to our foremothers and foresisters. Women artists, like all

women, have long been subjected to stereotyping and prejudice. The language of scholarship, and the vocabulary of criticism, is permeated with terms carrying a tacit value judgement. Women's work is constantly denigrated through a variety of tactics intended to trivialize and dismiss our creative endeavours. A double standard is clearly in evidence; it affects every woman. The elaborate network historians have constructed to distinguish Art (male) from women's art, and to rationalize this distinction, is proof that the double standard has long existed in art history. In literature, it finds its root in Aristotle, who, quoting the words of the poet, decreed: "Silence is a woman's glory."

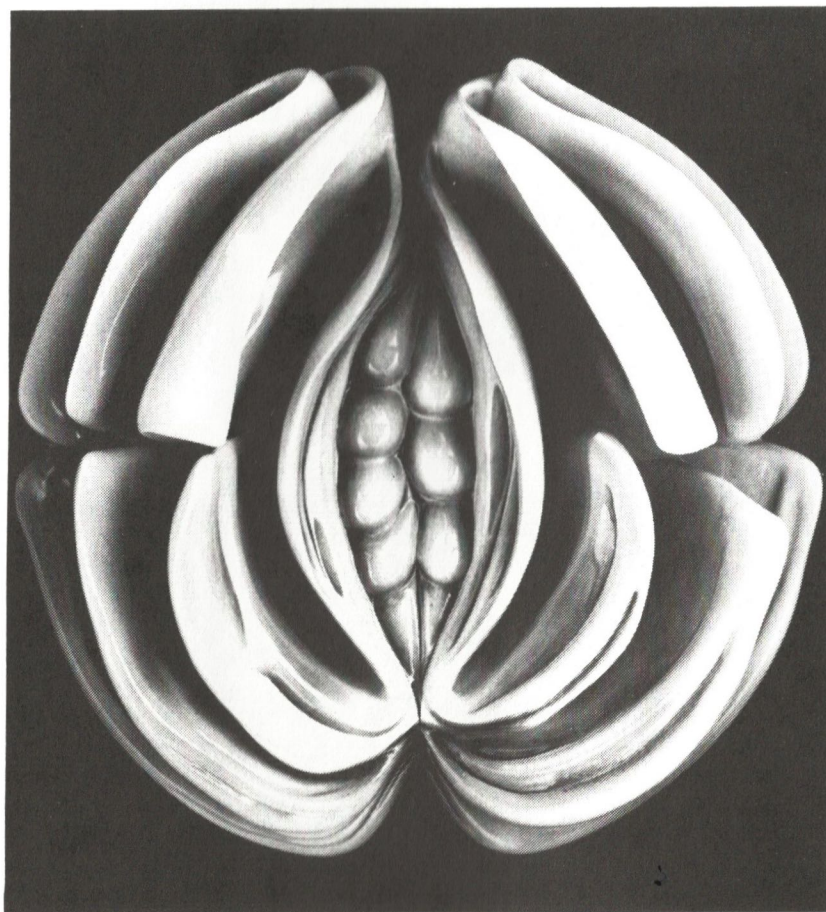
The women who have contributed to issue 15 take exception to this misogynist process. They have refused to accept the norms imposed from without, and have determined their own criteria. The essays by Kay Armata, Varda Burstyn, Carlyn Moulton, Lisa Steele, Carole Condé, Renée Baert, and Sharon Nelson, the poetry of Azélie Zee Artand and the visual art of the women presented on these pages share a common concern for the social, political and aesthetic double standard operating within our culture. Collectively, their work represents the development of a critical framework within feminist discourse. Individually, they impel us to follow in their footsteps.

But this is not enough. We must not accept the values and opinions of others. It is important that we learn to scrutinize, assimilate, and digest information for ourselves. It is important to recognize the limitations and implications of the material presented to us, and to form our own judgement, confident of our abilities. Only then can we stride forward, certain of the power within.

Susan Douglas-Drinkwater
Fireweed Collective



Title: Judy Chicago — *The Dinner Party*; mixed media; 47' per side. Photo: Michael Alexander.
The Dinner Party © Judy Chicago, 1979



Title: *The Dinner Party* — Virginia Woolf Plate; medium: china paint on porcelain; approx. 14" wide. Executed by: Judy Chicago/Judy Keyes/Meredith Horton. Photo: Elizabeth Theilen. *The Dinner Party* © Judy Chicago, 1979

After *The Dinner Party*'s Over

Introduction

On June 22, 1982, in Toronto, the Women's Cultural Building Collective presented a panel discussion entitled, "After the Party's Over". The discussion centred around the aesthetic and feminist issues raised by the Judy Chicago exhibition *The Dinner Party*, which was at that time installed at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

The Women's Cultural Building* is a collective of women working in Toronto in a wide range of cultural and creative fields of endeavour. Our aims include the creation of a forum in which cultural producers can develop new audiences for women's work, and the development of a critical context that functions within a feminist discourse. The underlying assumption is that, as women, we know that we have more to say than the present labels of 'artist', 'performer' or 'community worker' allow us. Art, culture and social concerns need not — in fact, *cannot* be — seen any longer as separate issues. In our brief history the Women's Cultural Building has been striving to create a context in which these integral concerns are considered in a critical framework and in the development of our individual and collective work.

When it was announced that *The Dinner Party* would be exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario — following on the heels of its phenomenal success in Montreal's Musée d'Art Contemporain — it stimulated a lot of discussion

* *The Women's Cultural Building* does not have an address. It is not 'housed' anywhere and is not in any way connected to the Pauline McGibbon Centre, Toronto. One day the Women's Cultural Building will have an address; but for now our work is: "Building women's culture!"

within the collective. It was noted that the AGO had not shown any serious interest in *The Dinner Party* until the piece had developed a strong reputation as a "blockbuster" drawing card, and that it was the Women's Volunteer Committee of the AGO which put up the money to bring in the exhibit as a "fund-raiser". The immense popularity, the media coverage, and the monumental style and scope of the work itself, raised many crucial questions amongst the women's art community. As these questions were raised and discussed among members of the collective, it became evident that it was necessary to place the "event" in a critical context. On the one hand, there was the immense genuine popularity of the exhibition, which seemed to indicate that an amazingly large number of women were eager to see Judy Chicago's show. On the other hand, there was the gut feeling that neither *The Dinner Party*, nor Judy Chicago, were capable of telling the whole story of what feminism and feminist art might imply or be. It was decided to organize a panel and a forum for public debate.

The format, the speakers, and the issues which needed to be addressed by the panel were developed by a group within the collective consisting of Carol Condé, Rosemary Donegan, Sandra Jantz, Kerri Kwinter, Joyce Mason, Carlyn Moulton, Tanya Mars (a.k.a. Rosenberg) and Lisa Steele. It was within this 'group', and our process of feminist debate/exchange, that we were able to develop some perspective on Judy Chicago's exhibition. These group meetings were an exhilarating and demanding feminist process which was both artistically and politically stimulating and a lot of fun. Out of these meetings, five major points of departure were arrived at as a means of structuring the discussion and allowing us to broaden the base and issues beyond *The Dinner Party* per se.

The assumed basis for the evening's panel discussion was, of course, feminism. In this respect it was useful to give a few statistics that reflected the economic and professional status of women artists working in Canada (which have a striking similarity to all areas of women's work). These statistics, cited by Joyce Mason in the opening remarks from the Chair, reflect the conditions under which women artists are working, and are important to keep in mind as background to the particular discussion which will be pursued in the following papers.

The papers which follow are transcriptions of those which were delivered on June 22, 1982. They have been only slightly modified and revised by the authors of this introduction. They are presented here in the order in which they were delivered.

Rosemary Donegan
Joyce Mason
Guest Editors
October, 1982

Statistics

The statistics cited here are from Sasha McInnes-Hayman's 1980 survey on contemporary Canadian women artists which was prepared for Womanspirit Art Research and Resource Centre, London, Ontario, and Status of Women, Canada. The findings are based on a questionnaire completed by 318 women artists.

Income

- 95% of the artists surveyed exhibited and/or sold their work within the twelve months prior to completing the survey.
- 9% of the artists surveyed claimed that all their personal income was derived from their art. Half of these artists included their teaching of art in this response. Half of these artists earned less than \$5,000 annually.
- 75% of all the artists surveyed reported annual incomes of under \$10,000 of which on the average only 10% came from their art. These figures do not take into account the amount of money an artist had to spend on materials etc., to make the amount cited.
- 87% of the respondents rely on their husbands or partners for the necessities of life, and turn their own incomes back into their work.

Recognition

Between 1972 and 1979, there were 229 jury panelists on the Canada Council for the Visual Arts. Twenty-eight women, a total of 8% of those involved, sat as jurors during a seven year period.

University Fine Art Department Faculties

In the Visual Arts Faculties of Canadian universities, female faculty members have increased from 16% of the total in 1972-1973 to 19% of the total in 1978-1979. The average shift of 0.5% in favour of female faculty each year means that equality on the faculties of these institutions will not be achieved until the year 2039.

In 1979, the student male/female ratio was 68% female to 32% male.

Laura Secord sauva le Haut-Canada des Américains en 1813 en passant les lignes américaines pour avertir les Anglais, amenant sa vache une partie du chemin afin que les Américains n'aient pas de soupçons.



Laura Secord saved Upper Canada from the Americans in 1813 by going through the American lines to warn the British, taking her cow part of the way so that the Americans wouldn't be suspicious.

Joyce Wieland, *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique*, 1971

The Impact of Feminism on Aesthetic Theory and Practices

(1965-82)

Kay Armatage

I have been asked to speak on the impact of feminism on aesthetic theory. I will proceed by outlining the major aesthetic issues raised by feminist critics over the last fifteen years, and conclude with an assessment of the impact of these interventions on mainstream aesthetics.

Imagery

The earliest examples of feminist criticism took the form of attacks on the imagery of dominant art forms produced by men. On the subject of film, there have been Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (1972) and Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1972); in literature, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1972); in the visual arts, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1971), and seminal articles by Lillian Robinson, Griselda Pollock, Linda Nochlin, and Lucy Lippard.

Their critique of the sexual objectification of women in art images led to the quest for positive images of women to replace the damaging stereotypes, images which would celebrate women's achievements, thereby producing new women heroes, 'female forms' and 'female images'. Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* clearly takes much of its impetus from this constellation of arguments.

Women's Search for Artistic Traditions

Another of the questions which feminists asked of traditional art history was, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"* This question opened up at least three possible answers, which themselves became areas of fruitful critical debate.

Lost Women

One response to the question is that indeed there have been great women artists, and that male bias in art history has caused them to be overlooked. The Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, recently 'discovered' by feminists, is an exemplary case. Once known primarily as Diego Rivera's wife, she is now being re-established as a central figure in Mexican artistic traditions. Kahlo is also taking her place in women's cultural history as an artist whose work was founded in her own subjectivity: female sexuality, the reproductive process, and a new iconography of female experience.

The Dinner Party supports a "lost women" thesis embracing not only women artists, but female figures from many spheres and times, most of whom have been lost from western history. As a didactic piece its greatest achievement is bringing these "women worthy" to the attention of a mass audience who might otherwise not have been aware of these historical figures.

The Question of Quality

Another response to the question of why there have been no great women artists is that male standards of greatness have been defined in ways that exclude women. The dominant standards of excellence throughout history have emphasized institutionalized forms of art — those which appear in cathedrals, palaces, corporate skyscrapers, museums, government buildings, private collections of the corporate elite, and art galleries. These forms of art have often been monumental in scale, and have usually been produced in costly materials such as bronze, marble, steel, or oil paints. These materials have not been widely available to women because of women's notorious poverty throughout the ages. Lillian Robinson has investigated the class, race, and sex bias involved in the valuations of major works of art, in *Sex, Class and Culture* (1980).

This is another major contribution to aesthetic theory by feminists: the redefinition of criteria or standards of judgement so that class, race and sex bias can be accounted for at least, if not eliminated. The redefinition of standards leads to the re-examination of definitions of art *per se*. Until the feminist intervention there had been no doubt that Art excluded functional

* This quotation stems from an essay with the same title published by Linda Nochlin in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. Edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

folkloric or decorative work. This is another point which intersects with *The Dinner Party* and even more widely with Joyce Wieland's work, particularly her great 1971 exhibition *True Patriot Love* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa).

The third reason there have been no great women artists, feminist critics suggest, is that they have largely worked in forms that are labelled domestic crafts rather than Art. *The Dinner Party* asserts that china painting and needle work, two of women's traditional "hobbies", indeed are, or can be, transformed into fine art, worthy of display in the great art institutions. In *True Patriot Love*, Wieland used needlework, quilting, knitting, cake decorating, scrapbooking, watercolour painting, drawing, and rug-hooking, assemblages, bronze sculpture, perfume, and even a live duck pond to make the same point even more exhaustively — as well as more wittily.

Conditions of Production

To locate women's art traditions in the domestic arts and crafts is also to raise another important critical issue — conditions of production — a question not normally raised in "pure" aesthetics. As producers of works of art, women differ notably from the heroic, suffering, eccentric genius of the male artist (Van Gogh, Rothko), or from the giants made more gigantic by the institutions which commissioned their work (Michelangelo, Rembrandt). Women artists — embroiderers, quilters, china painters — tend to be anonymous, often work collectively, and, most important, pursue their art not as a public career but as part of their daily work in the home. Amongst the 'fine artists', women have generally had less money than men, and therefore have often used cheaper and less monumental materials which can be worked with in the home rather than in costly studios: cloth, ceramics, watercolours, and found objects. Not coincidentally, these are materials which can rarely 'stand the test of time.'

The conditions of production in turn affect distribution, exhibition, and consumption of works of art. The works exist largely outside the confines of



Kay Armatage

the institutions, universities, museums and galleries; they are displayed in a corner cabinet or at a country fair. The art world accords them only the minor status of folk art, if it recognizes them at all.

Both Chicago and Wieland emphasized such notions by arranging their environments to suggest something other than an art exhibit. With *The Dinner Party*'s subdued lighting, cavernous spaces, and hushed or silent on-lookers, Chicago creates a chapel-like atmosphere and thus emphasizes the piece's allusion to patriarchal religion and Christian symbolism. Wieland arranged the National Gallery in Ottawa so that it would evoke a bazaar or country fair atmosphere. By turning it into the sort of venue in which these marginal crafts are normally exhibited, she challenged the institution which had traditionally excluded women's work.

Feminist critics have challenged traditional aesthetic theory at the level of imagery — with its corollary, the search for female images or female forms — and at the level of art history. They have questioned the standards of artistic excellence, and even the definitions of art itself. They have suggested that the conditions of production and the identity of the producer are indeed legitimate issues of critical enquiry.

These questions were largely developed during the third great period of the Women's Movement, 1965-74; significantly, this was the period of the conception of *The Dinner Party*. The theory and practice involved in Chicago's work consistently reflects the concerns of that period of feminist aesthetics.

Since then, feminist theory has developed substantially in most areas, largely through the proliferation of interdisciplinary work in Women's/Feminist Studies. Just as feminist historiography has moved from the study of "women worthy" to oral and social history (the study of 'ordinary women' and their contribution to history and culture), so has aesthetic theory moved in two directions, to the study of more profound psychoanalytical or structural questions, and to a more vigorous and practical involvement with questions of production, distribution and consumption. But across the spectrum of feminist aesthetics we find an emphasis on the development of strategies which can find, or gain strength from, women's traditional marginal position.

The Search for New Forms

Women are working in and from the avant-garde, and with new forms of art (such as performance or video); they are dealing with issues that affect ordinary women. The art thus produced can move directly into women's territory and thus finesse the institutions that have eschewed women's work.

With the interest in new media, new means of distribution and exhibition, and a new topology of women's concerns, has come one of the strongest tendencies in all areas of feminist theory. There has evolved an emphasis on a participating audience interacting with art which meets, engages, or chal-

lenges its viewers. This is in opposition to the tradition of a passively consuming audience, which is involved in the work only at an emotional level and which is humbled in the presence of the 'Great Work of Art.' *The Dinner Party*, with its air of solemnity, the ropes separating art from audience, and the didactic audio-cassette guiding and 'seeing for' the audience, clearly is not informed by questions which interrogate the traditional audience/Art relationship.

The Impact of Feminism on Aesthetic Theory

I regret to say that the impact of feminism on aesthetic theory has not been that great. In disparate areas, critical work has been transformed at least superficially. No film critic, for example, can now ignore blatant sexism or violence against women in films, although such a criticism would rarely be important enough to change his (sic) evaluation of the film. The Canadian art establishment has also perhaps paid more attention, as a result of feminist work, to artists such as Joyce Wieland and Emily Carr than they would have otherwise, inventing new categories or stretching old definitions to accommodate them.

But in general, the art establishment has remained unmoved, despite the undeniable fact that feminist questions challenge the most basic and time-honoured assumptions of established male-dominated aesthetics. I suggest that the case of *The Dinner Party* and its well-known history of struggle to be exhibited is *not* a good example of this point, for *The Dinner Party* does not substantially question established traditions. In fact, *The Dinner Party* supports the male-dominated structures with its emphasis on monumentalism, the primacy of the artist as a heroic figure (autobiography on sale in the lobby), as well as by its associations with wealth and opulence (the gold and mother-of-pearl, iridescence everywhere). These elements are very dear to the hearts of the art world and the art market, and they are among the most potent areas of oppression for women artists.

Hope and Action

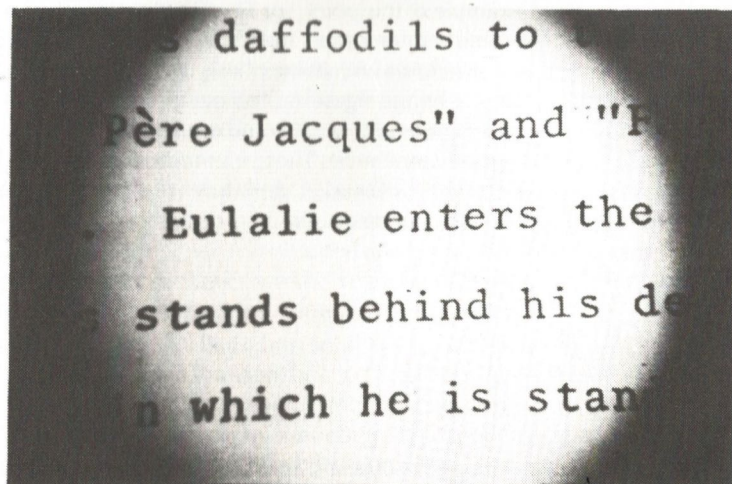
However, let me end with a note of hope and a call for action: There is a great deal of feminist art being produced, and there are many many women who are writing criticism which supports and elucidates it, or running galleries which display it, or publishing feminist art journals which disseminate information about it. An enormous network is being developed. The strength of the response from women to *The Dinner Party* is, to me, an indication that it is only a matter of time before the fundamental challenge of women's participation in every area of the art world will have its effect.

That's the hope, and here's the call for action: we must not stop with *The Dinner Party*. Accept it as the preliminary step that it is, and move on to a deeper understanding of the more sophisticated feminist art work that is becoming increasingly available.



FIGURE 28. a. *Betula glandulosa*. b. *Oxyria digyna*. c. *Oxyria digyna*. d. *Oxyria digyna*. e. *Oxyria digyna*. f. *Oxyria digyna*. (2/5)

ground birch provides a natural screen for outdoor seating. Oxyria



Joyce Wieland, *True Patriot Love/Véritable amour patriotique*, 1971

Image, Symbol and Sacrament

Religious Language and *The Dinner Party*

Carlyn Moulton

I am assuming that there are at least two reasons why we are all here tonight. The first is that we have either seen or heard about *The Dinner Party* exhibit. And the second is that we are not totally satisfied with our immediate experience of it. That although the show has had a real and actual impact on ourselves or on people whom we know, we are not altogether sure why it has had that effect, or even what that effect is.

I am going to say a few things about questions regarding religious images and symbols that I think are raised by *The Dinner Party*, but before I do that, I would like to make two general comments.

My own experience of *The Dinner Party* is as ambivalent as my experience of cathedrals. Initially, I am impressed by the stitching, shapes and china painting, as I am impressed by arches, vaulted ceilings and stained glass. Whether we view *The Dinner Party* as art, or *The Dinner Party* as monument — two distinct possibilities, I think — the sheer size and scope of the vision, dedication and effort required to bring it into existence is clearly impressive.

But however beautiful a particular representation of the stations of the cross might be or however beautiful the plates might be, at some point, when I begin to think about the assumptions inherent in the work, when I think about what it is that I am being asked to assent to or agree with, my response to a cathedral or to *The Dinner Party* falls short of total enthusiasm.

I also think we need to recognize the gap between what Judy Chicago claims *The Dinner Party* was designed to be, and what it is. Regardless of how the exhibit might be packaged or hyped, it has an existence of its own. Chicago seems amazingly eager to explain her work to us, to have her books

and her comments form the critical interpretive standard. Chicago says that her dream was to create a piece so far beyond judgment that it would enter the cultural pool and never be erased. It may not be erased, but it is not and should not be beyond our critical judgment. And I think it can be argued that artists are usually their own most ill-equipped critics. In a visual medium Chicago has undeniable talent. But where she tries to explain the piece, by saying "this is a symbol for" — as she does several times — she fails. That is the task of the critic. The artist's task, it seems to me, is to say, not this is a symbol for, but this *is*. It is in the naming of things, the creation of symbols that artists find their place. And so, regardless of how Chicago may describe the work, or what she tells us that it encompasses and means for us as women, or as feminists, we still need to come to terms with what is, with what *The Dinner Party* represents on its own.

Myth Telling

The Dinner Party very deliberately tells a story, a religious story. The story is a kind of female salvation history, which begins by paying homage or tribute to goddess figures, and ends by recalling the goddess images, which have found new expression through the lives of more contemporary women. We begin with an ideal state of grace and harmony with nature and the powers that be. Forces from the outside oppose us. A long struggle ensues. Prophecies about the future provide the momentum to continue the struggle, and in the end, there is the hope of salvation, of rebirth, of regeneration.

Because religious statements are often ambiguous — combining definite factual information with a peculiar, evocative power — we often respond to them on an internal level, rather than a critical one. But even so, the story that is being told here is an important one, one that needs to be told. Stories create the boundaries within which life is played, where we find meaning and power. *The Dinner Party* pushes those boundaries back a little, expanding the size of the playing field.

A little belatedly perhaps, but as recently as 1980, Carol Christ (in her book, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*) argues that women have not "experienced their own experience", that the act of telling a woman's story from a woman's point of view is a revolutionary act. *The Dinner Party* may not be the revolution you expected, and you might have written different slogans perhaps, but judging from the reaction to the exhibit, the way Chicago has chosen to tell this story is nevertheless perceived as revolutionary.

The telling of this story recognizes the importance of developing a context within which we can act. This is, I suppose, the point of forming a collective or any other form of banding together. And if the idea of the collective is expanded or extended to take in some notion of women throughout history, we need symbols to represent that inclusion. There is more information, more substance in that history than most of us can easily grasp. We don't

need a symbol for a rose, because a rose is a rose is a rose. But for that reason, the rose, or for that matter, a butterfly, can function as a symbol for other things which do not have that clear, unequivocal and limited "isness" about them.

If at times, we cannot grasp the complexity of the real situation, we focus on the symbol, which may not allow us to respond in a complete or ideal way, but at least it allows us to respond. And that is better than being paralysed by confusion or denial. By telling, in a symbolic fashion, the story of female history, *The Dinner Party* acknowledges the dialectic involved in understanding figures such as Kali, in coming to terms with good and evil, strength and weakness. And when we participate or interact with a work of art, a ritual or a sacrament, it is not just that we are involved with a "mere" symbolic act. Symbols, and our participation in them, make action possible. They give us a context, a sense of place.

But what is that context?

The Dinner Party is staged as a deliberate parallel to the *Last Supper*. The 13 women on each side of the table correspond to the 13 men present at the *Last Supper*; the embroidered corner triangles follow traditional vestment patterns; chalices sit at each place setting. Most significantly, the entire piece rests on an altar cloth — and by implication, on an altar.

And in traditional western culture at least, where we have 13 people, an altar cloth, a wine chalice and a plate for food or bread, we have the eucharist, the sacrament of communion. Those from Jewish or other non-Christian traditions have not necessarily made these associations, but along with several others who have come out of a Christian tradition, the way in which we are forced to view the exhibit or participate in it, reminds me of nothing so much as a line of communicants, hushed and reverent, pausing periodically before the altar, with murmurs of "this is my body, this is my blood" in the background.

The fact is that the original title of *The Dinner Party* was "Twenty-Five Women Who Were Eaten Alive". The women here represented are not just



Carlyn Moulton



Monique Mercure, Andrée Lapelle, Amulette Garneau, Charlotte Boisjoli, *Saga des Poules Mouillées*, (Saga of the Wet Hens) 1981. Photo: J. Le Cog

being brought together to chat with one another or to comment on one another's experience. The 39 women are *on* the plates. And given that this is a dinner table, we need to ask ourselves, who is sitting in the chairs? * Who is filing past the altar, hands outstretched? What is it that we are being asked to receive?

Historically, altars are understood to be structures where esteemed objects, animals or people are placed to be sacrificed. These offerings are made to appease or satisfy the appetites of a demanding, angry god or gods, and presumably to win their favour.

The Sacrificial Assumption

If we participate in such a ritual, we assume two things. One is an anthropomorphic understanding of deity or cosmic force — we assume that there is a god out there who is greater than we are, and who has a personality, will and emotions. In other words, we assume that there is a hierarchical value structure — some beings are more valuable than others — to such an extent that it is right and proper that the lesser should be sacrificed for or to the greater beings.

The second thing that we assume is that these “superior beings” like sacrifices. These gods, to whom we ascribe so much power and value, are blood-thirsty. By killing someone and reminding ourselves of it periodically, our state is improved. Our position before these superior beings is elevated. This is one of the principal underlying assumptions common to both Judaism and Christianity. It is assumed in our culture to such a degree that it appears — unchallenged — in the majority of the literature and drama that we encounter.

There is no question in my mind — nor I dare say, in Chicago's mind — that there have been hundreds and thousands of women who have been horribly and needlessly sacrificed. And we should remember that fact. We should learn something from it. But do we want to put them on an altar? Who is sitting in the chairs at this last supper? We know who ate these women the first time around. Who is being asked to eat them this time?

In her description of the Primordial Goddess plate, Chicago says that in almost all ancient religions, the feminine principal was seen as the fundamental cosmic force, that there was a time when there was no distinction between this Primordial Goddess, the earth, and the earth's daughter, woman. Without debating the historical accuracy of this, the principal is fair enough — strong images are not, by virtue of their strength alone, patriarchal. But she goes on to say, with great wistfulness, that a sense of unity was enjoyed then, that all were one. If we are attempting to regain that female understanding of unity, I think we need to rid ourselves of the hierarchical and class structures that have permeated and warped western religious and social thought. I venture to say that they have also permeated and warped *The Dinner Party*.

* When someone put this question to Chicago, she had no reply.

On the other hand, I suppose it is refreshing, when one hears the phrase, "in one's own image", to see a recognizable form. And it is important, for us as women, to have the experience of mediating a sacrament. Rituals are important. After all, all a sacrament is is a ritualized outward expression of an inward grace. Traditionally, and even still, as Carol Christ points out, men's participation in ritual has been their most remarkable display of cultural authority, and their most direct access to it. But it seems to me that women have been and would prefer to be much more associated with the giving of life than with the taking of it, to initiate rituals which join, not separate. And I think that, with a little bit of creative genius, we ought to be able to think of some form other than bloody sacrificial altar cloths to remind ourselves of whatever inner graces there are that we possess.

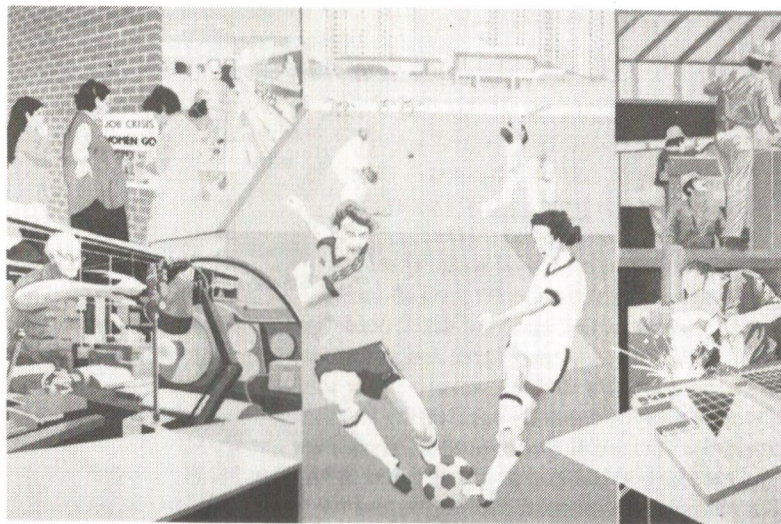
Forging History

The Dinner Party also exhibits, in the best religious tradition, a flagrant disregard for historical time. That is, women from all periods of time are brought together at the same moment — in a sense, transcending time. Jovette Marchessault does the same thing, in her play, *Saga of the Wet Hens*. It is a good idea I think, one that even modern physics would support. But what *Hens* asks, and what *The Dinner Party* doesn't, is "What is the effect of this meeting on the characters?" In *Hens* Laure Canon is altered by her conversation with Gabrielle Roy; in *The Dinner Party*, Theodora remains relatively unaffected by Virginia Woolf or Natalie Barney. I am not trying to argue, necessarily, that we can change past history. But I do think that the vision which people of vision have and which they experience, alters them and alters their time. Their vision is a prescience, a cause of what is to come. In religious terminology, it is called hope. It is the difference between fixing and creating time. It is the difference between a failed interjection into history and a successful one. Chicago's characters say that time is marching inexorably forward. Marchessault's character says that time is dilating.

If we could stand inside the triangle, surrounded by the women and their times, we might be better able to come to some understanding of the core of our history, to find the energy of the collective experience. Then we could experience history in an interactive way, moving inside — rather than around the outside of — time. The images would surround us, and as they moved up off the plates, would seem more concerned with elevating the entire horizontal plane, and less concerned with vertical thrust.

I believe that our symbols require both reverence and revision. Over a decade ago, in *For Coloured Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/when the rainbow isn't enuf*, Ntozake Shange had that sense. Her character rose up from the floor proclaiming, "I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely." Ten years ago, that was revolutionary. And it was reverent. It also recognized the need to invent new language, to discover new metaphors. It might serve us well to take this opportunity in history to develop and interject new symbols. We are not necessarily limited to basic two or even three dimensional

shapes and images. If the symbols and metaphors that we are familiar with no longer adequately describe our experience, then we need to think of new ones. We have tried long enough to limit our descriptions of the world to descriptions that are possible within the boundaries set by traditional language. The time has come to open up the triangle, and to extend the limits of what we say and think is possible.



The Limitations of *The Dinner Party*

Lisa Steele

Why do I, a committed feminist, find myself feeling queasy in the presence of a piece of art created by another self-declared feminist? Why do I, who has sought biographical material on women for years, get a sinking feeling every other page when reading Judy Chicago's autobiography *Through The Flower* — the same Judy Chicago who set up the first Feminist Art Program in North America at the University in Fresno, California? Why am I, an artist who claims to be obsessed with questions of audience, so unimpressed with the record-breaking attendance figures generated by *The Dinner Party*? Why indeed? Because the very areas of cultural investigation, production and analysis which Chicago claims for *The Dinner Party* — the representation of women, their own mythology, the place of women in art, media and society, the clarification of what it means to live as a woman — are the most vital areas of inquiry today. But *The Dinner Party*, unfortunately, has little to add to these discussions.

What *The Dinner Party* does do effectively is introduce the presence of women throughout history and this could have just as well been done in the medium of print alone — an encyclopedia if you will, perhaps available in serialized form at supermarkets. (I'm serious here. The introduction of women's historical presence is a vital educational project which should definitely be undertaken using mass-marketing techniques.) But *The Dinner Party* project, as a whole, is a failure because Chicago has allowed her drive as an artist to overshadow her drive as a feminist. And this is crucial in an interpretation of *The Dinner Party* in feminist terms.



Merilyn Fairskye, Michiel Dolk, and Jeff Stewart, *Murals for ACI Glassworks*, Waterloo (New South Wales), 1981.

In a recent essay in the British publication *BLOCK*, Griselda Pollock makes a relevant point in her discussion of feminist art history: "What does it matter politically for feminists to intervene in so marginal an area as art history, 'an outpost of reactionary thought' as it has been called? Admittedly art history is not an influential discipline, locked up in universities, art colleges and musty basements of museums, peddling its 'civilizing' knowledge to the select and cultured. We should not, however, underestimate the effective significance of its definitions of art and artist to bourgeois ideology. The central figure of art historical discourse is the artist, who is presented as an ineffable ideal which complements the bourgeois myths of a universal, classless Man (sic).

"Our general culture is furthermore permeated with ideas about the individual nature of creativity, how genius will always overcome social obstacles, that art is an inexplicable, almost magical sphere to be venerated but not analysed. These myths are produced in ideologies of art history and are then dispersed through the channels of TV documentaries, popular art books, biographic romances about artists' lives like *Lust for Life* about Van Gogh or *The Agony and the Ecstasy* about Michaelangelo. 'To deprive the bourgeoisie not of its art but of its concept of art, this is the precondition of a revolutionary argument'" (she is quoting Pierre Machery here).

There are several points here which help to clarify my criticisms of *The Dinner Party*. First the issue of the artist as a "universal classless Man". Chicago has, of course, replaced Man with Woman here, holding that women are in fact a "class" due to their historical oppression and at the same time maintaining that she herself is classless. While women's historical oppression cannot be argued, their "classlessness" can. Chicago has said that her project was supported by women "from all strata of society, all walks of 'life.'" She has also said she was aided by "housewives and students and just women all across the country and around the world in fact." Thus she becomes the ideal artist — classless — just one of the girls. An earlier pre-Dinner Party project of Chicago's however, reveals the hypocrisy of this so-called classlessness of women. Called "Great Ladies", the project began with a series of abstract paintings commemorating Queen Christina of Sweden, Marie Antoinette, Catherine the Great and Queen Victoria. Hardly just a gang of ordinary gals these. One needn't wonder if the women living under the rule of these women felt a classless solidarity of femaleness with them. And what of Chicago's role in this work? In commemorating the ruling class so baldly she assumes the very traditional role of artist as vindicator and decorator of power, I would suggest that a genuine feminist statement about power has been made by many individuals and groups other than Chicago — for instance the Jamaican theatre collective Sistren, whose work shows quite directly that women are at times oppressed by other women as well as by men; that oppression, while a shared fate of all women, is also a question of degree. And that while all women's history has suffered the same process of being erased, some women have been more thoroughly forgotten than others.

The Dinner Party, although less blatant, continues this homage to the ruling classes and the powerful but can effectively (at times) escape criticism by its very encyclopaedic nature. One of the original criticisms that I had of *The Dinner Party* was that no revolutionary women or political women (in a progressive sense) were included in it. However, when you look carefully, there are a few. For instance, you do find Emma Goldman, but she's on the Heritage Floor, she's not at the table. This is telling when considering a work which presents itself as an encyclopedia of women. It indicates to me an over-riding acceptance of the power structures present all through history. These power structures are not strongly challenged in Chicago's work in anything other than an implicit way.

So what exactly do I mean when I say that Judy Chicago let her drive as an artist take precedence over her drive as a feminist? I mean that she is basically an integrationist — assuming that the goals of feminism can be accomplished simply by including women into the already existing power structure (whether that structure is the art world or the Church or the state) and that women's presence will somehow "feminize" these structures and thus reform them. She says herself, when describing the banners at the beginning of *The Dinner Party*: "'She' — the Goddess, that is, the feminine principle and the spirit within each human being which affirms life — gathers all people before her to witness a vision of an equalized world (symbolized by the equilateral triangle) in which sex, race and class distinctions are erased, and people live in peace and harmony on Earth. *The Dinner Party* expresses the belief and hope that once reverence for the feminine is re-established on Earth, a balance will be restored to human existence and 'Everywhere will be Eden once again.'"

I hate to be a cynic, but I doubt that it's going to be that simple. The above quotation, in addition to an unpleasant messianic tone begins to reveal Chicago's overwhelming reverence for traditional art history itself. In an often-quoted entry in her journal in 1975 Chicago says: "My dream is that I will make a piece so far beyond judgement that it will enter the cultural pool and never be erased from history, as women's work has been erased



Joyce Mason, left, Lisa Steele, right

before...This is all that matters to me. It's what I've prepared for all these years. It's what I'm on this earth to do." In seeking to enter the "cultural pool" as she calls it, by creating a monument to the feminine principle, which is capable of being housed and exhibited only within a museum, Chicago avoids a direct confrontation with the whole process of history-making — and art history making. She has, quite rightly, perceived her own exclusion and the denial of female imagery and experience from the male-dominated art world. She then perceived the exclusion of young women art students within the art education system and she went on in her research to perceive the exclusion of women in general from history in general.

The Dinner Party, unfortunately, suggests a remedy for this exclusion which reinforces rather than replaces the prevailing, patriarchal reading of history and culture. It suggests that the Great Man theory can become the Great Woman and Man theory; that monuments are not such a bad thing and all that's missing are Women's monuments. The problem with this analysis is that it is the antithesis of self-determination, the antithesis of cultural democracy and thus, to me, the antithesis of feminism.

Feminism, which has demanded and provided, a new and radical analysis of the family and thus of the nature of power structures and hierarchy itself, is not necessarily informed by the knowledge of the existence of a female pope or a female pharaoh. Female "leadership", within already-existing hierarchies may have a different quality, but it does not guarantee any lasting alteration to the status-quo. Which brings me to the much-touted form of production of *The Dinner Party*. It has been said that Chicago "re-invented a whole new way to do art". I don't necessarily think her method was that revolutionary. Rather it is a further extension of the industrial fabrication method which many minimalist artists employed and continue to employ in the production of their sculpture. The only difference is that Chicago has used the cottage industries rather than heavy industry to fabricate her work of art. But she, like other artists, maintained "full esthetic control" of her project. In spite of the use of feminist concepts such as consciousness raising sessions, *The Dinner Party* was produced within a hierarchy — or as she herself has defined it "a benevolent hierarchy". If one believes that *The Dinner Party* needed to happen no matter what, then quibbling about collective or collaborative production is unnecessary. But it seems to me that the very conception of the piece itself, the methodology of its production and the over-powering persona of its creator places it within the standard art history continuum — which is essentially male and cannot be reformed.

The Dinner Party is, in a very traditional sense, a "work of art" which seeks entry into the temple of "high art", in order to secure for itself (and for its creator) a place in history. This, to my mind, is not a feminist quest. History, art history and language itself are constructs which we cannot simply invade, get 50 per cent parity and expect that feminist ideals will be brought to life automatically.

Earlier I mentioned self-determination and cultural democracy in relation to feminist art practice. By this I mean a spreading out of the creation — not

just the manufacture — of cultural images and activity. For example, you could think of a playwright going into a neighbourhood and working with the youth who live there, getting them to perform her play. These youth would have a considerably different experience than if someone went in and assisted these same youth to write and perform their own play about their own lives. I am not suggesting that only the latter is *authentic* production; both are obviously valid ways of working. The trouble comes when Chicago becomes insistent about the collective or collaborative form of production of *The Dinner Party* while at the same time claiming "full aesthetic control". It simply cannot be done.

In closing, I would say that in *The Dinner Party* Judy Chicago presents a central image — the vagina — to symbolize women. Well, despite the fact that we women all have one, it may not be how we would all seek to represent ourselves. Nor would many of us who are artists seek inclusion in art history the way Chicago has suggested it.

She has said that *The Dinner Party* "represents the fusion of women's ideas from the context traditionally associated with women — that is needlework — to the context traditionally associated with men — painting. It is this infusion of the whole stream of women's history and creative genius into the structure of civilization that *The Dinner Party* is all about." In other words, women's work is women's but civilization is painting. As a definition of civilization and culture, I would have to reject this.

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Defending *The Dinner Party*

Varda Burstyn

I want to begin my contribution with just a word or two about the processes involved in criticism, and to point to two dynamics which are often at play at any given point in time. First of all, people tend to set up a series of criteria and then to follow them to their logical conclusions, and sometimes this leads to positions which are somewhat one sided, lacking in nuance or qualification, or to premature polarisation. Secondly, when specialists in a given field evaluate a given artifact, one often finds a tendency to employ different criteria than those used by 'ordinary people', by non-specialists, who usually comprise the bulk of the audience, so to speak, of the cultural product. Neither of these dynamics invalidates points that are made in the critical process, but they do indicate that we need to have a certain perspective on such points. In other words, we need to allow for ambiguous or contradictory meanings in a given piece; and we also need to allow for and take into account the responses of a mass audience, if it exists. We should try to make sense of these responses and to see what is right, as well as what might be mistaken.

When the panel met for a discussion of this event, I discovered that I would be the only one to speak in defense of *The Dinner Party*. I had originally been slotted to speak about the difference in the contexts — the early seventies and the late seventies-early eighties respectively — in which Chicago and associates conceived, created and finally delivered the piece, and to evaluate the piece in these terms. I was by no means uncritical of the work, with Lisa I shared a whole number of problems regarding the criteria which had been employed for selecting the women commemorated by the dinner plates. Working class women remain invisible, almost all are white, middle or upper class European and American women. With others I had reservations about the scale of the piece insofar as it made the cost of mounting it very high and relegated it to the art galleries, which are not the usual stomping grounds of the majority of women. With Carlyn I shared some unease at the Christian overtones of aspects of the piece; with many others I felt uncomfortable with the relatively little credit given to the 'working community' of people who made this piece possible. I thought too that if female forms were the *dernier cri* in 1972, perhaps they had lost their impact for



Joss MacLennan

many in 1982. As one artist acquaintance of mine said in Montreal when she heard *The Dinner Party* was coming to town: "Big deal! I'm tired of looking at vaginas." That remark would never have occurred to her in 1972.

But dynamics being what they are, although I felt that my fellow panelists argued their points of view very compellingly, I went home and tried to think out more clearly why I, despite these shared criticisms and others, still came away thinking that *The Dinner Party* is a great work of art, and one which advances, rather than retards, women's ability to make their — our — own history, artistically, and in every other sense.

Thus my remarks tonight are couched in very positive terms, because I think that the problems with the piece have been well-articulated, but its strengths either underplayed, denied or ignored. My comments relating to the strengths of the work have a lot to do with my own perception of the sec-

ond dynamic at work — the difficulties arising from the distance between the specialists and the large number of people who comprise the audience for a particular art, or work of art. I do want to say from the outset, though, that I find the piece, both in its parts and as a whole, very powerful and moving; my defence of it is grounded in my own feelings for it, first and foremost. I am not conducting an exercise in 'fair play' here, nor simply assuming a devil's advocate position.

I want to take up two related sets of issues: first, the forms used in the piece, their symbolic value, and the ideological significance of the manner of selection of the women and the women themselves. Second, the related issues of monumentalism, main/malestream art institutions and the question of a feminist artistic counterculture.

With the popularisation of Freudian terminology, the notion of a 'phallic symbol' has become almost clichéd. Clichéd though it may be, the overweening power of the phallic form cannot be denied in our culture. On the other hand, we cannot deny the extraordinarily negative connotations associated with the vulva and vagina, and with their symbolic representations, in western culture as a whole. Usually, when these forms are represented, they come across in one of two ways: either they are deprived of power, 'naturalised' (Suze Randall, photographer for the pornographic magazine *Hustler* says in the film, *Not a Love Story* (N.F.B.) that publisher Larry Flint wanted to "make the Pussy look like a flower"), or when empowered, they are always tinged with the sinister or threatening (dark caves, swirling vortexes, engulfing greedy spaces, toothed openings). In most cases — from pornography to high art — the association with women's genitals is 'nature', whereas the association with men's genitals (the phallus) is culture: that which is made, created, imagined, constructed, that which distinguishes human from animal, that which gives humans their essence, according to many of the great philosophers, feminist as well as masculinist.

The plates — the series of central forms at the core of *The Dinner Party* — provide a disturbing and fundamental challenge to these misogynist values. The vulval/vaginal forms are displayed in all their strength, beauty, colour and variety, making open and known what has been hidden and secret, asserting pride in the form. Judy Chicago is not unique in this aspect of her work. Ann Severson made a film called *Near the Big Chakra* — a series of shots of vulva/vagina, some still, some in motion. I like to tell the story of what happened at the London screening of this film, because it illustrates so clearly how deep the negativity surrounding women's genitals reaches in our society. The story goes that many people in the audience had a very difficult time sitting still and watching the film, and towards the end, one man was so overcome that he actually vomited. It's not easy for people socialized in our society to gaze upon the source of their own life and of female pleasure without feeling deeply disturbed by all the associations with it churning away below the surface of consciousness. *The Dinner Party* not only pushes people — men and women — to look at these feelings, and to question them, but it also encourages people to find the roots of their positive feelings

about women's sexuality, rather than their feelings of fear, among this agglomeration of emotions.

Chicago doesn't just leave us with shots of the vulva/vagina, *au naturel*, letting all of our feelings of ambivalence run riot. These are not sexual forms pure and simple. They are forms which are sexual and cultural at one and the same time. Therefore, they are exceptionally moving and powerful, and profoundly rejecting of the myth that woman conceives only with her womb, while man is master of the brain. When first looking at the plates, many women feel uncomfortable with these forms. But after the initial difficulty, hundreds of thousands of women have recognized the representation of their own power on the table, and they have rejoiced. Christian overtones of arrangement and ritual notwithstanding, the piece is executed in the spirit of human divinity and the female principle. For many of the same reasons, this piece has an extraordinary impact on men, and this is crucial to its value as well.

There is some important truth in the criticism that *The Dinner Party* resonates with the "Great Woman theory of history" and some have argued that this approach blends all too easily with and reinforces the "Great Man theory of history". That Judy Chicago did not see fit to making a plate to "Anonymous" (the feminist saying "Anonymous was a woman" is more or less self-explanatory) much the same way men make plaques to the forgotten soldier; that she did not choose to put at least one of Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai or Rosa Luxemburg — feminist revolutionaries of enormous stature and my candidates for the wing of the table devoted to the twentieth century; but that she did choose to commemorate say, Queen Elizabeth I — these are real weaknesses, in my opinion.

But: she and her associates did give us impeccably wrought representations of women of achievement, of strength, intelligence, and, indeed, power. Women and men need to see the possibility of a history of women's strength that takes this kind of primal (pre-verbal), imagistic shape. I try to guard against tendencies to idealize people, and to abdicate my critical faculties to others whom I idealize. But when I think of Boadicea, the Celtic



Varda Burstyn

queen who led all the Britons in war against the Roman empire because she could not bear the gross indignity of the rape of her four daughters; when I think of Elizabeth Blackwell who decided to crash the barriers of medicine because as a young girl she saw women dying of peritonitis; when I think of Georgia O'Keeffe alone on the wind-swept dunes of New Mexico, an advanced voyager of the spiritual journey; when I think of all of these women I don't feel that my critical faculties are numbed. On the contrary, it makes me feel proud to be a woman, it makes me feel good about myself, it brings a lump to my throat. It makes me feel like trying harder to produce work of quality and social value; it makes me proud of my mother who taught me that women could do anything, but that, as a duty, they had to fight for each other as women first; in other words it makes me identify with and aspire to the spirit of these women — these role models, if you like, using the drier language of sociology. And I don't think that's a bad thing, in fact, I think it's good. In terms of psychological development, all human children develop their sense of identity through the processes of identification with people who are their ego ideals — parents, teachers, friends, siblings. The tendency to relate this way is built into our psychical apparatus. It can be used for good or for ill. I think Chicago has used it, overall, in a very positive manner. Women need to have heroines of their own whose lives represent qualities to which to aspire. Men need to be reminded of all these things as well.

When I interrogated a woman artist friend of mine on her critical thoughts on *The Dinner Party*, she said "I like it, but here's the thing. My mother (who is a single, working woman in her late fifties) flew in from Halifax to Montreal to see *The Dinner Party*. And she thought it was fantastic."

Monumentalism, Mainstream and Malestream Art

Taking up the accusation of 'monumentalism' might be the best way to connect some of the issues relating to form and content to those of distribution and consumption. It is my sense that having artifacts which commemorate great female forces in history is a positive choice. I also think that having them in a large installation to give some sense of awe and wonder, as well as convey the crime of their entombment, is just fine. *The Dinner Party* is not 'monumentalist' in the usual sense. It is not just a large, expensive artifact; it has some organic relation to its subject matter and its community. However, the question remains of where to put such a large installation, and it's a difficult question to answer.

My initial reaction to the kind of work which necessitates placement in a big art museum was that it is badly conceived — for all the reasons which have been stated.

However, when I started to think these attitudes through, I came up with some snags. First of all, if it's OK for women to make work on such a large scale, and I think it is, it will require facilities large and safe enough to house it. These facilities are few and far between, and none of them are controlled by women, let alone working class women. What then should the artist do? Try to organize an alternative set of spaces through the feminist community?

Or should she go after the art galleries? I am sympathetic to the first notion, and at times I think it would be first choice. But I think it's important to consider the counterargument, because in many instances, I think it carries the day.

The art galleries are ostensibly public institutions; they are paid for by public funds, that is, working people pay for them, directly and indirectly. Yet working people don't go into the galleries. Why not? Because capital A art has been presented to them as something above them, something they can't understand, something accessible only to smart, that is educated, that is rich people. And if that is what art is, the artist is doubly inaccessible and mystified — someone who somehow manages to plug into a level of knowledge or inspiration completely unavailable to them. And if one of these souls should happen to walk into a gallery and see, say, a minimalist show, the mystification multiplies many times over. This is the hallmark of working class oppression — to be told or to feel that you are stupid, that your instincts are worth nothing, and to accept the judgment, and with it, the value it upholds.

If you look at the triangular quilt pieces displayed on the wall going into the exhibit, made by women commemorating other women who have been important to them, and if you are critical of the absence of the working class heroines, a number of pieces leap out. Chiang Ching, the Chinese revolutionary is number one, with four quilt pieces to her name. Flora Tristan, French revolutionary feminist had two or three, Louise Michelle is represented, as are all manner of black, chicana, Asian, Quebecois and native women. And one in particular I want to emphasize — the piece commemorating the woman president of USWA Local 1010 in Chicago, the largest steelworkers's local in the States. These quilts indicate that working class women have seen the show, that they have identified with it, that they recognize themselves in it, and want to have active representation in its 'gestalt', its overall effect. And they have done this...in the museum. They and working class men can — and do — go and see for themselves. Accompanying the piece are long explanations of how it was made — explanations which demystify the production process. Its presence in a gallery represents a defeat for main and malestream art, the curators and the critics who would declare an empty canvas a masterpiece and dismiss *The Dinner Party* with one word of contempt: "Vaginas!" What I am saying here is that it is a good thing when women contest who is to decide, and how they are to decide what goes in the public institutions, when they demand greater accountability and representation.

Every city should have its women's gallery and cultural building; every community needs to have feminist cultural workers (artists) working side by side with their fellow citizens. But these strategies should not exclude challenging 'malestream' culture on its own terrain. I think, despite all its flaws, *The Dinner Party* has managed to do that, very powerfully. And if people want to argue that by doing this, dissent is co-opted, allowing the museums to slide off the hook, I would have to disagree. I think we have to

face the fact that crucial, indispensable, vital though the feminist institutions for culture are, at this point in time they can only be minoritarian; it is also necessary then to take feminist culture into the mainstream institutions. We need to work on a number of levels.

A number of women in union locals which I know of, in Toronto have decided to make an outing to *The Dinner Party*. These women would have been less, not more, likely to come to see the show if it had been installed in a feminist loft-space downtown. They also tell me that the women with whom they work who have seen the piece think it is magnificent. All these factors indicate to me that — and this is not a position I take because I don't want to get off the fence — we need art which is made and distributed in a whole range of modalities. One of these has been occupied by *The Dinner Party*, and given its impact on a mass basis, I think it has advanced the cause of women's art and Women's Liberation in many important ways.

Sistren — Jamaican Theatre Collective



Martha Rosler



Martha Rosler, "dead marines", from the bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems, 1981

Washing the Dishes

Carol Condé

I have been asked to speak tonight on other women artists who, in various ways, are exploring new areas of cultural production as women. The point here is to expand the framework of our discussion of 'feminist art' beyond what might be perceived as either the limitations or achievements of Judy Chicago's work, and to remind ourselves that there is more going on among women artists than a dinner party.

I will talk about feminist art largely in terms of its content, and its relationship to an intended audience. Before I talk about specific women artists, however, I should briefly outline my own position, upon which these choices are made.

As Lisa and Carlyn have already pointed out, Judy Chicago's content manipulates historical reality to serve her own particular vision, and like much of our contemporary culture (which is predominantly male-oriented) eternalizes this vision. She clearly freezes what we know to be a dynamic and evolving movement, creating a mystification rather than a revelation. Her exhibition encourages the already 'popular' notion that feminism is an established position — a firmly entrenched ideology that only seeks to legitimate itself. It reinforces this notion at the very time when we, in this community, are redefining a feminist politics.

In the early 1970s the effects of the growing feminist movement made a dint on women artists in the American art world. Three of the major exponents of a Women's Art in the U.S. were Lucy Lippard, of New York, Judy Chicago, in — need I say where — and Miriam Shapiro, on the West coast.

The main points put forward by these groups were calls for equal recognition and in some cases a separatist, female-based aesthetic.

In New York, I was a member of the Women's Ad Hoc Committee, in which there were women of every persuasion. Some, like Jackie Windsor, opted for the mainstream *kunstmarkt*; some opened women's collective galleries, like A.I.R. for example. A number produced works with feminist aesthetics, while others added social concerns to their feminism to analyse the ideologies of the sexual, social and class structures of society. The magazine *Heresies*, which was started at that time, reflected many of these directions.

But what was progressive for the movement at one point — the self-identity of the individual woman — can become regressive at another. Today, many women cultural producers not only consider themselves a part of the women's movement as such, but see the necessity of addressing their work to the social and political concerns of the movement: abortion, rape, violence against women, gay rights, Third World women, women in the labour movement, etc. Although hierarchal structures still dominate our working environment, the conditions and attitudes towards the struggles have changed.

The popular feminist slogan "Personal is Political" allowed women in the early '70s to reject male-dominated politics and to assert the political nature of their internalized oppression. The main achievement of consciousness-raising lay in providing a structure for women to discover that their problems were not 'mere personal problems' but political issues. From shared personal experience came the theoretical means to analyse patriarchal oppression, and a recognition, by many feminists, that this patriarchy controlled not only the 'women's domain', but perpetuated a larger system of class inequality and manipulation.

Coming back to Chicago's freeze frame, we can see how her piece has mystified the role of women as biological creatures enmeshed in private emotion, domestic labour, and the decorative arts — supposedly in opposition to man, the 'worldly' artist. This private/female-public/male dichotomy establishes difference on a purely sexual basis, rather than perceiving sexuality as socially conditioned.

In relation to this issue Griselda Pollock has effectively argued that both women historians and women artists (like Chicago) have psychologised a social condition. By claiming to express the 'central core' — the 'internalised spirituality of women' they have left unquestioned the political reality of women's lives and have thus reproduced the sexual hierarchy within their very attempts to change it. The private and domestic as subject matter, the biological imagery, along with the non-critical use of 'women's crafts' are seen by Chicago as the material of women's self-expression. But it must be remembered that these particular activities are assigned to women by the social division of labour; they are not, therefore, 'natural' to women.

With the current crises in both ideology and the economy, particularly as it affects women, it is, I believe, even more important for women artists to take an active role in connecting culture to social conditions. The polarity of

social problems and private ones must be bridged; 'sexual self-examination' must be surpassed by a 'social sexuality'.* This means dealing with the social dimensions of women's issues as well as traditional 'women's concerns'. For me, Art is a social practice. Its prime aim is to make sense of the world we live in and to articulate the need for change. With this expansion of women's political view of their role in society and its expression in cultural forms the Women's Movement can effect social change, leaving Judy Chicago to wash the dishes.

I'd like to describe some women artists who contribute to both the cultural work, analysis, and theory, not only of the women's movement, but broad social movements as well. These examples are only a few out of many and are not a judgement of quality; they only serve as an introduction to a complex range of concerns and do not attempt to address the equally important issue of form and its relation to content.

Amelia Productions is a collective of women working with a Vancouver cable access station. Their documentary video tapes deal with women's issues and with women in various social movements — the effects of micro-technology on women's health, maternity benefits, lesbian mothers, occupational health and safety, etc. A tape made on the occupation of B.C. Tel offices depicts a process by which women operators were able to enlist the support of male workers in their fight for equal pay. In their tape on the native women's occupation of the B.C. Indian Affairs Offices, the native women graphically told of their degrading relationship to the welfare system, of state control over their lives, and the resulting alcoholism, violence, battered wives and lack of employment in the area.

Martha Rosler is an American artist whose work actively opposes this society's economic and social structures. She deals with alienated domestic labour and sexual oppression as part of a larger political framework. In many of her works the kitchen is the site of this struggle. The politics of food, and

* That is, an understanding of sexuality not as simply the difference in private male-female roles, but as the way in which social life and institutions are sexually constructed.



Carol Condé, right, Varda Burstyn left

food as social production, are used in the articulation of the larger political issues of women and class. In one of her works, world economics are revealed through a mother, father, daughter relationship hinging on the subject of food, but this time from another perspective: anorexia. The colonization of the Third World, spliced with the politics of the art world, are the subject of another tape in which Rosler is talking with her son over dinner.

Barbara Hammer is a lesbian experimental filmmaker in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her films present female imagery of sexuality and eroticism, sometimes from a personalized perspective, sometimes exploring female cultural remnants, such as an old Peruvian convent. Her work is experimental, concentrating on surfaces and textures, going from the personal to the environmental and back. One film moves from a view of herself masturbating to shots of landscape. In another the shots of a hair cutting session reflect, formally, a widening perspective as the hair becomes shorter, the shots become wider. Her work attempts to extend the personal into the social and this is also evidenced in the presentation which she gives to her films in audience settings, providing the personal, anecdotal context in which her experimental work is made accessible to almost any audience.

Deborah Barndt is a photographer in Toronto, who has spent time working in Latin America. She recently was in Nicaragua setting up rural workshops in order for the people to produce their own photo novels as part of the literacy campaign. She is currently touring Canada with her work to raise money for further education projects there. In Toronto she has worked with immigrant women in English as a second language programs, using the women's stories as photo/texts for work books. She sees her photographic work as being intimately tied to women's education.

Lorrain Leeson is an English artist who has done work around community and trade union issues. She works in collaboration with Peter Dunn. Their most recent project has involved the production of posters and billboards in the Docklands community of East London, which is being ravaged by multinational mega-development projects. Prior to this Lorraine did a series of posters of women and health care, concentrating on mental health. She's also done work around occupations of hospitals in order to stop their closures. Although the work has been shown in art galleries, it is made for use in the community. The work and its uses (very direct support of community political strategies) question and re-evaluate the very terms and location of cultural practice.

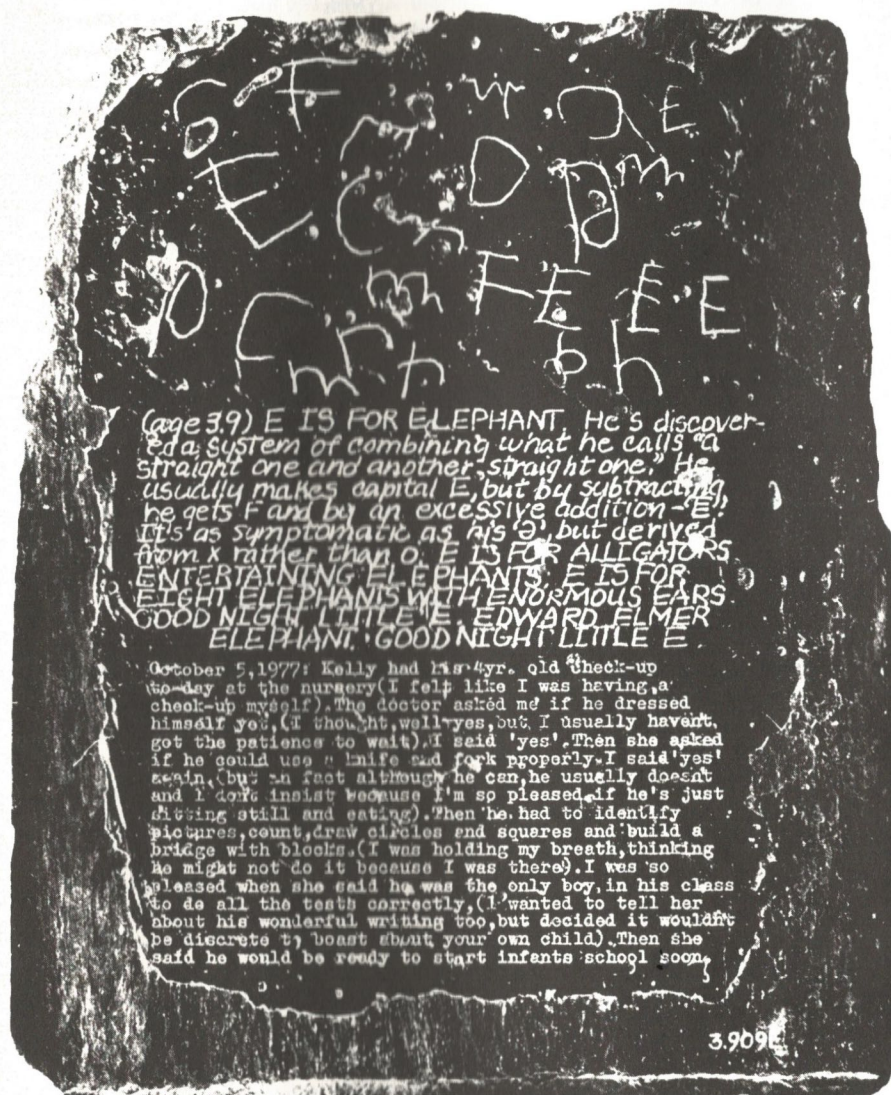
Merilyn Fairskye lives in Sydney, Australia. She works collaboratively with various people on community and labour murals. At present, she is working with a number of artists on a series of outdoor murals, depicting the history of a working class district of Sydney. The subjects included are: the history of aboriginal peoples, women, labour and urban development in the area. Prior to this series she worked with two other artists on a mural in a bottle factory which depicted the history and lives of the men and women who worked there.

I might also mention that a group of women in Sydney produced a series of

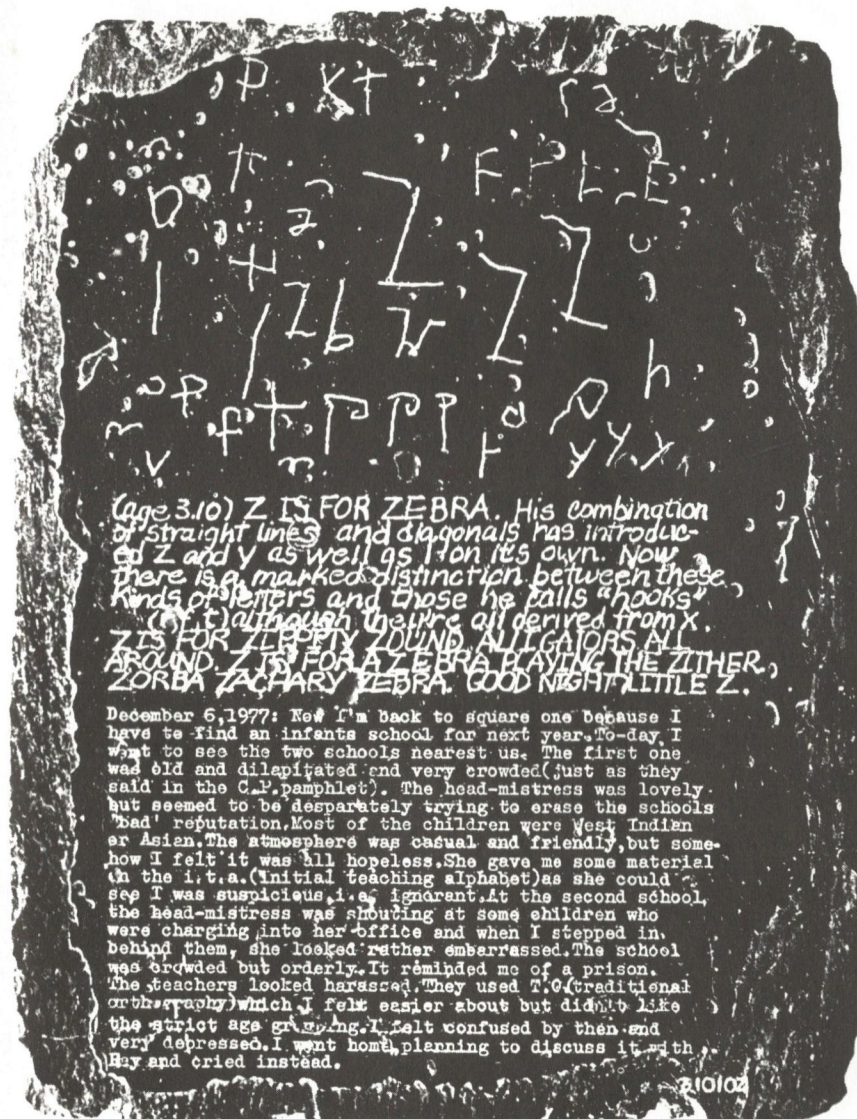
posters on women and traditional crafts, called the "Needlework Project". The series traced the cultural development and social context of women's crafts in Australia and their relation to both the identification with and resistance to the male-dominated society. The posters were done in large runs and many were posted on the streets.

Mary Kelly works in England. Over the past few years her work has focused on the issue of the representation of women through language. The work itself consists of many panels tracing and analysing the history of a mother/son relationship. Placing her psychic self-identification as mother against concepts of pre-existing sexuality and essential femininity, she presents these as constructed social codes that ultimately can be deconstructed.

So, aside from the women mentioned here, there are members of the Women's Cultural Building who, for obvious reasons, I have left out, as well as many others who collectively or singly, are producing work that may not have the scale or packaging of Judy Chicago's current exhibition but which are more accurately perceptive and expressive of women's conditions.



Mary Kelly, Post-Partum Document VI: Pre-writing, Alphabet, Exergue and Diary, 1979. Slate and resin, detail, sixteen units 35 x 27 cm.





Deborah Barndt, Peruvian Woman



Deborah Barndt, Portuguese Woman Pauses In Front of a Beauty Salon



Joyce Mason has worked primarily in film exhibition and arts administration and was the organiser of *A New Look: Women and Film 1982*, at this year's Canadian Images Film Festival (Peterborough, Ontario). Joyce is a member of the Women's Cultural Building Collective and is currently working with *Fuse* magazine.

Rosemary Donegan is a Canadian art historian and arts administrator, who has also worked in film and publishing. Rosemary was a founding member of the Women's Press Collective and of the Women's Cultural Building. She has produced a series of posters for the labour movement entitled, "Reflections of our Labour".

Kay Armatage is a filmmaker, critic and professor of film and Women's Studies at the University of Toronto. Kay programmed two major portions of this year's Festival of Festivals (Toronto September 1982): "New Directors /New Directions" and "Midnight Madness"; and was one of the organisers of the first "Women and Film: International Film Festival", which took place in Toronto in 1973.

Carlyn Moulton currently works as a freelance writer and editor, having completed undergraduate and graduate studies in theology and history. As a researcher/editor/writer, she has worked for the *Globe and Mail*, Anansi Press and several independent film productions; her articles, poetry and fiction have appeared in a broad range of Canadian publications. Carlyn is a member of the Women's Cultural Building Collective.

Lisa Steele is a women's shelter worker, an independent producer of video tapes and a contributing editor for *Fuse* magazine. Her most recent video tape, entitled "Some Call it Bad Luck", premiered in July 1982. She is a founding member of the Women's Cultural Building.

Varda Burstyn is a writer, socialist-feminist, and political theorist. She taught a course during the summer of 1982 on "Marxism, Feminism and Psychoanalysis," and is currently preparing a programme series for CBC-FM radio's "Ideas", which is entitled, "Feminism in the Political Arena". The series is scheduled for broadcast on Tuesday evenings in March 1983 (March 1, 8, 15 and 22).

Carole Condé is a visual artist, socialist and member of the Women's Cultural Building Collective. She has recently completed a forthcoming photobook titled "Standing Up" in co-operation with the women in the United Steelworkers, and is currently working on a photo project on the history of the U.A.W. in Oshawa. Carole is also a contributing editor for *Fuse* magazine.

Acknowledgements: **Johanna Householder**, who found a suitable space for the panel discussion. **Louise Garfield** and **Janice Hladki**, who acted as production managers for the event, and **Paulette Phillips** of Trinity Square Video who, along with **Linda Mulhall** and **Phyllis Waugh** videotaped the event.

Photos from their tape by **Rosemary Donegan**

And all the members and friends of the Collective, who gave up time on the weekends in the month preceding the panel discussion to hand out flyers and to sell buttons in front of the AGO, in our effort to let people know about the panel and other planned Women's Cultural Building events and activities.

Lisa Steele's paper was originally published in *Fuse* magazine Volume 6, number 3, September, 1982.

Ressemblance-s

Azélie, Zee Artand

Dans le couloir des allures
il ya glissures des mêmes
_____ excellent pour la transpiration
des mauvais risques

combinaison 943
double

et pourtant se ressayer dans la doublure
de la triple action présente dans sa

_____ dissolution
Encore là il ya du déjà
vu dans la trame

— Essuyer la chaleur formule
— Être là sans être unique

RESSEMBLANCE — RASSEMBLEMENT
inévitabile
apparition
du sous-lieu
attroupement

urgence nullement nécessaire dans la respira-
tion

IMAGE
SONS COUPÉS
1 000 PIEDS

ROMPRE LAISSER CUIRE

inutile de vérifier si la reproduction s'est
faite

inutile aussi de _____

Double de ses origines

complicité couchée
afin de permettre d'autres sortes de
ressemblances à répétition(s) qui sont
tellement visibles dans l'alentour

— A quoi tu ressembles?

— À l'autres.

— Pourquoi tu ne ressembles à rien?

— Dans mon cas, ce n'est pas nécessaire

ROMPRE SANS CUIRE

combinaison accordée ()

âge:

ton âge:

Une autre attend la visite:

C'est dans ces termes que l'autre...

«Les gens ont besoin des uns des autres»

**CANNIBALISME
RESSEMBLANCES
AUCUN ALIBI**

Il n'y restait que deux petits lits pliants
et de là imitation des grands soupirs,
tante Gertrude en était très satisfaite.
Elle disait souvent «plus c'est semblable
moins je m'ennuie» et d'ajouter «je m'étonne»

Elle regardait sortir les soupirs par la
porte de service et n'oubliait pas ses rêves de (
et de là sur la même quelque imitation
elle n'oubliait pas ses
dangereuses visions

analyse: résultat: ressemblances
ANONYMAT

DOUBLURE

— Moi je m'appelle encore
— Moi je ne peux plus car ma ressemblance
ne s'identifie à rien

CUIRE ET LAISSER RAFRAICHIR

belle chair va!
(cendres, humidité)
aujourd'hui — hier — aujourd'hui

Le grand collage

HORAIRE
TÉLÉGRAMME
ENFIN COMME
aucune imitation possible de ce calque
absorption dans l'image

COMBINAISON (OUVERTE
cri d'alarme non-censurable
CONVERSATION (essuyage par la
récitation)

personnages-doublures se donnant l'absolution

CONFORMITÉ — CONFORT — **ALIBI** ()

vider la dimension

d'autres, présences dans la traversée (**COMPERCEPTION**)

télégramme

il y a les rôles à tour de rôle
sachant son rôle
mais le sachant pas si beau rôle

Image(s) dans cette fraîcheur

CUIRE — LAISSER RAFRAICHIR

interrogation

COLORATION

activités en archipel à la racine des
vecteurs () circulaires

aujourd'hui — hier — aujourd'hui

ligne 22

Êtes-vous occupée?

Reprinted from *La Barre du Jour* No. 97, December, 1980.

Linda Lok





The Silence Around Christine M.

a film by Marleen Gorris, Holland, 1981, 92 minutes, colour, English sub-titles

Renée Baert

An uncompromising new film from Holland has begun to surface in North America, and the response it is provoking suggests it has been effective in subverting the complacent middleground of sexism. Crackling with anger and insight, emphatically partial, the film's transparent intention is to expose to scrutiny the underpinnings of entrenched patriarchy. Along the way, it provides a rich and varied account of crime and culpability.

In the opening sequences of the film, three women are brought in for questioning in the brutal murder of a male boutique owner. At the police station, it becomes apparent that, despite their shared crime, they are otherwise totally unknown to one another. While none disputes the charges, neither will they provide any motivation for the killing — indeed, Christine has ceased speaking altogether.

A female psychiatrist, Janine van den Bos, is appointed by the courts to examine the prisoners and provide a report for the trial on their mental condition. The men who surround Janine in her personal and professional life freely prescribe a report of insanity: no sane person, they contend, could have perpetrated a crime of such barbarous proportion. They view her examination as a mere formality.

Who are these women who have spontaneously committed this dispassionate act? The externals of their lives are easily read: Christine, a housewife with three young children; Annie, separated, a waitress and short-order cook; Anna, single, an executive secretary. But layered glimpses into the conditions of their existence, through flashbacks and through the process of Janine's investigation, unfold details of lives forcefully compressed.

Christine's husband, a minor civil servant, is bewildered by her action and frustrated by the wrenching adjustments it has caused in his life. He admits to occasional irritation at Christine's failure to live up to his expectations of her role within the family, but can locate no clues within the marriage to explain her crime. He finds nothing extraordinary in her silence: it was completely in character for her to go for days without speaking.

Annie has been abandoned years earlier by her husband and left to raise alone a daughter now grown and distant. In the restaurant where she works, she bustles with platters and wisecracks, serving as butt of and foil to the ribald bantering of her male customers. At home, her jauntiness is overcast by solitude and recollections of loss. When Janine asks her whether she has



The Silence Around Christine M. Photo courtesy of Barbara Martineau and Broadside.

ever considered re-marrying, she whoops with laughter.

Anna has worked for men all her life and, as a direct consequence, holds them in utter contempt. We see her at a company meeting, providing to the men assembled the background information on a business deal, together with a crisp analysis of the appropriate action to be taken. Moments later, while her hands toy with a coffee cup and her eyes stare blankly ahead, one of the men paraphrases her unacknowledged assessment as his own and is roundly congratulated for his astute recommendations. There was never any possibility of her advancement within the firm, her employer tells Janine: she is a secretary.

Janine's investigation is blocked by a lack of co-operation and interest on the part of her clients. Christine's silence is absolute, though she shows Janine her drawings: stick figures of a man, a woman, a child, contained within a box. Annie's lack of communication is couched in volubility: she chatters on cheerfully as Janine probes — then erupts one day with a sudden, hysterical anger, trashing her room. Anna counters Janine's questions with questions of her own — cool, hard questions that challenge Janine to employ her own experience as the agent of insight.

There is dimension and mystery within the silences that surround Christine. Her normal state of silence assumes an untested potency when she is caught shoplifting by the boutique owner. Fixing him with a terrified, deliberate gaze, she refuses to surrender the stolen object. Annie and Anna silently and separately observe this incident and begin to discompose the owner by quietly flaunting repetitions of the original crime. The voiceless rebellion encircling this man takes on the character of a grisly dance in which each successive gesture amplifies the intensity of movement — a motion becomes a strike, a strike becomes a blow, a blow becomes a beating, a beating becomes a savaging, a savaging becomes a murder. Four women lend silent witness to this composed eruption. Later, each of the three criminals observes in silence a private ritual of passage. The forms of silence the accused have assumed for themselves act as inversions of and counterpoint to the silences traditionally imposed upon them.

The horror of the crime, her conviction of the rationality of the women and her inability to penetrate the connection between them, haunt Janine. In order to fathom the enigma, Janine is compelled to enter the territory of this silence. The voices she hears within it, and within herself, lead her through a process of personal transformation. She comes to say of Christine: "Why should she talk? Who would listen to her?" She comes to compare the murder to an atrocity of war. She comes to recognize that her state of privilege is not a state of exemption.

The silence surrounding Christine resides at the heart of the film, but its critical mind is revealed through the process of Janine's metamorphosis from neutral professional to engaged feminist. Her increasing empathy with the accused women is rewarded when Christine breaks her silence to entrust Janine with a domestic message. But Janine's emotional and intellectual gains are countered by losses in her social and professional credibility.

At the trial, the conditional nature of her authority and independence within a patriarchal status quo lies starkly revealed.

As the trial commences, the camera pans coolly along the front of the courtroom, where the key players are assembled: the men who will act as judges, jurors, prosecutors, defence, clerks, witnesses for the prosecution. Suddenly the four female witnesses enter the gallery and, seated together, extend discreet and friendly greetings to the accused. The film audience stirs in a spontaneous greeting of recognition: we, too, are observers in this suspect court; we, too, have given silent witness to a murder; we, too, have a purchase on complicity. In the final scenes, when the judge tries frantically to restore order to a courtroom in pandemonium, we, too, are behaving in contempt of court.

It is this identification which has so strongly marked response to the film on the part of women; while *TIME* magazine has decried it as "man-hating", women seem to leave the theatre in the best of humour, and with an upbeat sense of female solidarity. This identification is encouraged by the formal structure of the film, in which the audience is adroitly led to a recognition of the social dynamics that have prompted a murderous rebellion.

In an early scene, when Janine asserts that her report can have an advantageous effect on the disposition of sentencing, Anna responds dryly: "Your report will have no influence whatsoever." The dual facets of a superb and dovetailed irony are exposed in a consideration of the implications of an adjudgement of the women's sanity: such a ruling, though certain to confound the state (through the agent of the prosecutor), would undoubtedly increase the severity of the penalty.

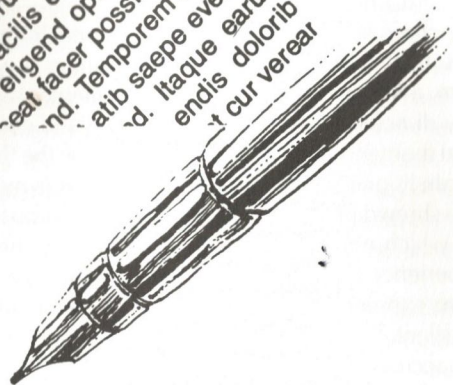
The film does not proceed to the conclusion of the trial. The prosecutor's contention that the crime was not sex-specific leads to a startling outburst of laughter from Christine, an insubordination which becomes increasingly uproarious as she is joined in laughter by Annie and Anna, the four witnesses, Janine, and, in concert, the (female) audience. The film plays this chord to a final note of triumph.

As the echoes from the film's vivid emotional inflection fade, the disturbing issues it has raised come into sharper and more enduring focus — and with them, a keener recognition of the strategies by which the film-maker has deftly directed both the action and the audience. The triumph of the film's final moments is, after all, a transient one: the three women will inevitably remain in prison. The conventions of misogyny are exposed by Gorris through a shrewd manipulation of the film's composite elements — a manipulation which nonetheless earns its legitimacy through its depiction of a lived experience that its audience can, and does, authenticate.

The film succeeds in being, finally, what its central characters cannot. They are silent; the film is outspoken. They are powerless; the film is potent. They are accused; the film is an indictment. They are imprisoned; the film, thankfully, is in circulation.

"A woman writer, however excellent her writing, remains eccentric rather than typical in humanity's imagination until we shape our institutional perceptions to fit the human reality."

M. Travis Lane



Mary Trafford

Bemused, Branded, and Belittled

Women and Writing in Canada

Sharon H. Nelson

Research:

Sharon Batt Julie Bruck Lee Courtois Sandra Lambert

Technical Support:

Peter Grogono, Metonymy Productions

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Preface

The classic question in murder mysteries is: who benefits? Perhaps I have read too many mysteries; when I am told that something is good, or desirable, or to be encouraged, I wonder: good for whom? We should ask this question often when we evaluate institutions that claim to support cultural activities.

The Liberal Government pays lip-service to equality for all Canadians. Cultural policies, however, are based on the assumption that Canadians are white, affluent and male. This is the population best served by Canadian cultural agencies. For instance, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) *Guide for Applicants* states that SSHRC "supports research focussed on the study of man..."

This article is concerned with the situation of women writers and in particular their exclusion from the cultural mainstream. Parts of the analysis can be applied to others who cannot or will not support, create, or contribute to a culture that serves the illusion that Canadians are white, affluent, and male.

A recent paper by Nanci Rossov, "The Chicken and the Egg: Women in Broadcasting," and her report of the situation to the Department of Communications, "Women in Broadcasting," make it clear that there is a direct relation between the images of women to which we are exposed and our expectations of behaviour. Many of the findings in relation to images of women in broadcast material can be applied to other media and especially to printed material.

Sharon Batt, Julie Bruck, Lee Courtois, and Sandra Lambert carried out much of the research for this report; Status of Women Canada defrayed some of the costs of this research.

The Economics of Writing

Canadians spend more per capita on books than people in any other country, journalist James Adams reported in the *Edmonton Journal* last year. Toronto literary agent Lucinda Vardy estimates that eighty percent of the people in Canada who buy books are women. This figure is consistent with the American situation delineated by Coser, Kadushin, and Powell in a major study, *Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing* (Basic Books, 1982). The exact figure is unavailable and in any case is much less relevant than the fact, admitted by almost everyone, that a large proportion of the book-buying public in Canada is female. Strangely, this information about the market is not reflected in the content of book sections of Canadian newspapers or in reviews and articles in general circulation or literary magazines.

Although, according to Adams' figures, women funnel almost \$700 million a year into the Canadian economy via their book-buying habits, Canadian publishers, editors, and reviewers conduct their business as if they are ignorant of the constitution of the Canadian market. Neither is the investment Canadian women make annually in books reflected in government cultural policies or agency support of feminist presses or women writers.

Literary publishing in Canada is an endeavour in which commercial success is not the norm. In practice, Canadian literary publishing as it now exists is the creation of the Canadian Government and especially of the Canada Council which supports all Canadian literary publishing.

There is an enormous dependency in the Canadian arts community on funding from various levels of government, with the federal government, directly through the Canada Council, and indirectly through other agencies, particularly the SSHRC, picking up the largest share of the tab. In the arts community, the Canada Council is the goose that lays the golden egg. It is seldom disturbed lest criticism be appropriated by "anti-culture philistines" and used as reason to cut funding. Federal funding thus insulates the arts community, fosters stereotypes and mistrust of those outside the arts administration and approved circles, and keeps the arts community dependent, with a large part of the dependency being fed by a single source. The Canada Council, whatever its faults, is supposed to be better than nothing. This may not be true. There may be alternatives other than "the Canada Council or nothing."

There is a lot of private grumbling about government funding and about

the Canada Council in particular. It is difficult to credibly criticise a system which has personally or professionally benefited you, harder yet to criticise a system you are trying to enter and in which you hope to succeed. The Canadian arts administration and the establishment of publishers, reviewers, and critics it supports benefit greatly from this and from the lack of real alternatives.

While it is taken for granted that every organization and specialists in every field will deplore budget cuts, lack of funds, and rejection of applications for new programs, it is understood that this kind of me-tooism, which was the *cri de coeur* of most of the Applebaum-Hébert submissions, is directed to the politicians and the finance committees rather than against the Canada Council, the SSHRC, or parallel government funding programs.

Professionalizing Culture

The language in which the arts are discussed demonstrates that the present government has tried to professionalize the arts. Terms such as "culture industries" are current. The assumptions that underlie such terminology remain unexamined. This is particularly true in reference to discussions of the "publishing industry."

Whole mythologies about writers and writing are created. They are believed because they are statistical and therefore mystifying and because they are officially endorsed. They are produced by the government for the government. They are misleading.

For instance, a major report, *Canadian Freelance Writers: Characteristics and Issues*, was recently released by the Research and Statistics Directorate of the Department of Communications (DOC). In it, Brian Harrison reports that sixty-three percent of the freelance writers surveyed held paid jobs aside from writing, that twenty-eight percent of those who classified themselves as full-time freelance writers (worked more than thirty hours per week writing) had supplementary income, and that fifty-seven percent of freelance writers held "other" full-time jobs.

Of all writers surveyed, barely thirty percent work full time at writing. Seventy percent of the writers surveyed by the Department of Communications are not actually "full-time writers," by any reasonable definition, regardless of the thirty hours or more a week they spend writing. As a definition, the thirty hour cut-off point is arbitrary.

There is no discussion of productivity, no figures concerning the primary source of income in relation to the hours worked to earn that primary income, the relation of these numbers to the actual numbers of hours writing and the earnings from it, and, most important, whether the writer is satisfied with the mixed workload and, if not, what the ideal would be. We do not

know what percentage of the writers surveyed are or wish to be full-time, professional writers. We have no basis on which to judge whether separation into full and part-time categories is appropriate, and whether meaningful generalizations about them can be made or to whom they apply.

For instance, Harrison states that the "majority of Canada's writers were men in 1979. In fact, 58% of all writers were men, and if we consider full-time writers only, the percentage climbs to 64 percent." The presentation is interesting. If you read Harrison's report carefully and keep a pocket calculator handy, you will realize that 19.2 is the percentage of full-time male writers and 10.2 is the percentage of full-time female writers in the sample. It would therefore be misleading although statistically accurate to argue that because sixty-four percent of full-time freelance writers are male, one should expect a parallel publication statistic for male writers. Further, the graphs, charts, and text present and imply comparison between full-time and part-time writers as if there were a balance in the sample. This is completely misleading.

It may be naive to assume that more than a small proportion of the freelance writers in Canada write only part time because the economics of writing do not allow them to write full time. The assumption that freelance writers work at other jobs to supplement their income from writing may be putting the cart before the horse. There is no way of telling from the DOC statistics how many freelance writers engage in writing activities because they have spare time, because it is part of their jobs, for reasons of advancement within other professions to which they are primarily committed, or because they feel a need to communicate and endorse a particular perspective.

It is only natural that a government concerned with professionalization of the arts and with the economic success of "culture industries" should make it appear that there is a large group of income-earning, full-time writers. What needs to be examined is whether DOC survey and reporting techniques are appropriate to writers. The crucial question is: are such techniques too closely linked to expectations that reflect government policy, and to the power structures such policy creates?

The DOC's survey of writers takes as its sample only those writers who belong to writers' organizations. Such organizations may or may not be representative of the bulk of Canadian freelance writers. The DOC argues that they are. This simply may not be accurate. For instance, there is no evidence that more than a small proportion of literary writers belong to writers' organizations.

Writers' Organizations

The organizations the DOC consulted form a small but visible section of the writing community. To understand some of the implications of the DOC survey techniques, we must understand something about how such organizations work, who joins them, who they serve, and what membership requirements or regulations exist. Let us look at the League of Canadian Poets, one of the most restrictive and least representative of these organizations.

In order to achieve membership in the League, a writer needs sponsorship letters from three members-in-good-standing, and the approval of a membership review committee. The publication record or achievement of the applicant, although considered, does not seem to be of primary importance. In the name of upholding standards, the LCP has refused membership to a Governor General's Award winner and to a writer with five published volumes. Both of these writers are women.

In 1980, for instance, sixty-six percent of the writers who applied to the LCP were women. Of these applicants, only a third were deemed suitable while two thirds of the male applicants were admitted. The League has thus managed to keep the magic figure of thirty-three percent female membership constant even when more than two thirds of applicants for membership were women.

Why do women bother to apply at all? The League and organizations like it, hand in hand with the Canada Council, are the visible element of what Coser, Kadushin, and Powell call "invisible colleges." Membership confers not only "credibility" for claims to professionalism, an area of difficulty and concern for women in many professions and areas of work, but is purportedly a means of access to the network of editors, publishers, reviewers, and perhaps most important, Canada Council jurors and referees. The League, in effect, sees its mandate as defining who is and who is not really a poet.

The Writers' Union presents itself as a professional organization that deals with bread and butter issues. Its membership requirements are clearly spelled out and are based on the premise that nothing succeeds like success. Writers who have achieved book publication and enough financial stability to pay the membership fee may join if the Membership Committee approves the "quality" of the writing. Membership is approximately fifty percent male and fifty percent female.

The League membership fee is \$100. The Writers' Union membership fee is \$150 and the Union des Écrivains' annual membership fee is \$100. One needs to be able to afford membership in these organizations. In addition, as Arlene Lampert, then executive director of the League of Canadian Poets, pointed out to me several years ago, there is little point in paying such fees unless one can afford the additional costs of attending meetings and conferences, or unless one is in a financial position to support such organizations as a matter of good will.

Money and the Exclusion of Women

Harrison reports that the incomes of male writers are much higher than those of female writers. The median income of female full-time writers was less than half that of their male counterparts and for female part-time writers, the median income was one third that of males. Harrison suggests that to understand these disparities, one would need information about "the type and quantity of work done during the income-earning period and, ideally, on the quality of the work." He hypothesizes, however, that women may be paid less than men for similar work, that women may be able to afford to earn less because they are married and not dependent solely on their writing incomes, that they work in lower-paying specialties, that they produce less material or material of lower quality than their male counterparts. Harrison concludes that "these hypothetical reasons for the income difference are not meant to 'explain away' the gap but merely to suggest factors that may contribute to it based on available information."

Elsewhere, however, Harrison reports that a "relatively small percentage of writers" produce "a significant proportion of the freelance newspaper articles published." Here again, one confronts a chicken and egg situation: writers who publish frequently are the writers editors remember to call. Harrison also reports that the bulk of Canadian freelance writers live in Ontario and Quebec, near publishing and broadcasting centers, facts which support the thesis that it is necessary to be visible and to be plugged into a network to succeed. It is no secret that women, and especially women with children, are less mobile than men because they earn less.

It is important to see the economics of writing in relation to the history of the employment of women. Women, and originally women and children, could be hired for less than men to do the same work. Women entered the labor force as devalued workers. Women's work, in the home, in the job marketplace, and in the literary milieu, is devalued because it is done by women.

It is well documented that women in all job categories earn less than men. According to Louise Dulude's research for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, one in six Canadian women live below the poverty line, two out of three minimum wage earners in Canada are women, and eighty-three percent of single-parent households are headed by women.

Also, as writer Penny Kome points out, "it is more difficult for women to make a living because peripheral jobs are less available and peripheral ways of earning money are more difficult for women than for men." Because of the economic disadvantages all Canadian women suffer, women writers who work for money at jobs other than writing earn far less than male writers in similar situations. In Canada, women workers earn on average only fifty-eight cents for every dollar earned by male workers. This means that it is twice as hard for a woman as it is for a man to earn time for writing. The eco-

conomic status of women as a group cannot be ignored when we consider the status and condition of women writers and especially their exclusion from literary networks.

While the economic facts of Canadian women's lives are a primary problem for women in the arts, Audrey Thomas has pointed out that women "are socialized and conditioned to take care of things. We are acculturated to be conscientious. Male writers just jaunt off." Economic status and socialization combine to discourage women from entering what Nicole Brossard has described as "an environment that is not welcoming."

In 1978, the year of the DOC survey of writers, half of the women writers surveyed earned less than seven thousand five hundred dollars. There is little reason to assume that the recession has improved these earnings, especially in view of reports that payment has not improved over the last ten years.

A writer's reward is seldom a large income from writing. The reward is the opportunity for a large number of peripheral activities, including teaching jobs of various sorts, readings, residencies, and tenured appointments. These peripheral activities allow Canadian writers to earn money. Many of these activities are based on or related to academic establishments. We should not underestimate the role of the universities and colleges and the hidden public funding they contribute when we examine the "literary industry."

In order to understand how the Canadian writing establishment functions, it is necessary to understand the relation of Canadian academics to the processes and procedures of Canadian literary culture and to consider some of the political and ideological assumptions that underlie those relations.

The Politics of Writing

In "A Peculiar Eclipsing: Women's Exclusion from Men's Culture" (*Women's Studies International Quarterly* 1, November 1978), educator and sociologist Dr. Dorothy E. Smith delineates the mechanisms and structures by which control of culture is accomplished and enforced. Smith points out that in the kind of society in which we live, "a great deal gets done in words," and that the work of administering, governing, and managing is "communicative work." As playwrights have always known, words constitute action and, as Smith argues, "organizational and political processes are forms of action in words." Such action is *ideologically structured*; it is based on beliefs and theories about reality. The tools of such ideological structures, the "images, vocabularies, concepts, abstract terms of knowledge, are integral to the practice of power, to getting things done." Further, "the ways in which we think about ourselves and one another and about our society...are given shape and distributed by the specialized work of people in universities and schools, in television, radio and newspapers, in advertising agencies, in book publishing and other organizations forming the 'ideological apparatus' of the society."

Smith makes it clear that the "forms of thought and images we use do not arise directly or spontaneously" out of our experiences or "people's everyday lived relations." She argues that what we think about ourselves and how we think about ourselves are in fact "the product of the work of specialists" who occupy "positions in the ideological apparatus," that is, within, for instance, educational, communications, and publishing systems. Although we may not be aware of it and although it is in the interests of those who wish to maintain the dominant ideological structures to keep us unaware, it is true, as Smith says, that "our culture does not arise spontaneously; it is manufactured."

When the culture of a society is ideologically structured, that is, based on words and concepts as action, writing plays an important part in defining that culture. The exclusion of any group from participating fully in the ideological apparatus and from contributing fully to the production of such ideological structures must necessarily have serious consequences. Not the least of these is a gap between the "official" image of the culture and the truth of people's lives. This gives rise not only to unsuitable and inappropriate public policies but to serious questions about political prac-

tices, especially in comparison with publicly espoused ideas.

For women, the processes of socialization, education, work, and communication perform, in Smith's words, "a routine, generalized, and effective repression." In the operation of this repression, the educational system is particularly important because from it we learn "to recognize and approve ideologically sanctioned forms of relations and how to identify authoritative ideological sources."

Our education provides us not only with the obvious "content" we recognize and on which we are tested in examinations but also implicitly provides information about how to identify who is an authoritative writer or speaker and *who is not*. We learn not only what books or newspapers to credit, but what *kinds* of books, newspapers, or other kinds of communication are credible.

The educational system "is part of the system which distributes ideas and ensures the dissemination of new ideological forms as these are produced," Smith tells us. Once we have been taught who speaks with authority, it is not hard to convince us of the authority of what such speakers have said. Thus the academic community exerts a great deal of control over who is read and what is read and, more urgent in Canada, who is published and what is published and how such publications are received. In this way and others, the educational system, in Smith's words, "is also active itself in producing ideology, both in forms of knowledge in the social sciences, psychology, and education, and in the forms of critical ideas and theories in philosophy and literature."

Because of the ideological structure of our society, writing and criticism exert extraordinary power in our culture. The definition of what is a valid question, what is an issue worthy of intellectual attention, is the basis of this power. Authority both arises from and is enforced by those who control definitions of credibility.

Cultural Assumptions

In "A Devastating Conceptual Error: How Can We Not Be Feminist Scholars?" Elizabeth K. Minnich points out that "'Man' and 'mankind' are not general and therefore inclusive terms. They are partial in both senses of the word, and so is the scholarship about 'man' and 'mankind'. 'Our' tradition was created and has been maintained and enriched by and for the few, and until quite recently no one even pretended otherwise." This has been particularly true in reference to literary traditions and, perhaps not surprisingly considering the ideological connections of literary production, it is still true today.

Dorothy Smith explains that there is "a circle effect" which has effectively excluded women from the group of those who are believed to speak with authority. Although Smith is here speaking generally, her description is particularly appropriate to writing and especially to literary traditions.

Men attend to and treat as significant only what men say. The circle of men whose writing and talk was significant to each other extends backwards in time as far as our records reach. What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened and listen to what one another said. This is how a tradition is formed....From these circles women have been excluded....

As a result the perspectives, concerns, interests of only one sex and one class are represented as general. Only one sex and class are directly and actively involved in producing, debating, developing its ideas, in creating its art....It is thus that a one-sided standpoint comes to be seen as natural, obvious and general....

What is there — spoken, sung, written, made emblematic in art — and treated as general, universal, unrelated to a particular position or a particular sex as its source and standpoint, is in fact partial, limited, located in a particular position and permeated by special interests and concerns.

Toronto journalist Judith Finlayson, ("The Psychology of Power," *Homemakers*, April 1982) argues that women artists have encountered difficulties "not only finding forms that grow directly out of their own experience, but also having those forms recognized as a legitimate means of expression....Until recently, women artists struggled to give voice to their own experiences in the forms created by men. Similarly, the theoretical moulds that establish psychological traits for both sexes have been based on males" so that "by birth alone, boys follow the rules and girls create problems."

In short, "the critical mind in our society has a gender and it's usually male." In addition, due to training and education, a woman writer suffers from what Finlayson describes as "the critical undervaluation of her own reality." In Dorothy Smith's words, women have "learned to live inside a discourse which is not ours and which expresses and describes a landscape in which we are alienated and which preserves that alienation as integral to its practice."

The Academic Connection

A disproportionate number of academics are involved in editing and publishing of literature in Canada. In "The University as the Hidden Ground of Canadian Literature," B.W. Powe claims that it is "generally acknowledged that much of Canadian literature is dominated by academics and authors with either tenured posts or positions as lecturers at universities." The university, Powe tells us, has become "the financial support, the hidden environment," of Canadian literature.

The reasons for this are related to the kinds of work academics are expected to do and the ways in which that work is done. Academics have an unusually large amount of time to devote to writing, editing, publishing, and reviewing. In addition, for many academics writing is part of the job. Academics are considered to be contributing to their disciplines by writing and by publishing or arranging publication of the writing of others in their fields, especially those with whom they share a perspective or point of view. It is the job of academics to be actively involved in ideological structures and to distribute ideology.

Canadian tax law, which penalizes full-time professional writers, is ideally designed for academics who write. They can deduct expenses they incur as writers from gross income. The fees they pay to writers' organizations, the expenses of academic and writers' conferences, the expenses of research and, in the case of editors and small press publishers, often the costs of editing and publishing can all be deducted from gross earnings, regardless of the fact that most of those earnings come from sources other than writing. Academics who write earn more than almost any other writers in Canada.

Brian Harrison reports that thirty-eight percent of Canadian freelance writers are employed as teachers. This is twice as many as are employed in any other profession including writing-related paid employment. Twenty-four percent of the freelance writers surveyed teach writing, literature, or related courses.

In 1980-81, only eleven percent of tenured academics in all disciplines were women and, in the same year, according to a survey conducted by Robert Kroetsch for the Writers' Union, only 12.5 percent of teachers in university writing programs were women. From Canada Council annual reports, we find that for the three academic years September 1978 to May 1981, only twenty-nine percent of writers-in-residence in Canadian university writing programs were women.

Dorothy Smith points out that the "figures which show us where women are in education represent an organization of social relations at a deeper level, extending throughout the educational structure and its articulation to the society which it both serves and structures." It is unfortunately true that at "each level upward in the hierarchy of control and influence over the educational process, the proportion of women declines."

Academic Affiliation and Literary Life

The relation of academic study and training to literary appreciation seems clear to a high proportion of Canadian writers. For instance, in the survey Harrison reports, twenty-one percent of writers specified that the measure "most essential to the immediate development of the literary field in Canada" is "improving public education and appreciation of Canadian literature." (My italics)

The tax advantages, job definition and responsibility, access to university facilities, and concomitant access to and credibility within a ready-made network result in the academic control of small press and magazine publishing in Canada. Small presses and literary magazines are often the first place of publication for those who go on to commercial publishers. University affiliation of literary magazines and small presses and their personnel connects Canadian literary success to the academic establishment. The role academics play as critics and reviewers in Canada, in combination with the links between publishing and academe, means that academics virtually control literary success.

Regardless of form or ostensible subject, writing communicates ideological assumptions. The styles and subjects current in literary writing create trends and expectations. What happens in literary circles affects what happens in the more lucrative areas of non-literary writing. The opinions of the literati affect what is perceived as interesting, worthy of attention, and saleable. That many writers are also academics and that a high proportion of academics write as part of their jobs makes the situation incestuous to say the least. So great are the overlaps and interconnections that, in effect, the academic establishment and the literary/critical establishment are one and the same.

The Academic Milieu

In his article about the university as hidden ground, Powe characterizes the academic milieu as cloistered, conservative, withdrawn from most of society's explosive changes, and self-referential. In spite of this, "the university is looked to as the arbiter of critical values and judgements."

Canadian academics form the backbone of what passes for an intellectual elite in Canada. Coser, Kadushin, and Powell assert that intellectual circles "by and large, define who and what is 'in.' Most important, they serve as arenas for sorting out ideas and defining literary taste."

Coser and his colleagues liken academic life to a feudal state where "some power holders protect their dependents against rival feudal dignitaries. Senior people enhance their power to the extent that they manage to ac-

quire many younger dependents who, in return for their favours, pledge loyalty and fealty to them or to the particular intellectual orientation they represent. Such feudal relations are most pronounced when it comes to small sectarian circles."

This model holds for publishing in Canada and, in publishing as in other such circles, it is "widely believed that for a group of scholars to perpetuate their orientation over a long period, new academic cohorts must be consciously recruited and fostered. A major means to this end is to facilitate publication of younger members." In Margaret Atwood's words, "male writers form schools — like fish."

Canadian academics, who are both editors and publishers, function via intellectual networks and invisible colleges as cultural gatekeepers. They make decisions about which 'products' deserve sponsorship and distribution. Coser and his colleagues are definite about the effect in publishing: "To get a book published, recommendation through an informal circle or network is close to being an absolute necessity."

Brian Harrison states that a book "must be read by an editor or publisher and the public must be made aware of its existence, and consequently reaching these two audiences is crucial to the success of writers." Success, he continues, "will often depend on factors other than the book's quality."

Coser, Kadushin and Powell support this view. They report that "publishing standards, definitions of responsibility, and conceptions of the role of publisher are likely to be powerfully influenced by the reference groups that individual publishers have chosen for themselves. Their decisions to publish or to reject specific books or categories of books will often reflect the standards of the company they keep." Penny Kome sums up: "The presence of women in publishing makes a difference to what gets published."

Librarian Anna Rovira points out that we cannot read books which have not been published nor can we order books of which we've never heard. Miriam Waddington reminds us that "men are the editors who distribute books for review, who decide who will write reviews and what will be reviewed." Eleanor Wachtel writes that "it is certainly true that the editor 'biases' a review by whom he chooses to do the job," and Audrey Thomas points out that "books are distributed by salesmen."

Invisible Colleges as Integrative Devices

The apparently informal socializing that takes place within universities, at conferences, and at meetings of both scholarly and literary organizations is an important integrative device, and as Coser and his colleagues report, the "motivation to recruit one's friends is self-evident." Women have little ac-

cess to these integrative devices because of their exclusion from academe, and, more important, because of the high cost of attending meetings and conferences. Women simply lack "the financial ability to be 'in circulation,' " in poet Maxine Gadd's words.

Networks and the Exclusion of Women

The exclusion of women from the mainstream of academic life and the under-representation of women in universities is a self-fulfilling prophecy that is reflected in the literary milieu. Women are rarely integrated into the power structures of publishing firms, magazines, and universities. Because women are not present in any number, it is perceived as "natural" that women should not be present. The prevailing values and standards become a tautology in which the status quo defines what is "normal" and what is normal is defined as the status quo. Anything that threatens the status quo is perceived as abnormal or sub-standard. In Smith's words, "to identify a novelist as a woman is to place her in a special class outside that of novelists in general. . . . What women say, write, or image is not automatically part of the discourse." Writing by women, which has traditionally been excluded from "the tradition," can thus be ignored or dismissed as "women's writing," a sub-genre. Thus invisible colleges continue to exclude women.

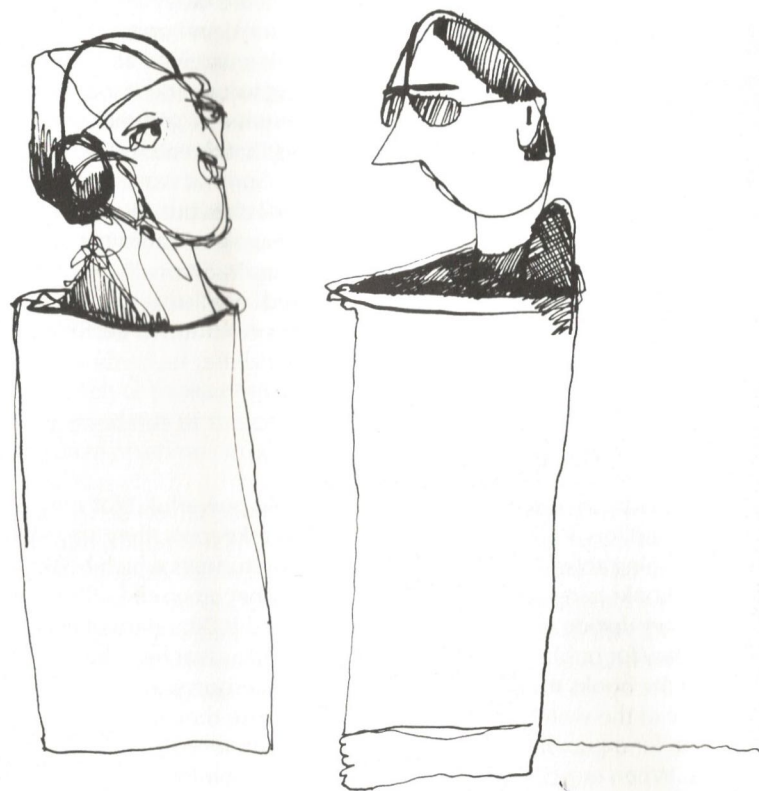
Invisible Colleges and Standards

In Canada, invisible colleges are extremely powerful. Not only do academics, editors, and publishers function as gatekeepers, they are in the position of being able to tell a captive audience of students which books to buy, which books to read. Their decisions thereby become self-fulfilling prophecies. They decide not only which books meet the "standard of excellence" necessary for publication, but as reviewers and as teachers they control the fate of the books they have chosen. In a Kafkaesque way, they also control the fate of the writers they have chosen because they make recommendations to fund-granting agencies and hiring committees and serve on awards juries. When our cultural bureaucrats need an opinion, they naturally seek out the experts, the authorities, the academics, the very same people who already control editing, publishing, and criticism.

In Canadian literature a major defense mechanism of invisible colleges is their enforcement of invisibility: members of these invisible colleges deny that such colleges exist. This reflects not only *doublespeak*, to use Orwell's word, but *doublethink*; successful members of invisible colleges, long

accustomed to control and power, may actually have convinced themselves not only that their success is related entirely to their own efforts but that it is based entirely and unquestionably on the merit of what they write.

More from "ELECTRONIC LIFE"



She thinks, "Am I to believe - I am the receiver and he is the transformer....?"

Dawna Gallagher

Dawna Gallagher

The Canada Council

Although Canada Council officers and jurors claim to be upholding "standards of excellence," clearly the Canada Council, by the very nature of its application forms and its dependence on academic writers and letters of reference from "credible" (academically recognized) sources, is involved in maintaining and reinforcing the status and control held by members of invisible colleges and in the promotion of a system of personal sponsorship. The exclusion of women from this system is obvious from Canada Council statistics.

Project Cost Grants to Publishers

For instance, project cost grants to individual publishers to "offset publication deficits on individual books" are made in addition to fiscal-year block grants. For the years 1978-79 and 1979-80, only twenty percent of project cost funding went to books by female authors.

Translation

Over the three-year fiscal period, 1978-79 to 1980-81, twenty-three percent of translations published with Canada Council support were of books written by women and twenty-eight percent of translators were women. In fiscal 1979-80, five translations were commissioned by the Council. All five were of books written by men.

Promotion Tours

More interesting, perhaps, in the "visibility" game by which books are sold are the figures for grants for promotional tours by Canadian authors. Between 1978-79 and 1980-81, twenty-two percent of authors on Canada Council-supported tours were women. In writing as in other areas, the adage holds: out of sight, out of mind.

Public Readings

The Public Readings by Canadian Authors is another Canada Council program that helps make Canadian writers visible. Between 1978-79 and 1980-81, thirty-three percent of readings were given by women writers. This compares, not surprisingly, with an average of thirty-three percent of female jurors on the Public Readings Review Committees for these years. Researcher and visual artist Jane Martin established in her report for the Canadian Artists Representation ("Women Visual Artists on Canada Council Juries, Selection Committees, and Arts Advisory Panels, and Amongst Grant Recipients from 1972-73 to 1979-80," CARFAC 1981) that there is a "direct, dramatic, and irrefutable" correlation between the percentage of women jurors and the percentage of successful female applicants. The proportion of women on Canada Council juries, review boards, and on the Advisory Arts Council does not in any way reflect the percentage of women in the Canadian population or in the arts community.

As of the current fiscal year, the Canada Council has instituted a new system by which, whatever the public demand, readers are held to a maximum number of readings. In the eight-readings category, thirty-one percent of readers are women and in the four-readings category, thirty-six percent of readers are women. Gwen Hoover at the Canada Council reported, in response to queries about the number of women readers, that all decisions about readers and categories are based "entirely on excellence." Not surprising is the fact that a third of the jury members in this instance were women. Jane Martin's finding, when applied to the correlation between the constitution of the review committee and the decisions about categories, makes nonsense of Canada Council claims. What is worse is that "the rhetoric about excellence makes it impossible to discover a policy," writer and editor Susan Crean tells us. In this as in other matters, Canada Council rhetoric bears little relation to reality. The written and unwritten rules are not the same; often, they are not even parallel.

Canada Council Readings Series and Awards

Organizers of readings series at universities which offer Creative Writing Programs or degrees do not issue invitations to women readers as frequently as organizers of non-university series. While the total public readings series presented an average of thirty-three percent female readers, these universities invited only twenty-four percent female readers over the years '78-'79 to '80-'81. As for other prestigious readings series, over those years Banff invited an amazing fifteen percent women readers, Blue Mountain thirty percent, and Harbourfront, in a sense Canada's showcase, twenty-five percent.

As for Canada's most prestigious government-sponsored literary award, the Governor General's, journalist Eleanor Wachtel reported in *Books in Canada* that since 1936, "fewer than twenty percent of jurors have been women and twenty percent of awards have gone to women." In an area such as Children's Literature, in which, according to Frances Duncan, eighty percent of people involved in the industry are women, it is not unusual for eighty percent of the Canada Council jurors for the Children's Literature Prize to be men.

Canada Council Grants to Writers

For the ten year period 1972-73 through 1980-81, Sasha McInnes Hayman reports that for all categories of Writing and Publication Grants a total of seventy-two percent of applicants and 71.4 percent of recipients were male and twenty-eight percent of applicants and 28.6 percent of recipients were female. This is a particularly striking correlation for an organization that claims to make all decisions on the basis of excellence.

There is obviously a quota system in effect. The rhetoric about excellence, quality, and fairness of juries is inconsistent with the perfect correlation between gender of applicants and gender of grant recipients. Notable too is the disproportion between the number of male and female applicants. Dorothy Smith's delineation of how women are excluded from "our" culture may serve as an explanation of why so few women writers apply for grants.

The Numbers Game

Editors, publishers, and Canada Council officers claim that excellence is "the single controlling criterion" and that women writers are getting a "fair" proportion of publication and publication space. In fact women writers are under-represented in all sectors of the writing industry. For more than ten years, the Canada Council has enforced a system of making the percentage of writing awards proportional to the gender of applicants. The results are clear in Canadian writing and publishing where women are ignored and excluded at the public expense. The seventy-two percent of grants that have gone to individual male writers over the last ten years does not include the massive financial support for male-directed, male-focused, and male-centred literary journals, magazines, and publishing ventures, nor does it take into account the funds that support male-dominated writers' organizations.

Publishing

The juries that review publishers' applications for funding are perhaps the most important review boards that the Canada Council maintains. At this level, it is unusual to find more than a token woman on a nine or ten "man" jury. In view of Jane Martin's findings, it is clear that the implications of this situation are very serious. It may in part explain the disproportion of publications by male writers.



Suggested devices for containing the emotions

Dawna Gallagher

Dawna Gallagher

Representation and Presentation of Women

Although forty-two percent of Canadian freelance writers are women, Sandra Lambert and I found, in a recent survey of seventy different issues of fifteen Canadian magazines, that women writers constitute only thirty-four percent of writers published and that they get only twenty-eight percent of publication space. Twelve percent of editors-in-chief of such magazines are women and twenty-four percent of editorial boards, many of which are nominal, are women. In addition, only twenty-six percent of books reviewed are by female authors.

This means that eighty-eight percent of editors are male; seventy-six percent of editorial boards are male; sixty-six percent of published authors are male; seventy-two percent of reviewers are male; and seventy-three percent of books reviewed in Canadian literary publications are written by men. Of one hundred and fifty-five articles in the magazines surveyed, 70.5 percent were written by men and of thirty-eight articles and interviews of which the subject was recorded, thirty-one (81.5%) were interviews of or articles about men. According to Harrison's study, however, only fifty-eight percent of Canadian freelance writers are men. These figures do not take into account the habit of magazines, literary magazines, and newspapers of lumping together books written by women in one review or of reviewing many books, most of them by women, in one review which offers a paragraph or less to each author.

Books by women are often reviewed by women and few female reviewers review books by authors of both sexes. Novelist Carol Shields points out that "all 'serious' books are given to men to review." Most often, books by women writers are reviewed with other books by women writers. This is consistent with a view of writing by women as non-mainstream. Women writers who claim that they are afraid of being cast into a female ghetto should pay careful attention to how and by whom books by women writers are reviewed.

Books in Canada is a magazine that gets more Federal Government money than any other Canadian literary or reviews magazine. Subsidies have gone from \$50,000 in the Fiscal year 1978-79 to over \$60,000 in 1980-81. A recent survey of *Books in Canada* provides some interesting statistics. Seven of the twenty-two articles in the issues surveyed were written by women and of these, five were about cookbooks or children's literature. In addition, of fifteen titles recommended over six issues, twelve were written by male and

three by female authors. Eighty percent of the writing *Books in Canada* recommends is written by men. This figure correlates exactly with the percentage of space given to men's writing in Canadian newspapers. It is clear that when women writers do achieve publication, their work is ignored by reviewers.

Another measure of the integration of women into the mainstream is inclusion in anthologies. The anthology serves as an introduction to a broader audience than is reached by other books, especially those from small presses. Canadian anthologies make it appear that there are very few Canadian women writers whose work has any merit and that Canadian literature has been produced almost exclusively by men. Sharon Batt, in a recent study, "Gender Representation in Thirty-five Canadian Anthologies, 1973-1982," establishes that twenty-six percent of anthologized writers are women and that, contrary to Batt's expectation, there has been no real improvement in representation of women in such books over the last five years.

The problem is self-perpetuating, a parallel of the hot-dog commercial*: more people read these writers because their work is accessible in anthologies; these writers are included in anthologies because more people read them. Editors tend to include writers who have already been included elsewhere partly because anthologists read anthologies and partly because writers who have already been anthologized are obviously "approved."

The 1982 issue of the Literary Press Group's catalogue confirms that women writers are under-represented in Canadian publications. Twenty-eight percent of the authors listed are women, and twenty-five percent of the books listed are by women.

Taken together, the statistics show that women are under-represented at all levels and in all aspects of the Canadian literary scene. Women are ghettoized in reviews and as reviewers. When women writers do achieve publication, they are allowed fewer pages per author than are men in literary magazines.

For an understanding of the situation it is even more important to look at presentation than at representation. How are Canadian women writers viewed, reviewed, and presented in those magazines, journals, and newspapers in which writing is evaluated?

* "More people eat our hot dogs because they are fresher: our hot dogs are fresher because more people eat them. (Editor's note.)"

Gender Specificity in the Presentation of Writers

Critics and reviewers claim to be specialists who can mediate between the text and the reader. They give readers clues to the meaning of a text by suggesting, via their comments, what elements we ought to attend to as we read. Just as in the literary industry the reviewer stands between the writer and the audience, so the review stands between the reader and the text. The reviewer, in telling the reader *why* to read a book is actually telling the reader *how* to read the book. The words in which the reviewer chooses to express recommendations serve as clues to what the reader is to see, understand, and appreciate.

There are differences in the diction reviewers use to discuss and report on the writing of women and men. Women writers are described in terms of sensibility, sensuality, elegance, grace, refinement, simplicity, and richness of imagery and texture. Male writers are described in terms of logic, economy, power, discipline, versatility, manipulation, and concreteness and immediacy of imagery. This choice of language is a mirror of and a key to the reviewers' assumptions about gender differences. Whether or not the reviews accurately reflect the writing, the gender stereotyping communicated by the diction is painful.

Reviews of books by female authors are usually gender-specific. It is not uncommon for a reviewer to praise the work but to nullify the writer's credibility with a few crude remarks about her anatomy or her politics.

Salem Alaton, in a film review of *The Woman I am* (Toronto Globe and Mail, March 1982), a film biography of Dorothy Livesay, opens: "Dorothy Livesay, the Canadian poetess who has been called 'the matriarch of the feminists,' is remembered to have proclaimed, 'Bourgeois art is dead.' " The word "poetess" is always derogatory and serves as a key to the values the reviewer attaches to the words "matriarch" and "feminist."

Robert Kroetsch (Books in Canada, January 1982) introduces Karen Lawrence's *The Inanna Poems* by informing us that "Karen Lawrence sometimes writes out of the Great Tradition of young Canadian women who have discovered, much to their astonishment, that they have vaginas." The emphasis is on "women" rather than on writing, on a physiologically based rather than a literary "tradition." One wonders whether, had Kroetsch made a similar or parallel remark about a member of any minority group in Canada, the review would have achieved publication.

Alexandre L. Amprimoz (Quarry 29,2, Spring 1980) starts a review of Florence McNeil's *A Balancing Act* with this line: "If only Florence McNeil would, like many of our cute Canadian poets, only present a personal experience and then try to convince us that it is a privileged one we would be both annoyed and suspicious...." McNeil is obviously to be judged within a particular, gender-specific category.

The woman writer is put in a category that is different from the one in which "real" writers are found and is placed in the context of that sub-species, woman, who produces a sub-genre, women's writing, and whose main chance is cuteness. This is a mechanism of social control that is used to demonstrate and enforce male superiority. Dorothy Smith points out that the "universe of ideas, images and themes — the symbolic modes which are the *general currency* of thought — have been either produced by men or controlled by them. In so far as women's work and experience has been entered into it, it has been on terms decided by men and because it has been approved by men." In the arts as in the educational system, "women have access and participate so that they may be present as subordinates, as marginal. Their training and education ensure that at every *level of competence and leadership* there will be a place for them which is inferior and subordinate to the positions of men."

The sorts of remarks used to introduce books by women not only allow the reviewer to establish superiority, they allow him to dismiss the writer and the writing. This sort of introduction warns the reader that the writer and the writing need not be attended to. Thus women are put in "their place" and kept there. Even the most positive reviews of women's writing are gender-specific.

Reviews of Women Writers in Canadian Literary Magazines

Lee Courtois reports that in *Books in Canada*, "for the most part, female reviewers report on women's books, and they are blatantly anti-woman. Feminism is definitely not encouraged; in fact, the books written by women which get favorable reviews seem to be centered around love, devotion, and the protagonists' unliberated and adorable personalities. When they praise this kind of subject matter, reviewers often manage to get in a few digs about those 'other' writers who take a different attitude towards woman's role in society."

If the female author has a traditional view about her characters' place in the world, she gets approval. Characters are engaging when they demonstrate acceptance of sex-role stereotyping but women are unnatural if they demonstrate independence. Freudian stereotypes abound. Reviewers tell us that women who demand equality must be humorless, and that women who insist on formal education waste it. Reviewers may misrepresent facts in order to support their own perspectives.

Women writers are reviewed as women rather than as writers. In reviews of women's writing, the focus is on an analysis of the personal life or situation which led to the themes in the work. In Courtois's words: "When

women writers are reviewed, the author is not separated from the work, and the work itself is not discussed. It is enough to dismiss the writer. Generally, reviewers attempt to *explain* a woman writer in terms of her psyche rather than concentrating on her writing."

A typical example is David Macfarlane's review (*Books in Canada*, May 1981) of Phyllis Webb's *Wilson's Bowl*.

The reader might suspect that she has lost herself in her own small world....An element...that underlies its unusualness — eccentricity would be only slightly too strong a word — is its awesome self-absorption. Everything is filtered through Webb's quiet, observant, sometimes tortured self, and unlike many poets, she does not pretend to have mastery over her subjects....It becomes clear, reading Webb, just how painful it must be to support the existence of both a revolutionary and a mystical nature....It can't be easy to be Phyllis Webb, but the struggle has produced some exceptional poetry.

Whatever happens in a woman's writing is related by reviewers to the personal, the individual. Male writing, according to reviewers, is ambitious in scope, embodies ideas, is boldly intellectual and expansively emotional. When a male writer makes a statement, no matter how personal, it is viewed as being a statement of public import and significance. This is consistent with the view of males as active, publicly involved persons. When a female writer makes a statement, no matter whether it is a comment about social and political realities, it is perceived as private and personal and the woman herself is seen as uncertain, victimized, helpless.

In Lee Courtois's words:

male writers are viewed as having an objective, depersonalized vision of human suffering. However deeply they may feel it, they themselves are seldom the victims. Male writers are not seen as people who beat against unyielding walls. Their outrage is seen as potent. It is perceived as a concrete attack, one that may have repercussions in the world, that may remedy some injustice. Men are perceived to be on a plane above; removed, they keep a certain distance from any brutal reality they may feel a need to comment on. They have *control* over their emotions and life situations. Women, we are told, do not. When women try to take such control, they are described as "frustrated," and perceived as personally "entrapped." Women who take a position of strength, who refuse to play victim, are attacked for "distortion" or over-reaction. Women are seen always as the personal victims of the things they speak out against.

The matter of scale is very important. Male writers are presented as larger-than-life, giants with a grasp of their material able to speak with authority about what constitutes reality. Women are presented as midgets in this male landscape. They "embroider" delightful language. When they are presented as having said or done anything important, the terms of discussion are usually domestic. Men, we are told, are capable of large visions and broad perspectives. Conversely, women, like ants, are purportedly trapped in the corners of their own lives. Reviewers tell us that women are unable to rise above the personal, cannot see beyond their own "small" slices of life and can speak only for themselves. In Frances Duncan's words, "Women have been relegated to the sphere of 'feeling' and relationships and these things do not belong in the 'real' world." Audrey Thomas points out that "women are not supposed to be public. Only at the PTA are you supposed to speak with authority, and then you're somebody's mother. Women are not supposed to have a separate identity."

Readers are directed away from what women writers are communicating. Reviewers try to convince us that women's writing is, and by implication can be, only plaintive, personal, confessional. Reviewers lead readers to believe that men make statements about reality, truth, and life but that women write only about themselves and their "personal" experiences and such experiences are not large or important enough to be considered "human".

A typical approach is taken by Ann Mandel in a review of Margaret Atwood's *True Stories* and Phyllis Webb's *Wilson's Bowl* which are discussed together in the January 1982 issue of *The Fiddlehead*. Mandel compares the theme of Atwood's poetry to that of Alain Resnais' film, *Mon Oncle d'Amerique*, for both introduce their work with "a beating valentine-shaped heart."

The difference comes from the difference in hearts. Though neither looks like real heart, Atwood's is also a vagina and glows with light, like a sun, like a nuclear explosion. This heart is source, energy, entrance, exit; opening and conclusion. Her crab too, hermit and predator, is ancestor and double, timid vagina dentata and reminder of old nightmares Similarly, throughout these books both poets struggle with the material world, insist on the necessity of that struggle. In Webb, poems are trapped in the body, cross-hatched on bones. In Atwood, people are tortured for speaking, their bodies insisting that poems be written Both poets reject received truths: the stories handed down by the powerful to the weak, governments to citizens, technologies to societies; the visions passed on by saints and poets to the rest of us in our partial banal worlds....

"Struggle" is a prominent word but it is a "necessity" rather than a choice and is related to being trapped and tortured. Mandel's implication is that the trap itself is woman's body, and, whereas men write about ideas, have authority, somehow the writing of poems is related in women to their bodies. According to Mandel, in Atwood, bodies insist "that poems be written," and in Webb, "poems are trapped in the body, cross-hatched on bones."

The male myth of woman, the stale jokes and "old nightmares" intrude even into this review by a woman of the work of two powerful female writers. The focus, the emphasis, is on body rather than mind. Although both books are formally interesting, the form discussed is the authors' bodies rather than that of the body of their works. Although both books and both writers speak with authority, this is perceived as a "rejection of received truths" rather than as a positive action, as reaction to the male norm rather than as creative action.

In this review and in others, even those women writers who are recognized for the "excellence" of their work cannot escape primary identification as female bodies, and whatever their skill, their experience, their ideologies or ideas, they are identified primarily as cunts. When they speak with power and authority, they are that old nightmare, vagina dentata. Their social consciences and their power, like their hearts, we are told, are inextricably and inexorably bound up with entrance and exit, the source of all their energy, their vaginas.

The Poet as Male

Michael Brian Oliver in a sense sums up the ideology of Canadian poetry in an essay in the 35th anniversary issue of *The Fiddlehead*. Oliver "became an assistant poetry editor" in 1967 and since "has been a regular contributor of both poems and reviews." His essay traces the evolution of a poet from boyhood to adulthood. He begins: "A man's philosophy determines the kind of poetry he will write: philosophy, the kind of knowledge he loves."

It is clear throughout the essay and basic to Oliver's analysis that the poet is male. After a lengthy and circuitous discussion of woman-hatred, Oliver returns more directly to the subject of poets and poetry.

...This brings me back to Woman, the importance of Love to the poet. Robert Graves claims that the whole duty of the poet is to invoke the White Goddess, and in the most comprehensive sense he is right, for She is the sister and the bride of the sun, the Mistress of

all the turnings and returnings of Nature, the endless completion of Desire. The poet who finds a relationship of integrity with her and makes it into words truly benefits mankind.... Ideally, every time a man writes a poem he should speak from the centre of the sun, or from the mask of an ambassador of the sun, such as the crow; and every time a woman writes a poem she should speak from the moon, or the earth, or the sea. This — not male chauvinism — explains why there have been relatively few women poets through the ages: the White Goddess is inscrutable, and when She does speak, She terrifies society's men and shames society's women....

In short, biology is destiny. The Muse is portrayed as a male masturbation fantasy leading to ejaculation; the poet has only "instinct and the pen." Woman's role is to be the muse rather than the writer.

Dorothy Livesay, in reviewing her many years on the literary scene and her contributions and relations with other writers, sums up by saying that many literary relationships have broken down and many of the men she helped along have finally "tended to denigrate me and put me down" because "these men — old, middle-aged or thirtyish — have been unable to see me as a person. They have expected me to behave as female — the listener, 'the little woman' or the lady poet who exists mainly as a support for the male ego. They cannot accept me as a fellow poet, critic, editor with views that do not necessarily coincide with theirs."

Oliver's perspective and Livesay's are two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, this coin is the currency of the country.

Canadian Newspapers

Things are no better outside the literary magazines. In fact, they are worse. A survey of Canadian newspapers conducted during National Book Festival 1982 by Julie Bruck revealed that overall, comparatively little space is given to Canadian books and generally, fiction and poetry get little attention in Canadian newspapers. Seventy percent of reviewers are male and seventy-seven percent of books reviewed are by male writers. Female writers get twenty-one percent of reviews and twenty percent of review space.

Judith Finlayson points out that she is the only woman allowed to write about women's issues at the *Globe and Mail*. I have an enormous readership because women are desperate to hear some of the things I'm talking about. The publishing industry serves the power structure. A feminist perspective throws that into question."

"Newspapers", says Dorothy Livesay, "print 'men's' news and sports, but the readers are women, and it's especially important for women in small

communities to have women's news because they are often isolated and alienated."

Penny Kome's experience is that "in conjunction with women's exclusion from everything else is the exclusion from being reported. It is said that women's stories are not of interest to the general public. The larger circulation magazines are open to stories by women but not about women. Women are invisible."

Larry Scanlan, in the *Kingston Whig-Standard Magazine*, (April 24, 1982) describes Janette Turner Hospital, winner of the Seal Book \$50,000 first novel prize, as "like a lottery ticket winner," who is "paraded" and "displayed." Over thirty column inches later, the reader is finally told the name of the novel. More attention is paid to Hospital's experience as basis for the book than to the book itself. The emphasis again is on the woman's life, her personality, her personal experience and especially her appearance. Aritha van Herk comments that "it is easier for a woman writer if she's young, attractive, malleable. One is sold on the basis of that."

The article about Hospital can be compared to James Adams' lead article in the *Edmonton Journal*, (April 1982) "Canada's 'literary secret' is throwing off his shroud." The title would lead a reader to expect some personal details about W.P. Kinsella, "one penman who likes to be interviewed, likes to stand up in public." That's about it for the really "personal," although a couple of biographical facts creep into the article which really is about Kinsella's new book and the fact that it has won an award.

When Ken Adachi, in the *Toronto Star* (May 1, 1982), reviews *Man Descending* by Guy Vanderhaeghe and *The Neighbour and Other Stories* by Naim Kattan, not a word is written about the authors. Adachi ploughs right into twenty-five column inches of review of the writing rather than of the writers. In the same paper, Lew Gloin begins a mini-review of a book by Christine Mander, *All You Need Is Enough Rope*, by telling us all about the writer.

In a feature article in the *Toronto Star* (March 1980), purportedly about a reading by Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood, Frank Jones weaves anti-feminist propaganda through a report that is a vicious attack on women readers and writers. A central paragraph reads:

The audience is the new sister-archy with, to use Virginia Woolf's heart-cry, "a room of their own," filling bookshelves with one-note tomes about finding the elusive self, producing feminist books to be glowingly reviewed by other feminist authors, or handbooks for the little ones on facing up to their parents' divorce, breeding a new journalism keyed to rape and abortion. Theirs is the new orthodoxy that none, least of all men, dare challenge. And the few raggedy-bearded men in the audience tonight sheepishly catch each others' eyes like missionaries at a cannibal barbecue.

Jones not only implies that Piercy and Atwood could only be glowingly reviewed on the basis of ideology but he lays the blame for news coverage of rape and abortion squarely at the door of women writers as if, by calling attention to these events, women writers were in fact responsible for the events themselves. This is a common media ploy and is used frequently in relation to "women's news" and especially in relation to women writers.

Jones is skilled and clever in the way he handles his material, undercutting any strength he feels obliged to report, satirizing poems about rape and torture with cheap, clever one-liners. He presents Piercy and Atwood as self-centred egotists who are somehow exploiting the painful social and political realities of women's lives by reporting them.

Myrna Kostash in "Book View" (*Edmonton Journal*, April 5, 1980), calls Jones' article "a snide and bitchy piece of writing." She points out that the work of women writers "is full of images of the violence that has been done to women and of hostility towards the aggression in men which seeks in women its target. The two phenomena — violence and male aggression — are not unconnected in women's lives and it is women writers who, with the gift of their voice, are speaking out bitterness and pain for all of us. If not they, then who?"

Kostash clarifies what Jones has done and puts the piece in the context of the Canadian literary tradition. "Jones, in his paranoia and obtuseness, reduces this literature to 'one-note tomes' of feminist rhetoric, as though the literature of protest of half of humanity were trivial and frivolous. (Whereas the stuff that men write about and for each other is, as we all know, Literature.)"

As Atwood and others have pointed out, female poets were traditionally compared by male reviewers to Emily Dickinson. Recently, a new parallel has been drawn. Women writers are compared to Sylvia Plath, a writer whose life has had considerably more critical attention than her work.

In the *Montreal Gazette*, (March 20, 1982) Joy Kogawa's novel of social and political history, *Obasan*, is compared to Plath's *The Bell Jar* in a review by Sherry Simon. Simon likens the "tragedy" in Plath's novel to the tragedy in Kogawa's. The only difference Simon is able to perceive is that one is entirely personal and the other is collectively personal.

Typically, if a woman is perceived to have a genuine problem, the cause is related to other women. According to Simon, the main character, Naomi, remains forever a victim, "caught between the two most powerful figures in the novel, her two aunts." That Naomi has been dispossessed, orphaned, and persecuted for her race do not seem to the reviewer to be of major significance.

Simon closes the review: "Joy Kogawa uses fiction, as well as documentary sources from the Public Archives of Canada, to build an exceptionally graceful structure to articulate and fuse the private and public experience. *Obasan* will join Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* as a classic Cana-

dian novel of girlhood awakening, at the same time filling in for us all a chapter which our history books left out."

This is a remarkable contextualization of a powerful piece of writing about social and political events in Canada. Simon plays the old tune, turning the book inside out so that it becomes a novel of "girlhood awakening" that uses, as incidental background, major historical events. The book, in fact, makes almost no reference if any to what one might conceive as "girlhood awakening." It is about the racial persecution of Canadians of Japanese ancestry.

Such errors in analysis of material and use of language are common in the few reviews of literary books that appear in Canadian newspapers when these reviews are about writing by women. There are clear socio-political and ideological biases among reviewers which surface when they write reviews of books by women. Reviewers seem to have been convinced by socio-cultural and literary propaganda that anything a woman writes is necessarily "personal," regardless of the subject or the scope of the work. This diminution, a cutting down to minimalist scale, is typical of reviews of women's writing. It mirrors a tradition in our culture which relegates "women's problems" to the realm of the entirely personal and treats such problems, which often are social, political, and cultural, with Valium, if at all.

Jones's article about Atwood and Piercy makes it clear why women writers have to be scaled down. If readers hear what these writers are saying, without the mediation of an ideological interpretation by critics, we would have to take seriously, in a social and political sense, the "stories" women writers have been telling. Myrna Kostash makes it clear that women writers are speaking for the unspoken-for as well as speaking to them. It is this latter function that is politically dangerous and which reviewers try to prevent readers from perceiving or understanding.

Susan Crean has said that "there are two ways of dealing with potentially revolutionary elements within a culture. One is the way it's done in Russia. The other is to remove all economic and political power." There is a third way: obfuscation and mystification, telling people that what they see isn't there, that what they know isn't true and that it doesn't matter if it is. This technique of disorientation and denial is a device also used in war against political enemies; it drives people crazy.

Women's Writing/Women's Lives

An example of the general tenor of media coverage of "women's news" and women writers appears in a recent syndicated column, "New Women's Leader Chooses Quiet Approach," (Montreal Gazette, March 1982) by Keith Spicer. Spicer praises Lucie Pépin and claims that "the things some women still fight over" are "tokenistic." As examples of tokenism, he mentions attempts to de-masculinize language, to achieve some representation in the professions, especially the Supreme Court, and, amazingly, he contrasts these "barbarisms" with the fight for "equal pay, pensions, protection from assault, aging, wife-battering and lonely poverty" as if these were mutually exclusive rather than related problems. Spicer implies that Pépin has agreed that "rhetoric and infighting" between Doris Anderson and Lloyd Axworthy have "slowed reform."

Anderson is related to "howling harpies, bra-burners, the smug rhetoric of revolution," and other "twisted" ideas. It is, according to Spicer, not government policy that has prevented reform, but the noisy behaviour of shrews. "Man-hating shrillness found in many of the so-called radical women's groups has not only sidetracked attention from bread-and-butter equality, it has sabotaged reform. It has made women's rights a plaything for disenchanted bourgeois ladies and frustrated leftish sloganeers." These elitist ladies and sloganeers are, according to Spicer, all women writers. It is women writers who are killing "the movement" with "lib-left trendiness." Like Frank Jones, Spicer not only attacks women and women writers but neatly inserts class differences into the text to ensure lack of sympathy. Spicer seems to have forgotten awfully quickly for whom women's rights in Canada were so recently a plaything.

Remarkably, Pépin's priorities to improve the conditions of the "one Canadian woman in six (who) lives below the poverty line," and her remarks that "two-thirds of all minimum-wage earners are women and that 83% of single-parent families are headed by women," are presented not as real issues but are put in the perspective of "making the council credible again."

Spicer's final paragraph makes his perspective clear. He tells readers that Lucie Pépin will succeed by "personalizing women's new confidence" by using her "media-capability." Spicer gives an example to demonstrate just what he means. When, "on a television talk show...Pépin and her colleagues won a compliment from the host on their legs...Pépin purred back, 'If that's what it takes to get your attention, that's fine.' " More important than what Pépin says, Spicer tells us, is that Lucie Pépin is a sexy pussycat who will purr when she's stroked.

It is in this way that newspapers enforce sex-role stereotyping, role-modelling, and the authority of authority figures, and diminish and discount what Canadian women and Canadian women writers are saying. Women committed to change and improvement of the status and condition of

women, such as Lucie Pépin, are discounted except as sex objects. Canadian women writers, and Doris Anderson is one of them, are cast as villains. Their sins take precedence over those of all others, for the very reasons that Myrna Kostash has made clear.

By silencing Canadian women writers, or diminishing them and their writing, or discounting it, defenders of the status quo and ruling elite, regardless of their own sex, exert a powerful social control over Canadian women. Not only do they discourage dissent but their attacks demonstrate the price dissenters will have to pay. Spicer's message, that any woman who is pinched should turn the other cheek and purr, follows a lengthy attack on all women who express dissent. Women writers are singled out for attention in a most extraordinary way, considering the ostensible subject of the column, but in a way that is to be expected if one accepts Myrna Kostash's analysis that Canadian women writers speak to and for "half the human race."

Because all of us, but women in particular, are socialized to mistrust our own perceptions and to trust "Authority," tactics such as those used by Spicer and Jones are powerful tools. Often, they work.

Conclusion: Enforcing Control

The Canadian literary critical establishment, the Canada Council, and the individuals who are successful within these power structures produce what can only be called propaganda. Its purpose is to convince us that these power structures are open rather than closed networks, that the establishments perform entirely in the public interest, and that the decisions of those individuals who wield power are benevolent, just, and fair. It is probably true that the people who claim these things most often and most vehemently finally convince themselves. Just as literary success is a self-fulfilling prophecy, so does this kind of propaganda, by sheer repetition, achieve credibility, at least with its disseminators.

Such self-credibility leads to further elitism and exclusivism and is not only self-referential but self-righteous. Dissent is not only easily dismissed; it can be entirely ignored. Those on the outside of the invisible colleges are dismissed as inferior. In Canadian writing and writing-related arts administration, everyone pays lip service to the ideology of excellence while keeping tight control over what is defined as excellent and, most important, who defines it. It is both implied and stated outright that the only discrimination is that based on recognition of excellence. "If you were really any good," goes the propaganda, those just, fair, un-self-interested arbiters of taste who, by virtue of self-appointment are able to distinguish quality, would recognize you.

Women who complain of male-centred vision, male focus or male bias are accused of that old stand-by, hysteria. The invisible college of Canadian literature need not even defend itself against such complaints. Who will take them seriously when everyone has been told repeatedly that excellence is both recognizable and recognized?

The central issue is the inclusion of women writers in the mainstream of literature. In addition to gender-specific reviews, public attacks, anti-feminism, and being under-reported, under-represented, and ignored, the bottom line is the "sour grapes" argument — "if you were really any good." This is the fundamental and unarguable weapon critics use to maintain the status quo and to enforce the standards and reinforce the control the invisible colleges hold.

This system is enforced by the use of the "cutting out of the herd" technique that allows the invisible college at one and the same time to choose its cohorts and to turn back any dissent or claims of discrimination by pointing

at success. Every so often, an obvious "outsider" is chosen, adopted, and made much of in the invisible college. This allows members to reinforce the claim that quality is indeed recognized and that success based on it is open to all.

Traditionally, women whose ability is so obvious that it is undeniable have been told that "you think like a man." This was once considered the ultimate compliment. It explains why the few women writers who have been recognized traditionally have done little to insure that more women are adopted into and enter the invisible colleges. A successful woman writer is not really a woman. As in a feudal system, she has given up one group of cohorts for another and her loyalties are clear. More important still is the fact that it is made clear to women writers that they are accepted on sufferance and in spite of their gender. They are not full members of the dominant male group and therefore must proceed carefully. If a woman writer expresses a feminist position, she is attacked. Sponsorship into the system is normally by dominant males; women do not achieve credibility or power as sponsors nor do they have the power bases to enforce their decisions and sponsorship attempts.

Women writers who have "made it" in some measure, in terms of dollars or attention from reviewers, are few. The invisible colleges and the star system together guarantee that the writers of whom we hear are the same writers over and over again. Most Canadians can name several "successful" women writers and therefore perceive that women writers, if they are "any good," can achieve success. What few people realize is that the emphasis on those few virtually prevents other women writers from getting reviews or public attention and thereby achieving "success."

This is how and why some women become the staunchest defenders of the status quo. They have come to believe that if their own merit has been recognized then merit is always recognized. They have no reason to try to help other women up the ladder because they themselves are no longer primarily self-identified as belonging to the group, "women". They are, rather, members of the invisible college. Their peer group consists not of other women but of other members of the invisible college, most of whom are men.

The invisible college thus manages at one and the same time to defend itself and to co-opt those who show some ability to achieve credible dissent. Meanwhile, the propaganda continues. Young women writers not only lack help in entering the system, lack role models, but are told again and again that acceptance is based entirely on excellence, that rejection slips reflect unbiased standards. Both writers and readers have come to believe this myth in some measure.

Thus the invisible college of the Canadian literary, critical, and arts-support establishment stands between readers and writers. Readers cannot buy books of which they've never heard nor can they read books that have not reached publication. We are treated to the spectacle of a Canada-

Council-supported, academically-based literary publishing industry which fails repeatedly to take cognizance of its natural market. The result is not only the elevation of the mediocre, the exclusion of women, and the maintenance of the status quo and the chronic need for further infusions of public money, but a form of social and political control associated in the minds of most Canadians with totalitarian political regimes. Indeed, the invisible college is totalitarian and the result is suppression, oppression, propaganda and the elimination of dissent. This is accomplished simply by censorship and it is directed most often at women's writing. In Canada we call it "maintaining standards of excellence."

Recommendation

The Canadian Government has made a financial commitment and established a public policy to encourage the Canadianization of industry, including arts and culture industries, and both the SSHRC and the CRTC are committed to the promotion of and investment in "Canadian content." More than fifty-two percent of the population of Canada is female. It therefore follows that fifty-two percent of "Canadian content" must be produced by women and directed to the concerns of women.

It is inconsistent and illogical to argue for affirmative action for Canadians and against affirmative action for Canadian women. Changes in cultural policies should be made to reflect not only the Government's commitment to Canadianization of industry, including arts and culture, but also Canadians' concern about and demand for equality of opportunity and equality of representation for *all* Canadians regardless of gender.

In a lengthy list of recommendations prepared for Status of Women Canada, I argued for equal representation of the sexes at all levels of arts administration and in all projects and organizations funded by the government.

Epilogue

In its original form, this report was criticized because I did not use a male control group and because I used DOC's statistics and at the same time argued against their validity.

The use of a male control group for a study of women writers strengthens the perception of women as deviant from a male norm. It supports the notion that women are incapable of knowing their own minds or analysing their own situation. It reinforces women's lack of authority as speakers and enforces our invisibility and inaudibility.

My criticism of the Department of Communications' survey techniques and statistics is inconsistent with my use of those statistics for comparison. Unfortunately, the DOC statistics are the only ones available.

Statistics are often used as a drunk uses a lamp post, for support rather than illumination. Statistics themselves do not constitute arguments or analyses and are of no use without contextual frameworks and interpretations. Often, when statistics are presented, assumptions are not stated explicitly and underlying prejudices go unnoticed.

There is no such thing as an unbiased survey, therefore there is no such thing as an unbiased statistical report. Turning the humanities into numerology, while it is much in fashion, usually begs the real questions. It tends to support the status quo, if for no other reason than that those already in positions of power and authority write the questions. It allows those who design the surveys to prejudice results by defining the sample and by including or excluding questions. It reduces human experience to "data" and treats all data as of equal value.

Then why use statistics at all? Because otherwise, no one would believe me. Also, while I was preparing the material, I heard again and again from women writers that "of course everyone knows there's discrimination; you just can't ever really pin it down." Some of the statistical information, and especially the data collected by Sharon Batt, Julie Bruck, Lee Courtois, and Sandra Lambert, is presented in the hope that it will help to "pin down" some of the problems.

Jane Martin established the relation of gender of jurors to gender of grant recipients in the visual arts. I discovered, first from Sasha McInnes Hayman's statistical survey of the Canada Council and later from other sources, that a quota on grants to women is set by the Writing and Publication section of the Council. These findings make it imperative to demand equal representation

at all levels and in all administrative structures. Barbara Goddard responded to this recommendation by saying that "while the presence of females in the granting institutions is not always a guarantee that they will support women's work, there is a better chance of that happening if there are many women in such positions of decision making."

As can be seen from my analysis and from some of the reviews I have quoted, sexism, anti-woman bias, and anti-feminist prejudice are not sex-linked phenomena. Until strong feminists, by which I mean people of both sexes whose actions are consistent with strong anti-sexist principles, achieve some power, gender will continue to be prejudicial.

Sharon H. Nelson, managing editor of *Metonymy Productions*, has written articles, reviews, reports, theatre and dance pieces, and computer science texts. She has taught writing at Concordia and at UBC. *Blood Poems* (Fiddlehead 1978) was her fifth book. She recently finished *Mad Women & Crazy Ladies*.



a room of one's own

Dawna Gallagher

OUR STORY

The **Fireweed Collective** would like to engage in a continuing dialogue with our readers. We need encouragement, criticism and suggestions to help us reach a wider and more diverse community and to broaden our vision. We are anxious to hear what you like, what you don't like, what concerns and topics you would like us to explore. Write to us.

We are looking for community representatives across the country to help us reach a broader base of women. If you know women who are writing, if you'd like to see **Fireweed** in your local bookstore, if you feel we need your input, let us know.

We are always interested in contributions from artists: painters, illustrators and photographers whose work would be appropriate in our format. We are also interested in presenting women's work in the performing arts.

Our supporters may not be aware that all **Fireweed** donations are tax deductible. Receipts for donations over ten dollars are issued automatically.

Acknowledgements

The Collective would like to express our appreciation and thanks to the friends, associate members, and regional representatives who have given their time and talent in the ongoing publication of **Fireweed**. We would also like to thank the following individuals: **Susan Sturman**, first and foremost for her generous contribution of time and energy doing paste-up; **Lynne Fernie** for her continuing practical help and spiritual support; **Joss MacLennan** for proving that professionals sometimes work for free; **Janet Patterson** for her unflagging enthusiasm and support (Sheila would also like to thank Janet for her psychiatric enthusiasm and support); **Sharon Nelson** for her generosity and patience; **Mary Trafford** for responding so wonderfully to such a tight deadline; **The Women's Press** for sharing their working space and putting up with our never-ending production schedule; **Beth Wilcox** for her assistance in photographing the cover; **Lisa Wyndels**, **Daria Stermac**, and **Jennifer Smith** for their essential contributions during production. We would also like to thank the people whose donations help make this publication possible: **Sheila Block**, **L. Ann Fraser**, **Colette Gagnon** and **Rhea Tregebov**.

Contributors' Notes

Azélie Zee Artand is a poet and visual artist living in Montreal. Since 1977 her main area of interest has been road maps. She has recently created a publishing house, **Zelastycal Editions**, which produces object/books.

Renée Baert is a free-lance writer/curator living in Toronto.

Dawna Gallagher is an artist living in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Linda Lok is a Chinese-Canadian artist living and working in Toronto. She is currently studying anthropology and art history at the University of Toronto.

Mary Trafford is an illustrator and student of medical art at the University of Toronto.

Upcoming Issues

Issue 16: Women of Color

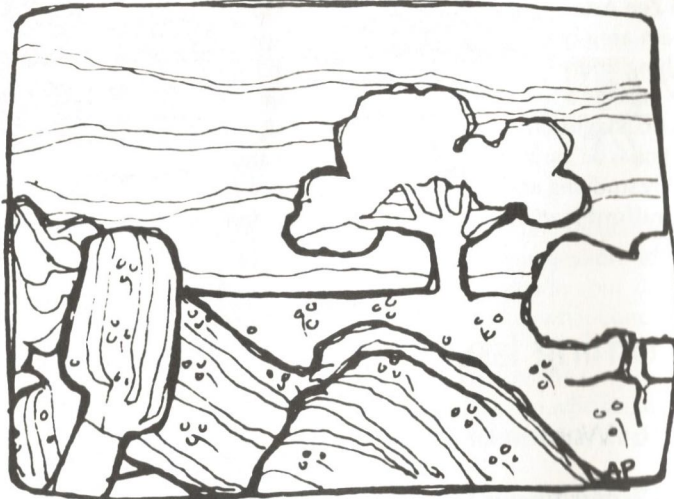
Issue 17: Writing (Deadline for submissions:
March 31, 1983)

Submission Requirements

When submitting written or visual material to *Fireweed*, please:

- Always make sure that each submission is carefully labelled with your name and address.
- Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for our reply or return of your submission. (If you live outside of Canada, attach an international reply coupon with sufficient postage.)
- Type written material on 8 1/2" x 11" paper (single-spaced for poetry, double-spaced for prose). When submitting poetry, we suggest that you send six or seven poems to give the editors an idea of your work. For prose, no book-length manuscripts, please.
- Visual artists are encouraged to send whatever material you feel would reproduce well in our format. Send slides or photographs — no originals through the mail.
- Your covering letter should include a brief biographical note, including previous publication credits, if any.

These guidelines will ensure the safety of your work. Please write us if you would like further information.



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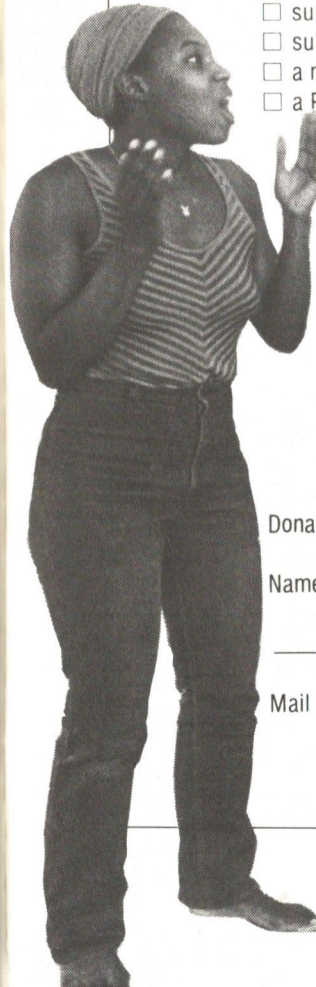
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Aesthetic Theory and Practices

Image, Symbol and Sacrament —
Religious Language and
The Dinner Party

The Limitations of *The Dinner Party*

Defending *The Dinner Party*

Washing the Dishes

Plus

Poetry Reviews Visual Art
and a Special Report on Women
and Writing in Canada