FIREWEED

A Feminist Quarterly

FIREWEED: A Feminist Quarterly

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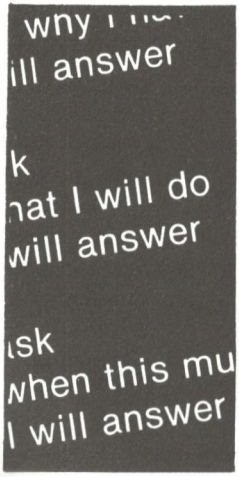
FIREWEED

Women and Performance

A Feminist Quarterly

Features

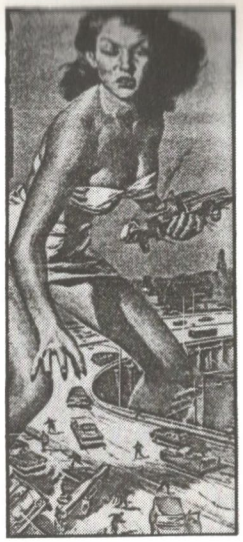
Poetry



Interviews

Reviews

Departments



Fiction

It's a question of *what* or *whose* version of reality we are willing to be restrained by.

Realism. The ultimate con. The fatal pretence.
Or. How to tell a lie and get away with it.

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, in the time of Ibsen and Darwin, we all decided to pretend that *that* picture of reality was true. And we were not. And then we forgot that it was just pretend. We have become accomplices in the lie.
The picture, the whole picture, and nothing but the picture...

This is *real.*

That's only tv.

Only tv?

My surrogate mother . . . my mother's surrogate daughter, generator and creator of my shadowy rivals, thinner, fitter, sexier, fresher *and* more serenely efficient than I . . .

Only tv?

Put up your hand if you feel that life has a gripping beginning, a wrenching and passionate conflict and a tender and comprehensive resolution.

Does your life lack a certain familiar but unattainable style you remember fleetingly as if from a dream?

Will your relationships not tidy themselves into resolutions at what seems to be the right moment?

Virginia, there is no Mary Richards.

Oh yeah? How come she has her own tv series then? Santa Claus doesn't. God doesn't. That's why they're dead and she's not.

This.

That.

War Games:

My pulsing seamless undeniable blue light shadow is a rival more formidable than any Jung might have imagined for me; more evil than any my mind could engender.

Woman as spectacle sliding prettily along the dream waves of a foreign plane, sutured and spliced together by conventions of light.

This is . . .

That is . . . .

Because pictures are so powerful, seem to be real; seam to be real; seam to be reel; and therefore are real.

Make a picture. Make a reality.

I am in danger of drowning in a sea of ghosts.

This is real

That is . . .

This issue is about realities.

Other realities

1. I am sabotaging IBM.

2. I am destroying all mass electronic communications equipment.

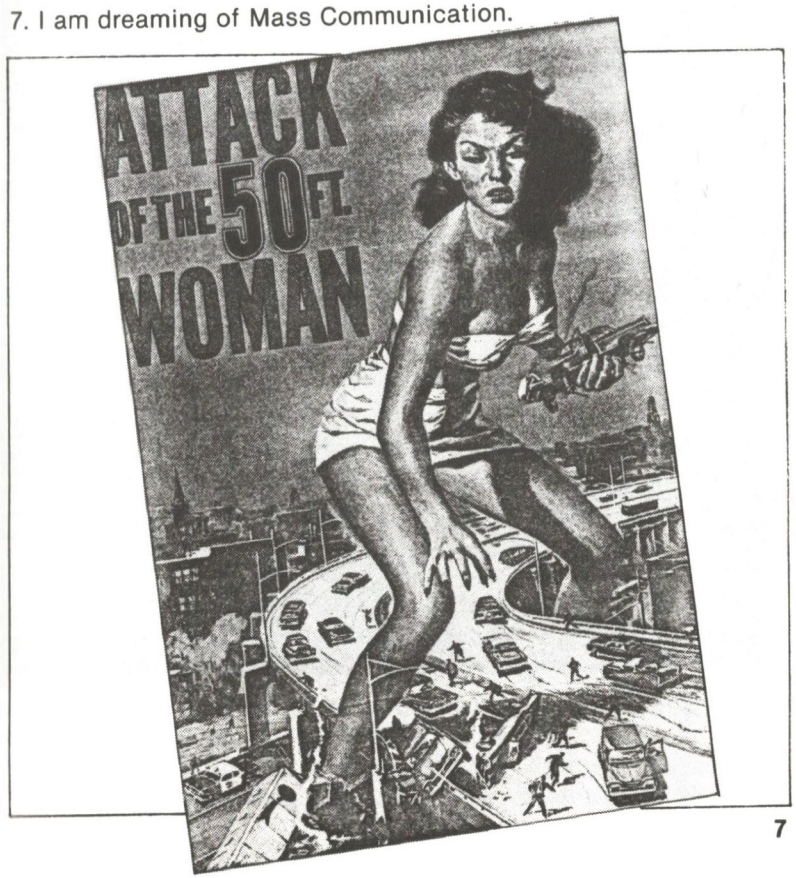
3. I am exposing the heads of all multinational corporations as ghostly electronic computerized Wizards of Oz.

4. I am liberating the equipment.

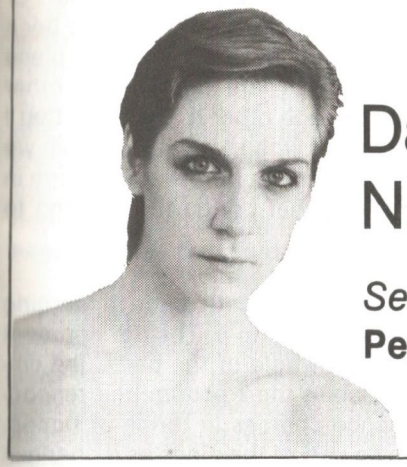
5. We are signing an inviable treaty that makes it mandatory for every citizen of the world to contribute one segment of programming to the newly established Every Person's Broadcasting Network annually.

6. I am watching billions of programmes filling the airwaves from every point of origin on the globe.

7. I am dreaming of Mass Communication.



Andrew Oxenham



Dancing Nourishes Me

Self-Profile: **Peggy Smith Baker**

Peggy Smith Baker is a dancer, choreographer, teacher and director of Dancemakers, *a vital dance alternative. One of the few dancers in this country trained in modern dance from the beginning, she has been acclaimed as a dancer of compelling drama who, as a choreographer, creates movement that is at once simple and lyrical.*

I make sense to myself when I am dancing. That's the closest I can get to explaining, or figuring out, why I have become a dancer. The content of dance (the implications, associations, imagery) has always been there for me, and the technique is something for which I have a good attention span. So the work is a pleasure because it has its own logic and fascination.

Most of the class work I've been doing for the last few years is based on the movement principles of Jose Limon. His technique is a series of basic ideas rather than a syllabus of set exercises, so every teacher approaches it with different material and there is a lot of room for one thing to lead to another. When you work at something that is founded on repetition — plies, tendues, every day and the same dances for many, many performances — you need something that is going to lead to discovery through the repetition. I don't mean that Limon is the only technique that allows for that, discovery and development is the point of all technique, but I'm working in Limon and I'm making discoveries.

Despite the fact that I've always had a lot of solo work, I'm not a soloist at heart. Choreographers have given me solos largely, I think, because I don't fit the conventional dancer mold. But a good deal of my satisfaction comes from dancing with other people. For example, there is one woman in Dancemakers whom I have been working with for long enough that whenever we are in a piece together we are dancing with each other. There might be five other people on stage, but we are aware of each other to the point that I always know where she is, I can feel her when we pass or when we are doing the same phrase at opposite sides of the stage. We are in touch, there are connections. For me, that brings the dancing to life.

I love to be used in new work. I enjoy the frantic pace of learning new material and then working and reworking it. The development of phrasing and transitions, making a whole of the parts, the emphasis on style and detail. I appreciate the freedom and responsibility when I am given performance choices in terms of timing, dynamics and movement. I like to be part of the piece as it changes and determines itself.

As a choreographer I am just finding my way. I aim for work that is unique, that has its own personality, its own strangeness, beauty, awkwardness, its own enigmas. I try to give myself enough distance to just watch it take shape, see where it needs clarifying and where it needs to be left alone. I want to be creative without being calculated. When the piece is finished I can put myself in if need be, but I tend not to be in my own work while I am choreographing. I pick up on the inspiration, intuition, interpretations and misinterpretations of the dancers I work with, but I don't want to hear that they don't like a step or feel uncomfortable or that a phrase is difficult. There is no room for that in the midst of work.

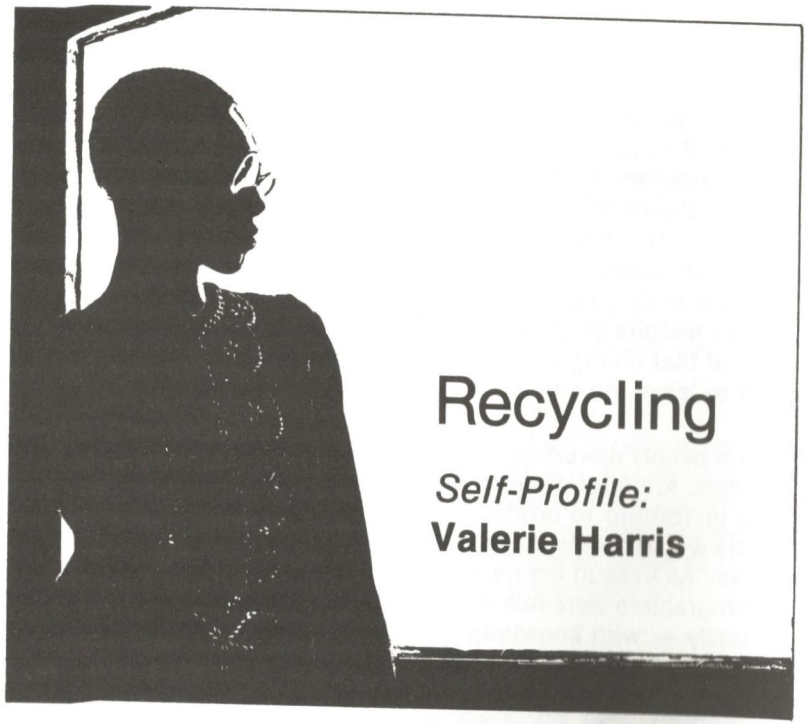
For me there is no question of dancing or not. I've survived some miserable injuries and some lousy performances, but dancing nourishes me. Teaching people who are serious about learning, doing class with a wise teacher and really good dancers; rehearsing with people who will work full out; choreographing, especially when I'm on to something; and performing for a sensitive, excitable audience — all these things nourish me.

Working in a city as isolated from the mainstream of dance as Toronto has its drawbacks. Classes suited to the needs of professional dancers are scarce and it's necessary to go elsewhere for intensive periods of study in order to find a teacher of the calibre required to guide one in the development of a really fine technique.

There are very few spaces in which to present work; only a couple of theatres where dance companies can make do, and almost nowhere to show works in progress. The studio theatre in Toronto Dance Theatre's new building is great, on a par with the American Theatre Lab in New York City where a tremendous amount of dance is produced each year, but it goes largely unused, unavailable to groups outside TDT. Toronto is not included in the touring circuits of established dance companies (though there is hope of that changing fairly soon), and if you want to keep up you need to leave the city to see performances elsewhere.

I am deeply disturbed by the attitude of the press in dismissing our work. Although Dancemakers was the only modern dance company in Toronto to produce itself this year, critics from the daily papers would review only the opening night of our ambitious spring season. As a result the many dances included in the alternate evening programme were not reviewed. Until critics treat modern dance seriously — with knowledge, understanding and responsibility — working in Canada will become increasingly frustrating.

But certainly, I can't wait for an O.K. I do my work here because it is relevant here. I am part of this culture and society. Being a dancer in New York does not necessarily mean success. And dancing in Toronto does not have to mean making do. For me, the work is all important, and I want to do well at bringing to life work that I believe in.



Rina Fraticelli

Recycling

Self-Profile: Valerie Harris

Valerie Harris is a playwright and journalist in New York City. She is a project consultant for Third World Newsreel, a documentary film organization, and is presently at work on a play about filmmakers.

Valerie. Woman. Black. American. I live in New York City (crazy place). I work in independent films. I write plays . . . From January 1977 to October 1978 I experienced a most productive period: I wrote plays, thought of future plays, and I saw my work performed. There was a burst of creative energy that paralleled the frenzied movement and explorations of both my external and internal life. In short, I went through changes. And now, after filling a year with sending my plays around, working with political organizations, writing for various publications, showing films in Paris, surviving my first New York production *and* the flu, I find I'm on the verge again. The energy is gathering again, and again I have a feeling of unlimited possiblilities, but it's scarier this time. I've had a taste of something new, and I think I want more, but more of what?! Went back to the old journals and the work completed in an attempt to check myself out. I've felt the need to call on my past to guide me through this present and on . . .

From the journal

Jan. 15, 1977: One night we went out on the frozen lake, sat quietly and built a fire and conducted a short ceremony. I was moved by the experience in a way that I didn't expect. I asked the lake not to let me forget what can exist between kindred spirits. This area, the snow, the trees have seduced me. I am glad that winter means more to me now than freezing my ass off at the bus stop.

From *Ice Game*

> The performance takes place on a frozen lake surrounded by tall trees. The set is black and white. The trees are like black crystal, fragmented and reflective. Somewhere beyond the trees a yellow light is shining, the light from the masquerade from which these performers have come. When the performers are not engaged in conversation, they stamp their feet and shiver. We hear, faintly, throughout the performance music and laughter from the masque.

Jan. 23: Yesterday the wind was very strong and no one went out all day. Today the snow is melting. I want to be in the sun. I don't want to participate in "the group" but I am obliged to. "The group" to me isn't Joan, Jacques, Andre, Therese, Steven and Valerie anymore. "The group" is that strange serpent living under this house who used to send his spirit in here at night to provoke eerie feelings. He never got to me that way so he went into hiding for about four days to figure me out. Now the sucker is here with me all the time. Suffocates me so I can't sleep, strangles me so I can't eat. If Andre and Joan didn't make me laugh, if Therese didn't understand me and I didn't understand her, if Jacques didn't amuse me, if Steven didn't touch my heart somewhere, then I'm sure I would die at the hands of this monster, "the group."

From *Ice Game*

Pierrot: But Your Holiness, I refuse to remain party to this troupe.

Your Holiness: May I remind you, Monsieur, that you were not elected, selected, or even nominated in any way. You're simply one of us. So you can't refuse.

Pierrot: But I can, Your Holiness, I have. I do.

Your Holiness: Where would you go?

Pierrot: I don't know . . . I have to think.

All: It's cold out here on the ice.

Your Holiness: Who, then, would you represent?

Pierrot: That's easy enough. I'd represent only one. I'd speak only for myself.

All: Yourself?

Your Holiness: Yourself? And who is that? What do you do? What is a *you* without *us*, Monsieur, hmm?

Jan. 27: "Often I wonder — am I madman who is content to be alone and from the phantoms of his loneliness fashions a companion and spouse for his soul?" — Gibran's "The Voice of the Master"

Jan. 29: Read *Endgame* again this afternoon . . . "Play and lose, and have done with losing." . . . Of course, if you don't play, you can't lose, but I want to play. This is my life, and I have no choice but to live it, to explore . . . "Since that's the way we're playing it . . . let's play it that way . . . and speak no more about it."

Feb. 3: (Montreal) Where will I live after this? I don't know why but the thought of living in Philadelphia scares the shit out of me now. I have guilt feelings about it at times because I know my family has done a lot for me but I feel that we have less and less in common. What I like doesn't seem to interest them and vice versa. On the other hand, I realize that we are all living our own individual stories, and none of them will lose much sleep over where I live or what I do . . .

March 19 (New York, at Richard's loft): The cat went to the door and cried and for my own salvation I let him out. I think he left for me, really. I think he knew he had the power to drive me crazy and decided to have mercy. I let him out but I feel guilty — suppose he doesn't come back? Does Richard like me enough not to hate me if the cat doesn't come back? . . . Today was the first time I can remember anyone saying to my face that I am eccentric. What does eccentric mean? I know what the hell it means. *This*, right now,

what I'm thinking, the fact that I am sitting in this space alone at night, not being able to distinguish peace from discomfort, fear from ecstasy, the fact that I turn around and see my reflection in the dark glass and know better than to stare too long but am tempted to, all of this is eccentricity. I love it and I hate it. But mostly I love it . . . I understand there is a lot of crime on the streets of this city. Well, if no one grabs me, I will write. If someone grabs me and I live I will write. And if someone grabs me and I don't live then I won't write — and finally the spell will be broken.

From *Nights Alone*

Kattarina: But maybe I can understand. You say I'm special, then maybe I can understand. Wait, I think perhaps I do know you from before, from years ago, when I was still young. Yes. I remember. I sat at the kitchen table, a round, brown table. My mother demanded to know where I'd been, demanding woman, she was always demanding something of someone, she demanded to know where I'd been. But I was not myself for the first time and I sat at the table dancing to the music inside my head. I didn't stop dancing and she demanding to know where I'd been. "Stop that wiggling! Sit still! Sit straight!" that's what she said to me. Then she slapped me, to make me stop dancing. And I screamed. "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" Both of us screaming the same words at each other's eyes, and when the screaming ended, finally ended, I jumped out of the chair, snatched her face off and stuffed it into my mouth. I ate it. I ate her face, her neck and continued all the way down to her toenails. I devoured my mother. Yes, I ate her. But it was not easily done. She didn't digest. I retched and threw up. I threw up my mother and she was . . . *you*. You were my mother. And we danced. Me and you, was it? We danced in each other's arms and it was the first time I danced with my mother. It went on that way for a long time, Piggy. Remember? I don't like to . . . Yes, this is insanity, Piggy. Remember? I don't like to . . . Yes, this is insanity. But you won't get your black paws on me. Ha! Now that I know what you are I can beat you. I can stop you. We don't stand for this sort of thing in *our* family . . .

April 4: Saw "Children of Paradise" yesterday and dreamed last night of a mime, a true disciple of Marcel Marceau, of wanting to see him perform and not being able to.

April 30: Will finish my play by this time next week — *know* I will. All I have to do is figure out this scene between Cat and her mother and then rewrite the ending which has been written for months now.

May 1: *Nights Alone* is the title. As soon as I started writing I knew I would go to the end. But there was no feeling of accomplishment or elation. Rather, I felt lonely. I've become too used to thinking about these people, their world.

August 14: Finished typing *Boxes* for radio and all that remains is to have a copy made. Why did I do it? I know it won't sell but maybe I needed the discipline of doing it, the therapy of typing. *Boxes* is not a bad play but I don't want to do that kind of theatre. I was just learning when I wrote it. *Nights Alone* is closer to what I want to do...Began *The Redesther Play* and plan to finish by November 1. That will be an experiment for me — condensing the process. But there are so many plays in my head and I am anxious to get them out. I think I can get them out faster if I get over my fear of beginning the actual dialogue. I always hesitate to say, "These are the words I select to speak for this image." . . . I'm afraid of what I want to write. I want to create fantastic dream spectacle works for the theatre, but maybe no one will accept them, maybe not for a long time or ever. There is a painting — Gerome's "The Duel After the Masquerade" — that I would like to write a performance for. But maybe no one would be interested in it but me. Still, I persist . . .

Sept. 10: Called Christel in D.C. on Sunday. We talked about *Nights Alone* and now at least I understand it better. I'm worried about how she'll direct and act in it too. She's too involved, and because I don't know what she's doing besides making love with "Piggy" I don't count on a real production. Her advisor "advises" her to do it as an exercise in directing experiments. For her thesis he suggests "Arms and the Man." Enough said . . . Told C. and C. about *The Redesther Play* so they could get an idea as to where I am in my writing. I think the three of us are at a meeting place. She looked at Redesther from a feminist perspective, which is fine, but I am not thinking of those characters as representational of any type of *women*. I think of them as incarnations of powerful, intense emotions . . .

From *The Redesther Play*

> The first priest claps his hands twice: drums, bells, reeds. The Lustful Dancer springs to life. The priests exit. The people move about and wave their arms toward Redesther. After a moment the men and women separate, their movement is gradually slowed, their droning quieted. The sound of the instruments fades. Finally there is silence, though the Lustful Dancer dances as wildly as ever. Slowly the people climb out of the sandpit and exit, men left, women right, with sliding motion. The men who guarded Redesther exit, leaving her alone on the bank . . . Still in the pit the Lustful Dancer dances close to Maximon, who ignores it until it stops defiantly in front of him. The Lustful Dancer snatches the streaming red hair from its head and reveals itself to be a man . . .

April 4, 1978: . . . Also I suspect that my subconscious is very strong and being that the characters of my plays spring from there I am quite affected by them. It's kind of spooky. Yesterday I felt all the rage, venom and vengeance of Redesther, a vengeance like that of Medea. Now, like the Pierrot I am experiencing alienation, exploring it. But I can't expect other people to put up with this. My dream images are very powerful but I must somehow command the power and not let it overwhelm me...*Ice Game* will have to wait until I get together again. David and I have postponed working on *Nights Alone.*

April 15: A new project that I anticipate as being exhilarating, frustrating and worthwhile is being part of the editorial collective of Heresies, a feminist art/politics journal, issue devoted to black and other third world women. Went to the first meeting (which is why I know it's going to be frustrating) and I like the idea.

July 13: Worked on *Ice Game* again today. I am doing all dialogue now and then will go back and "dub' in stage directions and images. It's getting exciting. I feel differently since returning from Philly. It's taken me awhile to get back into my own pace and head. I hesitated before going to the theatre alone, and I thought I'd left that insecurity behind me . . .

October 19: *Ice Game* is finished! No sense of loss as with *Nights Alone* or *The Redesther Play.* Is that what they call being "professional"?

October 28: Went to Cleveland to see *Nights Alone* performed. It was a very serious, psychological play, done in 2 acts, no shopping bags, no cats on stage, no two character play. A version of my *Nights*, and that was an experience. I was taken to dinner and my success was drunk to. I was reviewed in The Cleveland Press and called a "splendid new playwright' and "a promising writer." The production was described as "superbly directed." Everyone involved was pleased. I was pleased. But what? This is supposed to be the rewards of the work but for me the work is so much more rewarding, so I can't be as thrilled as I know I'm expected to be. I will collect the programs and posters and reviews and I have a sense that they are stepping stones to something and I'm afraid that way of thinking will be a wall between me and my present feelings about success. I am successful when I finish a play and I like it. Seeing my work produced is a responsibility that I want, but a responsibility all the same. Valerie the Playwright is questioned, must listen to comments, gets phone calls about "rave" reviews — must answer to people. I couldn't wait to get home to Valerie the Familiar . . . Spoke briefly with Andre; I told him that I didn't care much for the critic's phrase-ology but I suppose the important thing is that she liked the play. He said I have to get used to it. There's so much I'll have to get used to.

From The Redesther Play

All: Essence of sunlight and starlight and moonlight;
Familiar of zephyr and fire, serenity and storm,
lasting life and desert silence;
Protector of all worthy beings;
Kinsman to all sacred things —

One: It is a woman with wings!

All: All praises to the woman with wings!

LEGENDS OF THE COPPER WOMAN

LEGEND ONE

n the days before the coming of the people, the coast was almost empty. Only Copper Woman lived here, alone with her secrets, her mysteries and herSelf. Copper Woman lived, but not well, for her secrets were incomplete and her cycle unfinished, her world not yet a totality. *Alone* she came from the bowels of the mountains and built on the shoreline a small wooden house, alone she learned to harvest Tutsup the sea urchin, Ya-is the butter clam, Hetchen the little neck clam, Ah-sam the crab, Um-echt the horse clam and So-ha the spring salmon. She learned to eat the meat and make clothes from Kich-tlatz the fur seal. Alone she learned Tut-lukh the sea lion was not to be approached unwarily. But still, her existence was marginal at best.

In the time of the first autumn storms a craft of godling creatures appeared and taught the Copper Woman all she must know to survive on a better level. Coming from the setting sun, riding down the golden slide that cuts across the water just before the blanket of night fall, they came to teach her what all humankind must Know to live more fully. But this was not the Time nor the Place for the magic ones to stay and as they left for their place, Copper Woman

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The following were interpreted and adapted from the Nootka legends by Anne Cameron.

began to weep. Bitterly she cried, for loneliness is a bitter thing and an acrid taste in our mouths, more bitter when you think you have been freed from it and find it returning again. So much did she cry, her very head began to drain of all fluid and as tears fell from her eyes, so from her nose great amounts of thick mucous. Tears and mucous and from her mouth saliva and her face swelled as the waters of loneliness poured. From her nose an enormous cluster of mucous strands fell into the sand and lay at her feet, and so great was the cluster that, even in her pathetic state, Copper Woman was aware of it and grew ashamed. Trying to master her wailing, she made to kick sand over the mess, bury it, hide it, return it to the earth. The magic one told her not to feel shame, not to bury the snot, but to save it, even cherish it, and when she had learned to accept even this most gross evidence of her mortality, then from the acceptance would come the means whereby she would never again be alone, never again be lonely. They told her that those times when body secretions flow, those times a woman answers the call of the moon, are holy and sacred times, times for prayer and contemplation.

Copper Woman did as she was told. Not understanding, but having faith, she scooped the mess up in mussel shell and put it with her magic things. A few days later she noticed the sand in the shell was moving. She looked closely and saw a small, incomplete thing twisting uncomfortably in the small shell. Copper Woman carefully placed what was in the mussel shell in a larger shell, a shell of Um-echt, the horse clam. Every day she watched and became aware that the small living incomplete thing was growing something that looked like a miniature of the neck of the horse clam. Soon the small figure was too large to be comfortable in the shell of Um-echt, so she put it in a shell of Tutsup the sea urchin. But in only a day or two she moved it again, for beneath the thing that looked like the neck of Um-echt, this thing was developing small versions of Tutsup and Copper Woman did not want the spines of the sea urchin to grow between the legs of her little friend, for then how would he walk? So she put him in the shell of Ah-sam the crab and for a few weeks he was happy although, like Ah-sam, he would grab at her with his hands and not want to let go. Copper Woman put her little mannikin in a bed made of fur from Tut-lukh the sea lion and he was happy, even though on his face he grew whiskers like Tut-luhk and on parts of his chest and belly the soft fur of the big animal. And his voice became deep and he would roar with jealousy if Copper Woman spent too much time admiring something else.

One night the snot boy left his bed of the fur from Tut-luhk and he crawled into bed with Copper Woman. He fastened his mouth, like the mouth of Ah-Sam, on her mouth, and his hands, grasping like the claws of Ah-Sam, felt for her breasts. Copper Woman knew she

could easily destroy this impertinent snot boy, but she also felt responsible for him and sorry for him for being such an incomplete collection of traits of a number of sea creatures. Had not the sea saved her? Had not the godlings come from the sea and told her this strange thing would be the means whereby she would never again be alone? Besides, his mouth on hers was pleasant and his hands, though demanding, were not hurtful and did cause a warmth in her belly. A warmth that grew until the part of him made from the neck of Um-echt and the parts of him which resembled Tutsup began to come alive and grow until she welcomed Um-echt into her body and held the snot boy close to her, closer until the lonely feeling almost...but not quite...went away and she felt her body swelling, filling as if with the moon.

The snot boy cried out, not the deep voice of Tut-luk but a cry much like that of Qui-nä the gull and then the mannikin held onto her and shook as if the autumn gales were within him. Copper Woman soothed him and held him close, wondering if the loneliness would ever totally go. Many times thereafter she would hold the snot boy close and would fix her mouth on his, use the magic of her hands to waken the two small Tutsup and once they were awake the Um-echt part entered her, seeking, exploring, taking her...almost...from loneliness, but never totally.

The Hag

LEGEND TWO

he Copper Woman was living with the incomplete mannikin, snot boy, in the place where the godlings had come to give her knowledge. She taught the small strange creature as much as she could, but he never really seemed to learn properly. When he built a weir, there was always one part of it not properly made, and many of the fish would escape. When he built a fire it was either too hot or not hot enough, and often he would burn himself. When he was through using a thing he would leave it, never remembering to put it away where he could find it again, and sometimes he would forget to come home when the meal was ready, then would complain bitterly if his food was overdone or cold. Copper Woman would tease him, make him forget his ill humour, laugh with him and often she would sing for she was less lonely with him than she had been when alone.

Her breasts grew large and tender, her belly filled until it looked as if the moon itself were trapped inside, and one day movement within her told her she was no longer one person, but two; that there was another living inside her body. Copper Woman prayed daily that this other would not be incomplete like the snot boy, but rather an entire person with responsibility and attention to detail. Often she felt frightened and wondered at her own ability to care for this new person, and once or twice she chafed that she was no longer free to be herself, but rather had to think in terms of another.

One night, with much pain and blood, there came from her a small version of herself. But altered. The copper skin was darker, as if older, and the hair black, even blacker than that of Ku-ka-wus the hair seal. The eyes were more slanted than hers, almost like those of the cormorant who had no other name yet and only got his name much later when the blindness was taken from him. And Copper Woman looked at her daughter and felt the loneliness diminish until it was no larger than a small round pebble on the beach. Her breasts ached with a pulsation like that of the waves on the beach and when she had cleaned the blood from her daughter and the mucous from the small nose and mouth, she wept with thanks for the secret magic the old ones had given her. Knowing the secret she had been able to lick clean her child and not feel revulsion. Rather she felt that, again, and in a different way, she was giving life to herSelf. When she held her child close, to warm her and make her welcome, the small head turned and the soft mouth closed around the swollen and darkened nipple. The small pebble of loneliness vanished and a feeling even stronger than those

awakened by snot boy filled the Copper Woman until it was as if the god creatures themselves had entered her, and through her to her milk, from the milk to the child, and so she named the child Mowita, knowing she would one day be the matriarch.

Snot boy did not pay much attention to Mowita, sometimes he would play with her, sometimes he would even hold her and speak softly to her, but mostly he went about his own affairs. Incomplete, he could catch fish, but it was Copper Woman, and later, Mowita, who knew how to smoke and cure. Time and again they showed Snot Boy how to do these things, but he would laugh and say he had no time for such bothersome details and he would leave, laughing. He could catch Mowitch the deer but was useless curing the hide or cooking the meat.

When Mowita was walking and laughing and beginning to make words, Copper Woman gave life to a son, like the snot boy, but not quite so incomplete. Not as complete as Mowita, but better than snot boy. And when this child was walking there was another, again a girl, and to her daughters Copper Woman taught the secrets, to her sons she tried to teach more than the snot boy would ever know. Many children had Copper Woman, and their laughter rang clearly, riding on the wind, climbing to the heavens as does the smoke of a fire, and life for them was pleasant.

Sisters: Christmas, 1979

Robin Belitsky Endres

Auntie Katie is old now
But her voice sounds just the same
A sweet sound, a pretty sound
With tears in there
Her hair short dark and curly
My mother's adored younger sister
Once we all three drove to Seattle for the shopping
In my mother's old blue Pontiac
1949
Wait a minute
It wasn't old then
They were having a grand time
In the front seat and I was squeezed
Up against the window, loving it
We stayed in a motel and just when
The story started to get juicy —
Robin, go outside and play by yourself for a while
Half understood but most interesting that story was
About another sister's husband who was shut away
For doing something to little girls
Standing outside the door I heard
The tears in Katie's voice
Gather up and spill over
The other thing I remember about that trip
Was my mother being happy
My father said to me once
Your mother's sister Marie is always miserable
Your mother's sister Katie is always happy
And your mother is somewhere in between
(Marie isn't the one whose husband was —
There were *four* sisters altogether)
When Katie was young
During the war
Before I was born
She was in love with a handsome man in the Air Force
I've seen pictures of him
He was Jewish and wanted Katie to be Jewish too
The engagement was broken
She let belief stand in the way of love
My mother said often, scornfully
She herself married a handsome Jewish

Man in the Air Force who didn't ask her to convert
She didn't believe in God anyway
So we celebrated Christmas
Much later Katie married Uncle Bill
Whom she claimed to adore but who
My mother claimed caused her migraine headaches
We didn't see much of her in those years

When I was twelve they took me to see my mother
in the hospital
They had slit her throat and the top of her head
And taken out part of her brain
Katie was sitting in the waiting room
I didn't even know she was in town
Everything happened so fast
I sat and stared at the wall for a long time
When I started to come apart
Katie held on to me real tight

Just about the time I had the baby
Uncle Bill died
Don't worry Robin, my mother said
She's upset but she'll get over it
And you wait and see
Those headaches of hers will go away

Christmas day and I suddenly panic
What if my mother's alone?
I got her presents and sent her mine
But I forgot to ask what she was
Planning for the day itself
She answers the phone in her happy voice
Katie is there, come to stay for a while
Now that Bill's gone
They're cooking a turkey
Won't be ready til midnight she says
I forgot to put it in at the right time
Katie says hello on the extension
It's been twenty years since I heard her voice
"You sound just the same as you always did"
"You remember"
"Of course I remember"
They were having a grand time
Two old women
One of them with half a brain
The other mourning half a love.

I Am Not Objective:

Filmmaker Laura Sky Talks with Fireweed About Her Work

Laura Sky is a Toronto filmmaker, radio broadcaster and teacher at the Film Department of Queen's University in Kingston. She has just completed her most recent film Shutdown. *She is interviewed for Fireweed by Catherine Macleod, a Toronto feminist and writer who is currently producing her first film, a retrospective of the recent women's movement in Quebec.*

Shutdown *is a film about the closing of an American branch plant in Sarnia, Ontario. The Prestolite Company has been producing auto parts there for fifty years. On December 22, 1978, this plant was shutdown by its American parent company, The Eltra Corporation of Toldeo Ohio. One hundred and twenty five people lost their jobs. Half of them were women. Most of these workers were over fifty. They were skilled in the work they had been doing for years but too old to retrain to meet the needs of other industries. They were no longer marketable.*

Shutdown, *directed by Toronto filmmaker,* Laura Sky, *tells the story of branch plant shutdowns from the perspective of the people who had worked in the plant. It looks at their realities in very human terms — their feelings, their fears and their analysis of this Canadian dilemma. There is no narrator, there are no "experts," no officials. The story is told by the people themselves.*

This is the kind of film Laura Sky has been making for the past eight years. We talked to her about her political relationship to the medium, how she became involved in filmmaking and how her own experience and consciousness affects the kind of films she makes.

Catherine: Your first film was called Tomorrow's Children. *Could you tell us something about your decision to make this film?*

Laura: It started in 1973. I was living in Cabbagetown with my husband at the time, close to one of the local vocational schools — this was before Cabbagetown was fashionable. I got to know some of the kids who were in the school system and I knew they were being screwed, particularly in the special education classes. They were the kids of low income families, working class families and they were being given a low-budget education.

I remember one girl saying that the kids didn't get much education at their school. "For a year all we made in class was cakes . . . most of the girls quit, get married and have kids, or get jobs in a factory. We don't have enough education to get a good job." This girl had wanted to be a kindergarten teacher but they didn't have programs like that at her school. She said, "I'm real smart outside of school, but I'm dumb inside school. I ain't coming here to learn anything — because they're not teaching nothing."

I knew that I wanted to do something about this and I knew that the audience I wanted to reach was not a print-and-paper audience. I needed to find a more direct way to reach the people who were most affected by the issue, and film was the only way.

It was the right time for me also. I had always been in the classes for so-called "dumb" kids myself and I wanted to integrate my own experience with the experience of these kids. I had a tremendous need to express myself and at the same time make some sense to other people about their own experience. Political filmmakers, you know, aren't totally altruistic. We aren't saints. We get into it for our own needs too.

Catherine: At that time did you know you were going to make more than one film?

Laura: It was a pure act of tenacity that got the first film made. After that I knew I never wanted to do anything else. It was a process of taking active control over my life and film was an "ordering" medium. With film everything has to make sense.

Tomorrow's Children was a film I had planned to make along with my husband. He was a cameraman. On the eve of the beginning of the project we separated and I had to decide whether to proceed on my own or let the whole thing go. He had taken the camera

equipment we'd bought and sold it so I had no camera skills and no equipment. I had nothing but my tenacity and a kid to raise on my own.

I got a LIP grant. I met a cameraman, John Phillips, who taught me everything I needed to know. He was really supportive of the project. Then I rented the equipment from the man my husband sold it to and I haven't stopped since.

I shot *Tomorrow's Children* in Super 8, black and white. Subsequently, the National Film Board transferred it to 16 mm for distribution.

Catherine: Were you a feminist at the time?

Laura: I was terrified of feminism and the woman's liberation movement. I had come out of the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement and had developed an analysis of the family that somehow managed to exclude feminism. Separating from my husband was an individual act for me at the time. It was the period of "smash monogamy" and I wanted personal freedom. I couldn't connect to larger issues. The way this contradiction expressed itself in me was that I became a kind of neurotic romantic. It was a contorted manifestation of my liberal politics, and a clandestine affair with a married man was one of its symptoms. In a funny way, however, it was this man who introduced me to feminism — in an extremely indirect way, I might add.

I had become quite ill and couldn't take care of myself and my child. I had no family in the city to help me out. My lover, because he was tied up with his own family, couldn't help either, so he sent a woman friend of his to stay with me until I was better. It was this woman, already a part of the women's liberation movement, who first introduced me to the politics of being a woman. She talked to me about politics and poetry. She was the first woman I knew who lived a life independent of men and was flourishing. She drank bourbon and talked very eloquently about female rage. I never saw the man again but the friendship that developed with the woman had a major impact on my life. Until that time I had not known how to protect myself in political ways. I learned that from her.

Catherine: You've been called a socialist feminist. What does this mean to you?

Laura: Unlike my feminism, my socialism has always been there. When feminism discovered me, it was as if I inherited another front on which to fight social battles. I always knew there was an "us" and a "them." On that count there was no loss of innocence for me. I was partly raised by my grandparents — Montreal garment

workers — who were both union activists wherever they worked. As a child I would sometimes watch my grandmother cry at the end of a day at work. She taught that there was no such thing as a nice boss and gave me a certain view of how the world worked. My parents were also political activists and a typical Saturday evening consisted of my parents' friends coming to our house and arguing politics well into the night. Their politics were their passion. All red diaper babies know what I'm talking about.

Catherine: What brought a socialist feminist to the National Film Board?

Laura: When my marriage broke down I was left with a child and no money. I needed a job. When I first heard about the job of directing the Challenge for Change program in the Ontario Region for the NFB, I turned it down. I couldn't see how I could do politically relevant work in an institution like the Board — an idea that was shared by a lot of my friends. Economic pressures prevailed, however, and when it was offered to me the second time, I took it. I was determined not to be co-opted; in the process I developed callouses on all the soft spots I brought with me to that job. My tenacity translated itself into aggressiveness, something that was essential to survive in an institution like that. I was not only up against the NFB — I felt I had to prove to all my doubting friends that I could do good work there. My first step was to make the Challenge for Change studio accessible to the right people — community organizations, women's groups, the trade union movement. You can't do these things and be sweet at the same time. I developed a reputation of one of the toughest mother-fuckers in town. During my first year at the NFB I used to have to spend every weekend in bed recuperating from the week's work and getting ready for the next week. It wasn't easy. I was there for eight years. My job was dissolved by the Board last year. I was shutdown.

Catherine: You have worked quite closely with the trade union movement in recent years. How did this relationship develop?

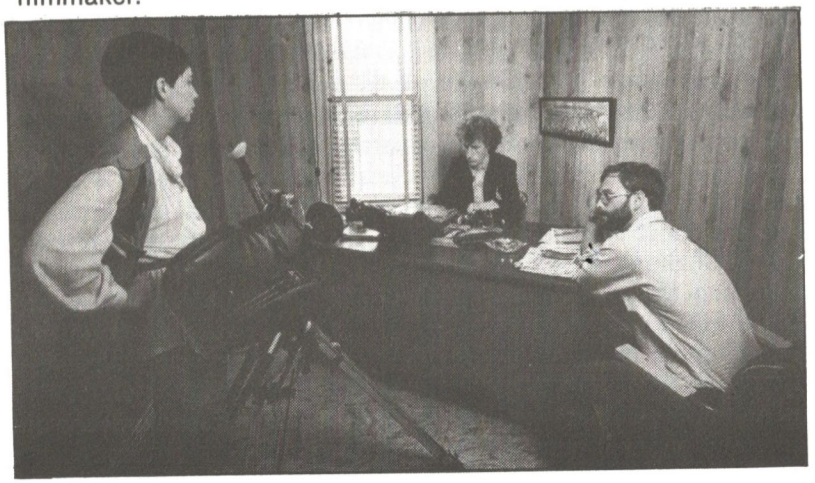
Laura: It was the Artistic Woodworkers strike in 1974 that brought me into direct professional contact with working people and their rights. Challenge for Change was invited by the strike committee to document the relationship between the police and the picketers on the line. The experience re-charged my old militancy, something I had lost, to some extent, in the course of my marriage. I was forced to choose at that time between the institution I was working for and the values that I held in common with the large community of working people. It was such a significant struggle to me and it surprises

me now that so few people remember the Artistic strike. I guess it's like finding out someone doesn't remember Chicago in '68 or the whole period of the sixties.

Catherine: You are a feminist and a filmmaker but you don't call yourself a feminist filmmaker. Why?

Laura: Of the twenty or so film projects I've worked on, only three of them are specifically about women. In the others I have always integrated my feminist analysis. As a woman, like other women, I honour the priority of relationship in questions that centre around quality of life issues. It's this perception I bring to all my films. As a woman too, I'm not afraid of intimacy — I have been well trained in a feminine role but have taken that training and turned it into something progressive. Because I recognize the progressive nature of female perception, I don't feel it's necessary or even desirable to make films only about women. If we are to change the world that we live in and that keeps us down as women, we have to look at that world as a whole — it has corporations in it, men in it, kids in it, unions, government, women. Women don't belong in ghettos — work, home or cultural — women are of the world. And the world has to change in ways that reflect this. As women, we have to do it ourselves because no one will do it for us.

In my way, with my films, that's what I'm doing. I make films for working-class people, men and women. I believe in the right of every person to fight exploitation in order to achieve their full potential. I can't disassociate myself from my sense of justice and human-ness. I have to take a stand. Documentary filmmaking has been far too shrouded in the phony myth of objectivity. I am not an objective filmmaker, I am a woman, a feminist, a socialist and a filmmaker.



Installation Conceived

Maya Deren

(On entering the space, pull a rope cord blue...
bird whistles blow, the clank of a bell, hint of a primal drum beat...)

Paint a photograph of a young girl
naked, pot-bellied, dressed up with a string
of beads & double-headed axe
round her neck
some big ol clod-hoppered shoes
the odd bit of lipstick or rouge
on her forehead
Place her in a bed of feathers.
In an old wash tub.

Crack an egg, spread the albumen
in her hair
Lay the egg-yolk on her
belly-button
Spread the egg-shells about
the arc of her head
& weave a spider's web
between her toes
binding her feet ever so gently

Then position 3 little white creamers
about to overflow
just below her toes
Attach a baby-talk device
to her vulva
and let it say when pressed
'do not tickle me dead/do not shove quills
into my eyes/do not tranquilize my soul'.

BEFORE

D. ANN TAYLOR

FROM MAGGIE MUGGINS TO NYPHO WARRIOR

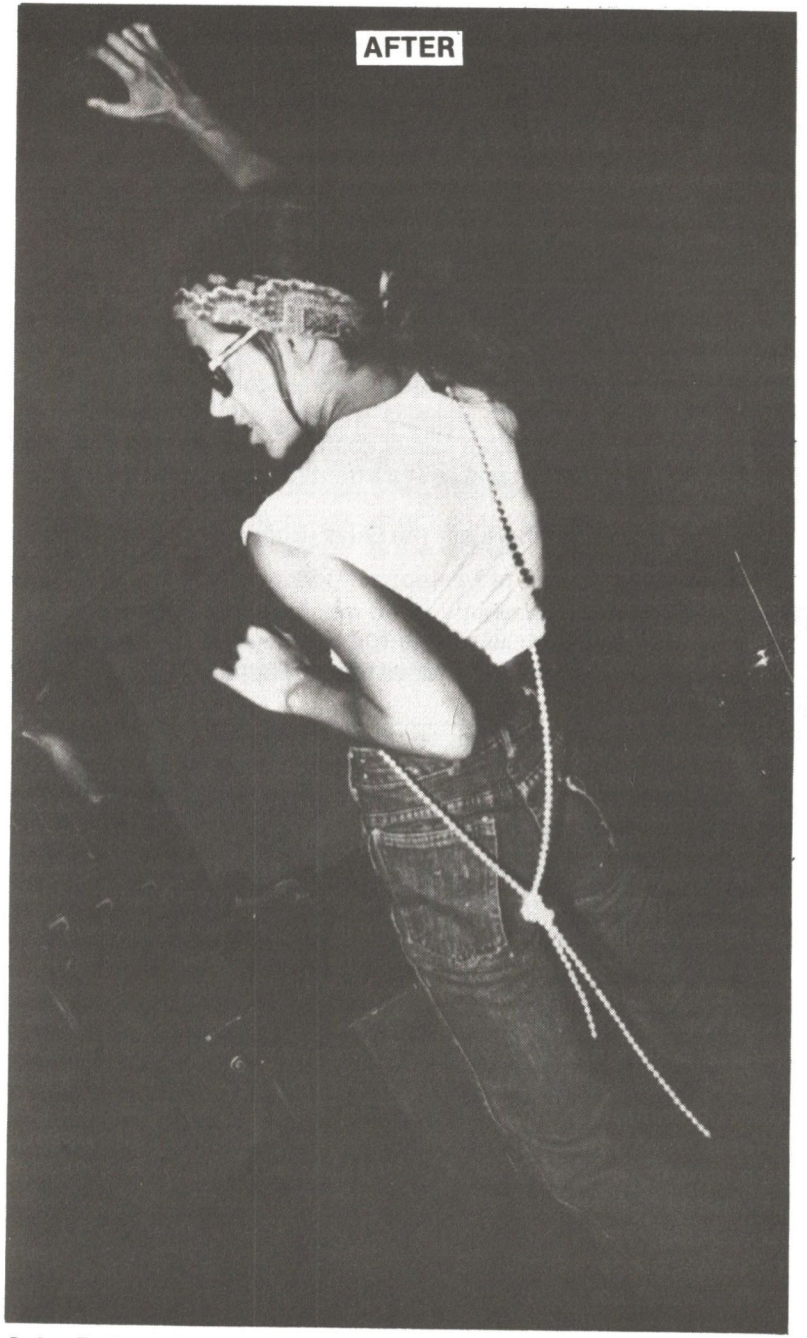
Playwright, rock star and chanteuse D. Ann Taylor is the writer for and a founding member and performer with the celebrated Hummer Sisters, Canada's only "post-feminist, neo-terrorist lunar cycle rock group." D. Ann is also co-artistic director (with Michael Hollingsworth) of the Hummers' corporate umbrella organization, VideoCabaret.

Over the past five years VideoCab has pioneered the integration of video and rock music in live theatre performance. Across Canada and in New York and London through such productions as The Patty Rehearst Story, Electric Eye, *and* Nympho Warrior — *among others — the Hummers and VideoCab have presented the leading edge of Canadian theatre and charted a course for contemporary performance.*

Performed before as many as forty video monitors and with live rock and roll and D. Ann Taylor's unholy mix of satire, docudrama and frenetic theatricality, the Hummers' shows have been described as a "roller coaster ride through an Oedipal eye socket."

Twenty-odd years ago Taylor warmed the airwaves as Canada's beloved Maggie Muggins; today she describes the experience as good training for her current frontal attack on junk-food, junk-sex and junk-culture.

The following excerpts are taken from Taylor's script for the Hummers' anti-classic production, The Bible As Told To. *(Originally*



D. Ann Taylor as Rocky Blvd. in "the Girl next door ain't Home"

titled The Bible As Told to Karen Ann Quinland, *it was performed in Toronto in 1977, with music by Andrew J. Paterson, Robert Stewart and D. Ann Taylor, and featured Bob Nasmith as The Private Dyke.)*

"The Bible As Told To"

The Bible is the catechism of the New New New New Woman. The star is The Private Dyke, a sort of Phillip Marshmallow character whose beat is Romance.

While investigating the death of sex, the Private Dyke nearly abandons his much-despised and misunderstood male identity, taking on the garments and postures of the female sex which he so carelessly worships and fears. Just prior to the following VIDEO MONOLOGUE, the Private Dyke is wearing a silver lame dress, deep undercover in the girl's locker room, spying as they discuss the breeding problems posed by the attention span of the New New New New Man.

The chorines sing Where are the Guys (Booga Booga Guys) and exit.

Video: On the twenty video monitors and large video screens which form the landscape of the play the face of a veiled woman appears.

Music: Rhythmic theme on an Eastern scale.

Vo: Would you welcome please
Iran's most distinguished exchange-feminist
Hadija Mzmzmzmz.

Hadija: Thank you kind media-star.

Dear ones.

Sisters daughters mothers harlots.
I am very pleased to be here
in the opportunity of your country
at this moment in his history
when he makes the fumble-play
into adolescence:
'Goodbye meccano set, Hello Girls.'

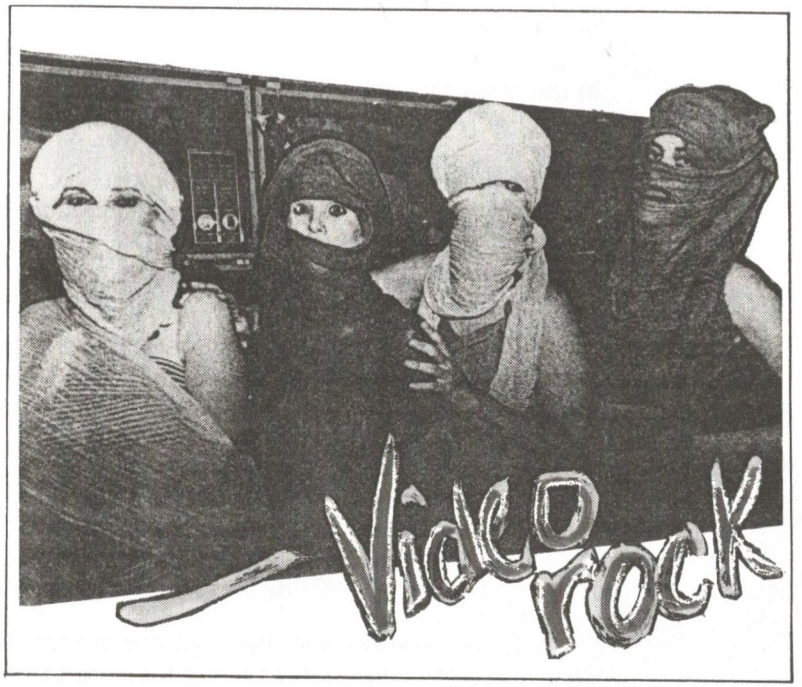
I bring you greetings of solidarity from your
Persian sisters

We who are blessed to be living
in the third millenium of a coherent tribal culture,

we whose liberties and duties habdullah
are enshrined with poetic justice
in the eternal Holy Koran,
we have despaired for you our Western sisters.

We have gathered in groups at full moon
and ululated (HADIJA ululates lengthily)
to strike fear into the hearts of your oppressors.
We have ululated (HADIJA ululates)
to give courage to our oil farmers
who will shake the decadent society which
cages you
until it falls.

The law of our land is not negotiable.
The law of our land is not at the mercy
of scumbag politicians and merchants
who would carve up our tushes.
The dignity of the female
the honour accorded her fruitfulness and
emotional power
the respect of her genius in loving —
these are the birthright of Persian pussies.



We are not available
to sweeten the sour socks of ecocidal
capitalism.
We are not available
to be painted over the guilt-riddled sex of
consumerism.
We are not available
to drape our bodies on new automobiles.
We are not disinfected
or forced to bare our bellies
to those who cannot touch us.

And as you know
the great symbol of our freedom
we are not required by any law to wear
'The Smile,'
the mysterious 'Smile,'
the mysterious gaping 'smile' which says
'Come Hither and I Will Eat You
and Shriek and Shriek and Shriek.'

We are with you in your struggle
to throw off twenty-five years of meaningless
teeth-baring,
twenty-five years of nonchalance
draped over the aching muscle of your
acquiescence
in the genocidal sterilization of your bodies
and your sex.

Your continent exhibits the most efficient
war-pathology
on the whole camel-humping planet
and has turned upon itself to satisfy the
infinite lust
of the death-machine.

Sisters you have been purged of your booga
booga power

You don't cry, you don't bleed, you don't sweat,
you don't dribble,
you don't pee, you don't cream, you don't come.
And now you purge your brothers.

Faceless sexless soldiers, drying up the ocean,
cleaning up the mess, streamlining the controls,
cleaning up the mess.

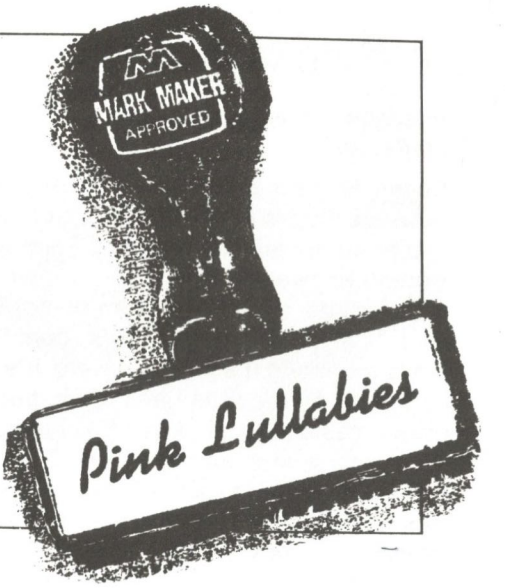
Sisters.
Your bodies are occupied territory,
bristling with IUD installations
humming with chemical sterility
invaded by vacuums and knives.
Sisters.
Wipe those smiles off your faces.
Chew a big wad of garlic at all times.
Find someone to marry.
Don't fuck under the full moon.
Less is more.
Have a nice baby.
Habdullah y'allah allah allah.
(HADIJA ULULATES climactically.)

(The Hummers enter with brooms, squeegies, windex, mops)

Hummers: Clean up the mess.
O look. More mess.
Where did all this mess come from?
(Repeat at random).

Dresser showing drawer arrangements.

A Fantasy environment created by Susan Taylor



The installation

The room (in the Splash gallery in Ottawa) smells of White Shoulders perfume. It's a pink gingham room with gold and white furniture. It has a French canopy bed with pink gingham canopy and gold & white pillars. There is pink gingham on the windows, both real windows and painted windows, and a dressing table. The surfaces of the tables are cluttered with jewelry, toy make-up kits, a collection of Virgin Mary statuettes, children's books. The cupboard is full of dolls, books, hats for playing grown-up in, toy cooking utensils.

There is a small piece of paper pinned to the closet door with a drawing and words saying "I am a queen, my name is Nina." Nina is Taylor's daughter.

There are pink chiffon little girl dresses hanging on the walls, little girl's shoes on the pink rug. There are bowls with pink candies in them.

A collection of saccharin-sweet "It's a Baby Girl" cards with storks and pink bows stapled on a wall is surrounded by yards and yards of pink toilet paper. In one corner, lit like an altar, is a white hanging piece, a gauzy veil, surrounding a table. On the table is a white toy bunny and a white box. In the pink satin-lined box are photos of Nina tied with pink satin ribbon. The photos express an extreme frustration. Under them are pink baby booties. This piece was done years before the rest of the project was conceived and was one of the seeds of the installation.

Each drawer in the dresser had a mood. One is a "winter," filled with vests with pink ribbon trim, a white rabbit fur muff with a doll's head on it, little white gloves. Another has "best" clothes in it, lace and silk and pink hankies.

Growing up female

Interviewer: Can you tell us something about the response to the installation?

Susan: Some men find it hard to deal with that room and I think it's because they're left out. A couple of men said to me, "I feel as if I'm exploring my sister's bedroom" and that was an opportunity they weren't allowed.

There was a comment from one of the visitors to the show who said, "Let's have a little boy's room." I think that there is a little boy's room and it's just as severe, it's just as conditioned and just as strong as the little girl's room, but it's not for me to make it. I grew up as a little girl. I was the middle girl with an older sister and a younger sister and both were very feminine. I somehow got pegged with the masculine role of the family. I was the tomboy; I was never sick; I was the strongest; I was bigger than both of my sisters. So I grew up with the thought that if I liked pink, I wouldn't be strong anymore; I wouldn't be capable of helping my father move the fridge down the stairs. My two sisters couldn't; I was supposed to. I had to come to terms with the colour pink. I had to discover the pink in me and realize that it wasn't bad. Working with the colour made my daughter Nina aware that having her drawers neat and tidy wouldn't necessarily make her live "happily ever after." She doesn't need pink the way she did when she was four years old because she's had her fill of pink.

Somebody said, "What you're doing to your daughter is really cruel," and I said it's no more cruel than getting a pink greeting card or birth announcement that telegraphs the information "There's a girl in this house." Explore it, put all that pinkness in one room and you realize how absurd it is. But when you get that *one* card, you say, "isn't that cute?" You don't realize how serious it is and how strong it is.

Pink is very beautiful, and it's very magical. Making your house nice and pretty is wonderful, and you can close yourself in. You start in your bedroom, and keep it neat and tidy, and then you go out and get married and make a home like that, but it doesn't allow you to acknowledge that just around the other side of the world people are dying of starvation. It blinds you to that; that's what is frightening. I find the room frightening. You could be very comfortable in that room if you were lulled into it. Psychologically, they've discovered that pink can be used as a sedative. They are painting the walls of solitary confinement cells pink, because it has a pacifying effect. In the past we've found little control methods, and pink was one of those methods.

For me it's a very dead room. Sometimes I walk in there and think this reeks death, of stagnation, and when you go in there you go back into the mirror. This is the world I was supposed to love.

Bed and painted "window" in background.

And of course I've always wanted to be protected and sheltered. Wouldn't you like to live in a perfectly controlled little world where everything is lovely? It's like my friend Mary says, "everything lovely in Lovely. They don't break windows or hurt people in Lovely" — talking about surburban Toronto. "Of *course* the children are happy in Lovely. Of course their drawers are neat. Of course the little girls are wearing clean white socks and pink underpants. Parents never argue; there are no single parents in Lovely." And Mary's a single mother with three kids.

You walk up the stairs, a white staircase and then you're in a hall with a pink light, you go down the hall and there's an audio-visual installation of my daughter, Nina, in a park with a blossom tree, and she's dancing. She's searching for the pink fairy. It's me playing with her fantasies...We sat in her bedroom and she started making these faces and asked me to photograph her, and when I looked at the slides, I saw how stereotyped and preconceived ideas of different emotions were. And I wondered where they came from. It doesn't come from me: it comes from the things around her — school, tv. I'm not your typical housewife and mother with a clean spotless house. She brings out memories of my past, and she sparks them off, and how as an adult, I can accept them and respect them.

Interviewer: How does Nina feel about Pink Lullabies?

Susan: She loves it. But she'll give it up for a bicycle.

Interviewer: Was the idea of giving it to her one of inoculating her against what the room represents, that if you withheld it, she'd never get it out of her system?

Susan: She's always liked pink.

Interviewer: But didn't it start with her liking pink?

Susan: ...and me rejecting the fact that she liked pink? Yes.

Interviewer: And part of it is that we now think we should give kids the right to choose their own environment, and then they choose something we don't like, something we've rejected. So what do you do?

Susan: Exactly. And in a way it's sad, sad for me to see her destroy that room — now that Nina is using it as her own, in our home — because I'm still affected by it. I look at the bed and say, "There's a magic marker on this beautiful pink bedspread," you know. My first reaction is the conditioned one, but then I say, "Wait a second; it's okay, go ahead, wreck it!"

She's really an aggressive girl. It's very charming for me to have an aggressive daughter who knows what she wants, and is determined to get it. I like to see that in her, and don't discourage it, but after she'd been in the pink room for a while, I noticed she'd become much more pleasant. And then, well I don't know if it was the excitement of the show and the fact that she was more or less the star of the show in the slides, but when we took it away she was very agitated, and the next day she wore black jeans and a black T-shirt to school.

Art and money

Interviewer: Do you question that Pink Lullabies is Art, or that it should be in a gallery?

Susan: First of all, women do art all the time...

Interviewer: But it's never acknowledged?

Susan: Right. Some of the comments about my show were: "Why are you transporting the whole room to a gallery?" "Why can't you just make something that represents the room?" "Why are those objects important?" You see, as soon as you take what a woman is doing all the time and put it into a painting or a drawing, you're making men's art, you're doing what they want you to do. You're doing something that isn't relevant to your life.

Interviewer: No, it becomes a separate thing. "This is what I do in my house, and this is what I do in the gallery."

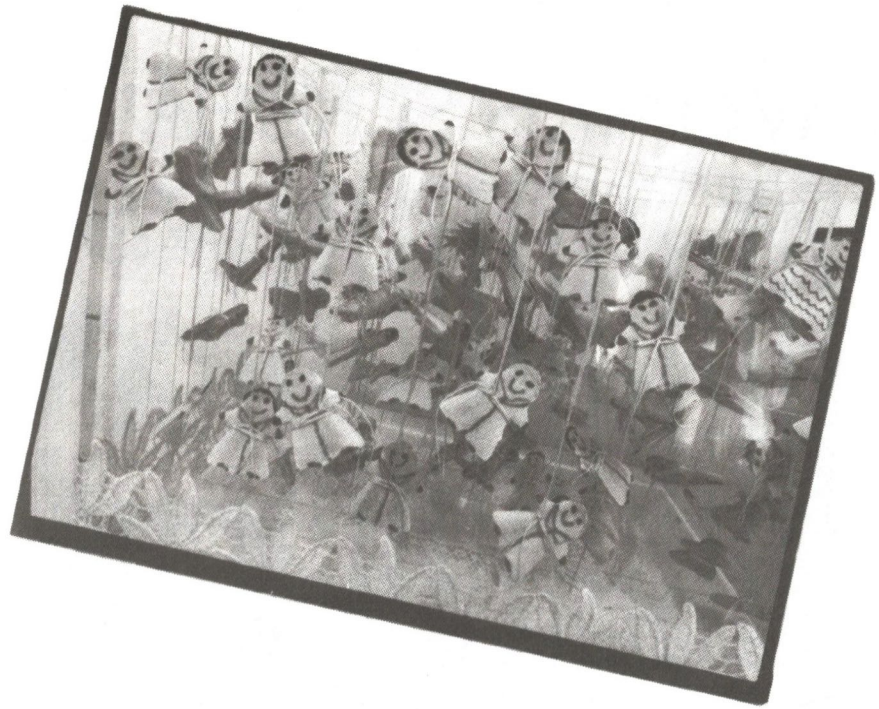
Susan: When people go into the room at the Splash Gallery, and they sit on the bed, I say to them, "You know you're sitting on a piece of art." If that was a painting on a wall no one would dare to touch it, but because it's a bed that I've just made, and put the sheets on, nobody has that respect for it: it's just a bed. But women make beds continually, every morning. To me that's an art — the way I put everything there, very consciously considering the aesthetic value of whether the flowers were tall enough, what should go next to what, judging the way the light falls on certain objects — to see if it's balanced — is the same way one would decorate a canvas.

Interviewer: But isn't one of the reasons it's not recognized as Art the fact that you can't price it, it has no price in the commodity market, the art market? The market needs to think in terms of the "ten best."

One of the constructed pieces in the room is the glass box filled with cookies cut out in the shape of little girls, painted and hung by pink ribbon.

Susan: There are three hundred and fifty in that box. They're all made with the same stencil (cutout). They're made out of flour and water and salt and that's basic playdough, with "Pink Lullabies" stamped on the back. I baked them in the oven and hand-painted each one of them individually.

Desk with glass case of cookies and "Pink Lullabies" banner.



Interviewer: Where did the inspiration for that come from?

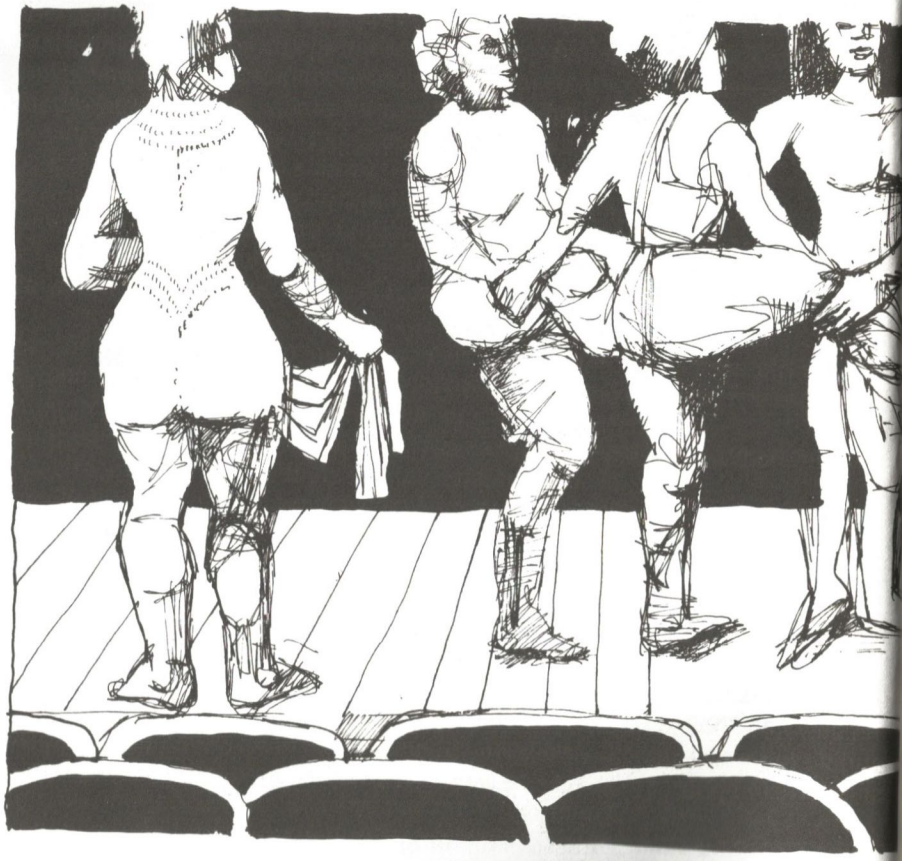
Susan: I went to the bank and got a bank loan for the show to buy all the things and said, "Now what I'm going to do to pay back this loan is to sell cookies. They're going to be stamped with the name of the show on it, and I'm going to sell them for three dollars each, and I'll sell a thousand of them and I'll cover my costs." I got a bank loan because of that, so I was more or less obliged to do it. And there I was doing it, and stamping them, and making every one unique in the baking and face-painting. But when it came to the opening night, it was so confusing and there were so many people I just couldn't bring myself to say "Well, why don't you buy these?"

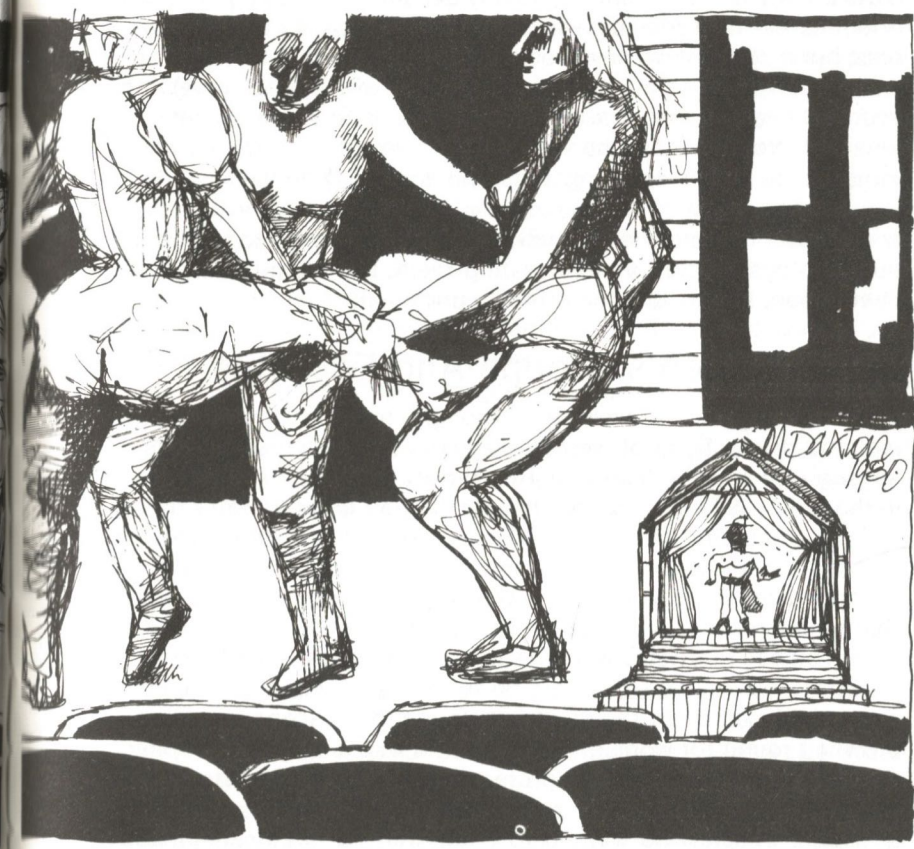
All of the things in the room are bought from Simpson-Sears, which is why that credit card is displayed in the room. That medium, the Sears catalogue, has such an overwhelming effect on Canadians. What you buy in the Northwest Territories is what you can buy in Montreal and Newfoundland. You just phone in, or write in and "here's my order." Any girl in this country can have that bedroom set. Not that anyone would want it.

Interviewer: I'm sure there are a number of girls who would love it. Why the canopy bed?

Susan: Well, that's the princess. People think I've pinked right out. They don't know that the pink dress I wore to the opening was the first pink dress I'd ever bought in my life.

WOMEN'S THEATRE IN GREAT BRITAIN





Maureen Payton

by Marie-Claire Rouyer with Ann Cipriani

When *Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven*[1] was first produced at Jim Haynes' Arts Lab in February 1969, the *Observer* theatre critic headed his weekly column: "Are women oppressed?" The play was the first work for the theatre by Jane Arden, a woman film director. The combined poetry and toughness of both the writing and the production expressed spectacularly the theme of the female oppression. For the first time on a British stage, not only the individual point of view, but the political perspective was shown — at a time when Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* was not yet out in print. *Vagina Rex* caused a considerable stir: the general appraisal was that the message of the play was surprising, not to mention shocking, and it was decried as being completely beside the point. The assertion of rights issue was simply ignored.

At the time, in the late sixties, the women's movement had only just become established in Britain. In fact, it had not yet become a movement proper, consisting of as yet isolated groups. These groups had emerged, in 1968, either from mixed radical and Agit-prop groups in London and some of the universities, or when Ford's women factory-workers came out at Dagenham in the first strike for equal pay by women.[2]

During the same period what is now called alternative theatre had already developed from its early stage of "fringe" to that of "underground" theatre. With Jim Haynes' Art Labs, theatre was becoming concerned with political and social issues. But it was on-

1 Calder and Boyars, *Playscripts 58* (London, 1971).

2 See Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 43-45 and Sheila Rowbotham's preface to *The Body Politic, Women's Liberation in Britain, 1969-1972* (Stage I, London, 1972).

ly from 1971, when alternative theatre emerged, that groups such as Red Ladder (founded in 1968), The General Will (1969-70), and McGrath's the 7:84 Company (1971) became avowedly politically oriented. The new socialist theatre did not disregard women's problems, but it didn't show any specific awareness of them either. They were still treated as an unimportant aspect of cultural, social and economic oppression. It was several years later that the feminist ideas developed within the women's movement were actually formulated on stage creating, first and foremost, an independent means of expression. As long as women themselves were not wholly or in part responsible for thinking up, writing, directing and producing plays, as well as interpreting them, feminism remained at best a mere theme, and too often a convenient label.

Early Women's Groups And Festivals

The first large-scale event that brought together the (till then) isolated productions of women playwrights and actresses was a season of women's theatre at The Almost Free Theatre in London in the fall of 1973. It consisted mainly of short plays, notably those of Pam Gems and Michelene Wandor. For several weeks, professional and amateur theatre women were able to share their individual experiences and meet with a largely female audience. Pam Gems remembers this occasion as "a very exciting and traumatic time. You had this heterogeneous mixture of women, rich American students, housewives, teachers on full salary doing it as a hobby, women interested in theatre for propaganda reasons, actresses prowling round for work. In the end there was a split which boiled down to a gulf between the 'professionals' and the 'amateurs' — and I don't use the word pejoratively. There were among the amateurs people who wanted to come into the theatre — I was myself attracted to working with a group where I could get support; but on the other hand we had the professional dilemma of what was our position if we used non-Equity people in the plays? It was never really resolved."[3]

At the end of The Almost Free season, women's theatre was going in two main directions. One was propaganda plays, originally represented solely by the Women's Theatre Group, which was composed of actresses who had met during the season (they had first held an open discussion group, but this broke off after a few months). Seven of them then decided to set up a production collective aimed at a different audience. The other was represented by the Women's Company, which consisted of women from different branches of show business who wanted to increase their creative

3 "Women are uncharted territory," *Spare Rib* 62 (Sept. 1977).

opportunities in a male-dominated milieu. Several plays were produced but the group never became an established company. In December 1975 four of the women joined with two men to form Monstrous Regiment. Their first show opened in May 1976.

Most present women's companies in Britain are of very recent origin. A list of them was published in March 1979 by the weekly magazine *Spare Rib*. Most of them are London-based. My own survey, made in September 1978, focused on the five oldest companies: Women's Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment, Cunning Stunts (founded in April 1977), Gay Sweatshop (made up of a male and a female group that sometimes work together in mixed shows and sometimes work separately) and finally Roadgang Theatre — which later became Major Diversions, the only professional women's group in the North of England. Further all-woman groups, professional and semi-professional, have been formed during the last three years, owing largely to the increasing number of festivals.

The festivals have been a driving force in the growth of women's theatre. They bring isolated groups into contact with one another and lead to confrontations that, though they may be stormy, are always stimulating. The festivals preserve the indispensable link with the reality of women's daily lives through workshops and debates with the audience. They also make it possible for British women's theatre to become aware of what is happening outside by inviting productions from elsewhere, especially the United States.

The first women's festival, in November-December 1977, was sponsored by Action Space Collective and held at Drill Hall in London. It was planned around the first British run of *Voices* by Susan Griffin, an American. *Voices* was produced by two Englishwomen, Kate Krutchley and Nancy Diuguid, who had both worked with Gay Sweatshop. The Drill Hall festival was followed by "March for Women" (March 1978) organised by Battersea Arts Centre in connection with an exhibition of paintings by Margaret Harrison. The shows produced on that occasion were centred on Harrison's main themes: women's work, and women and violence. *In Our Way*, by The Women's Theatre Group, attacked the equal pay myth; *Flemmy,* by the (sexually) mixed Sidewalk Company, dealt with male and female attitudes in a criminal case; *Icing*, a performance art show, and *She asked for it*, a play about rape by Counteract Federation, both explored female responses to violence.

Meanwhile, as the festival idea developed, a more permanent kind of activity was being sought after. The production collective Women '78 drew up a programme of plays written and produced by women, which was partly of original Women's Company plan in 1973. Several of Michelene Wandor's plays, such as *Aid thy Neighbour*, were staged at the New End Theatre in North London;

likewise, *Confinement* by Kate Phelps and Nancy Diuguid, produced at Oval House. A production of *Portrait of Dora*, by the French feminist writer Hélène Cixous (directed by Simone Benmussa) was also staged at the New End Theatre in July 1979.

At the same time the Feminist Theatre Group had been meeting the need for coordinated action generally felt to be lacking. This group was open to all women concerned with the theatre. Its aim was to pool individual experiences and analyse the situation of women in show business, as well as to promote militant actions such as the picketing of all sexist West End shows in October 1978. Its newssheet contained an opinion column, play reviews and details of forthcoming tours and of London productions concerned with women. In spite of this, the companies based in London, like Major Diversions, continued to feel isolated from the mainstream of women's theatre.

The financial condition of all women's companies has deteriorated considerably over the last two years. When this survey was conducted in September 1978, all major professional companies had received grants from the National Arts Council, which at the best of times covered fifty percent of their expenses. Since then all grants have been cut down, and two companies — Major Diversions and Sidewalk Theatre — in 1979 had their financial support completely withdrawn. Other women's companies are theatened by Mrs. Thatcher's drastic reductions in the arts budget.

Apart from Monstrous Regiment, which appears almost exclusively in theatres, the other groups perform in schools, universities, factory lunch-rooms, community centres, trade-union clubs, women's centres and even in the streets. The format of the shows is definitely influenced by the necessity to perform in ill-equipped places; but aesthetic options in women's theatre are more often than not determined by its militant purpose.

Women's Theatre And Feminist Politics

In their various manifestos, brochures and programmes, all the companies declare their commitment to the women's cause. However, depending on their priorities, the groups' individual approaches can be very different.

Monstrous Regiment's policy is to present the highest standard of work, to challenge and provoke as well as entertain. "We see ourselves as part of the growing and lively movement to improve the status of women. Our work explores the experiences of women past and present and we want to place that experience in the centre of the stage, instead of in the wings." In *Scum*, which was their first production, the action takes place in 1871 in a Paris laundry and shows the part played by women in the Commune. *Vinegar Tom* relates the persecution of witches in the sixteenth century. In both plays, historical documents were used with a political bias which gradually disappeared from succeeding productions. Their chief concern remains theatrical effectiveness.

Major Diversions and Cunning Stunts, on the other hand, describe themselves as socialist feminists. For Major Diversions this means "using our theatrical skills to explore and promote (within a socialist perspective) the experiences and struggle of women, which we feel are relevant to the community as a whole." Cunning Stunts' commitment to socialist feminism is more subtle: "Many of us have previously worked in many different styles — notably mime and Agitprop socialist theatre — and have found these forms inhibiting. The political analyses presented by many socialist theatre groups are often inaccessible to those not already familiar with them in some ways; or in the other extreme, complex economic theories are often over-simplified to make them digestible. In any event, when using theatre as a tool for political conversion, the end result often betrays a very academic approach to socialism that does not translate itself to the heart. We feel that possibilities of change are more readily shown by action and feeling rather than by force of argument; in our affection for an audience and each other."

That criticism of a certain type of alternative theatre in fact raises a greater problem which concerns alternative theatre as a whole. It describes itself as "socialist" in its collective organisation, in the themes it develops, in the causes it supports — but it keeps its distance from political parties. The idea of political involvement as seen by alternative theatre was thrashed out at a seminar organised by *Theatre Quarterly* in July 1976. The position of feminist theatre was given as an example of non-partisan political action and defended by Michelene Wandor against the attacks of Margaretta d'Arcy. The latter criticized the total absence of any political theory in British alternative theatre which, she said, was a vehicle for a few vaguely leftist stereotypes. For Wandor, on the other hand, political commitment did not necessarily mean party politics, as demonstrated by Red Ladder's play on housing and a Women's Theatre Group show on contraception: both tried to create some degree of awareness in the audience; political theatre was just that. [4] To what extent consciousness-raising can be considered a political statement is also a crucial issue in feminist politics, and consequently feminist theatre.

A survey of feminist theatre repertory shows that the themes of the plays produced do tie up with the demands of the British Women's Liberation Movement Manifesto: equal pay, equal opportunities and education, free contraception and abortion, a right to

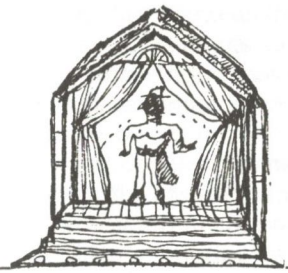
4 "Playwrighting for the seventies," *Theatre Quarterly* 24 (Winter 1976-77).

one's own self-defined sexuality. Yet when asked "What are your contacts with the women's movement?" all the groups replied: "We haven't got any as a group but a few of our members are individually involved with it." This apparent estrangement from the women's movement is belied first of all by the festivals — which encourage contacts with women's groups; secondly by the advertising and reviewing of plays in the movement's national and regional publications, thirdly by the fact that the companies support most of the movement's campaigns (like the national campaign for abortion); and fourthly by the support given to such organisations as Women's Aid.

Though radical feminists exclude men, it does not necessarily follow that all women-only companies support radical feminism. Indeed few companies consider separatism as an essential condition for their existence and survival. Separatism also raises an aesthetic problem: in women's shows male characters are gross caricatures or do not exist altogether. In that case one may question the effectiveness of representing an oppressor/oppressed relationship when the direct representation of the oppressor is automatically excluded. Certain groups meet that objection with another question: what does effectiveness mean? For instance, Gay Sweatshop thought they would be able to deal with the problem of homosexuality as a whole as there seemed to be discrimination against both men and women. After two years it became obvious that the group had to divide into two: one part to deal with male issues, the other with women's issues such as lesbian custody (which was the subject of *Care and Control*, the first show of the women's company in 1977.)

Although for Cunning Stunts separatism is not as essential as for the Women's Theatre Group, both agree that a show planned and produced exclusively by women is a significant feminist statement, far more persuasive than any theoretical demonstration. But is it a political statement?

Radical feminists criticize women's theatre for its woolly thinking, just as the orthodox Marxists reject the vague socialism of alternative theatre. Even Gay Sweatshop was accused of political naïvety in its show *Any Woman Can*, intended to liberate latent lesbians and help them come out. Gay Sweatshop's objective is to get across to as wide an audience as possible. "So we have to make sure," says Sara Hardy, "that on the one hand while we're saying something positive and interesting to feminists, we also mustn't alienate women who aren't feminists or aren't lesbians or both — we don't want to bash them over the head with feminism but we *do* want to inform them of its existence and what it is about." This is also the aim of British women's theatre as a whole. The objective, as described by the co-ordinating committee of the 1977 women's



Cabaret has become very popular lately; it represents a victory over a deliberately sexist kind of entertainment.

festival, is to "break down the barriers between so-called feminists and so-called non-feminists, which is something the media built up. Encourage women to talk again and break down the myths that are created on both sides."[5]

Formats And Styles In Collective Shows

All the companies are operated on a collective basis and most of their shows are collective creations. When a group has its own writer or hires one, the script is revised by the group. When Gay Sweatshop were preparing *Care and Control*, for instance, they taped interviews of lesbian mothers, wrote the first draft from the tape, and then asked Michelene Wandor to write the final version. For *Vinegar Tom*, Monstrous Regiment asked Caryl Churchill to research witchcraft for them and to work out a script; this then was approved by the whole group.

The methods are those used by alternative theatre at large, with all the Agitprop techniques: the episodic sketch, repeating the same pattern, the stereotyped character embodying one aspect of the theme or a whole range of attitudes, the mixture of practical information with satire and caricature, the neo-Brechtian song, the introduction of jingles or pop songs. The music and variety-type numbers may be the main part of the show. In Major Diversions' first production, *Opportunity Blocks*, all the women's movement demands were presented in revue form. Cabaret has become very popular lately: it represents a victory over a deliberately sexist kind of entertainment. The cabarets done by Monstrous Regiment, *Floorshow* (1977), *Time Gentlemen Please* (1978), *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* (1980) have been praised for their high professional quality, but criticized for their ambiguous message. The company themselves admit they want to get rid of the caricatured image of the "masculine" militant, because it gives quite a wrong idea of feminism. Femaleness must not be disowned in favour of masculine values. On the contrary women must demand recognition for what they are. To discard beauty and charm altogether is

5 "Women's work," *Time Out* 399, 2 (Nov.-12 Dec. 1977).

simply playing into the hands of male chauvinism. So the sexy revue must be taken over, the myth attacked on its own ground and the point proved that the same degree of aesthetic perfection can be attained "with no tits, no legs, just very bright satin costumes that fit without exposure," as Mori Jenkins, technical manager of Monstrous Regiment, states.

The American company, Spiderwoman, who visited Britain three times in 1978 and 1979 confronted their audiences with a radically different answer to the sex-object image. In their first show, *Women and Violence*, they used the clown persona and juxtaposed slapstick with pornographic jokes — they call it "female locker-room."[6] This debunking of "femininity"—it is the least glamorous actress who wears the leotards — and this self-described "facho" approach are supposed to have liberated British women's theatre from its serious-minded didactic approach. In all fairness it should be pointed out that two characteristic features of Spiderwoman's productions could be detected in some British women's shows previous to Spiderwoman's first visit. Spiderwoman's satirical tactics consist of fictitiously identifying with the male opponent in order to unmask him. This was precisely the strategy of *Bouncing Back with Benyon*, written and interpreted by Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray in 1977 to support the National Abortion Campaign's fight against Benyon's Bill. This viciously funny satire assumed the mask of the proponents of the "let them live" lobby.

On the other hand, Cunning Stunts from the start have claimed women's right to coarseness and ugliness and have tried to invent a new style radically different from Monstrous Regiment's "feminist glamour," but without the pornographic tone of "locker-room humour." "By exposing ourselves as individuals and in a crude style not generally acceptable in women, we invite the audience to draw their own conclusions. Rather than talking about strength, we show it; rather than arguing equality, we prove it. We are clowns of a sort, jesters to Their Majesties the People, but without the traditional clown costume. Instead we have tried to find characters of a more contemporary flavour, closer to ourselves, identifiable, absurd," says Evin Steel, a member of the six-woman company, which combines the skills of music, mime, song, dance and acrobatics. In *Hamfat-on-the-Turn* (1978) and their comic epic version of *The Odyssey (1979),* they exhibited an astounding versatility reminiscent of fairground theatre and commedia dell'arte.

The up-front comedian style seems to have gained ground among new groups over the last two years, but none has succeeded in consistently avoiding the pitfalls of vulgarity or ambiguity. Bloomers is a case in point. This all-woman group was started in

6 See *Time Out* 421 (27 April — 3 May 1978) and *Spare Rib* 86 (Sept. 1979).

1979 by actresses from the predominantly male, socialist company, Belt and Braces. Their first show on the fantasies and difficulties of working-class women flung sexist stereotypes at their audience with sharp and well-timed jokes. But their second attempt (in February-March 1980), *Camoflage in the 1980 Spit and Polish Girly Show,* an anti-militarist play, was more ambitious. It was also more interesting since feminist-socialist analysis as yet has rarely focussed on areas other than obviously female ones. *Spare Rib*'s review of the show (92 — March 1980) acknowledged this merit but was, rightly, very critical of blunders in the handling of caricature. It is no easy task to steer one's course between stark, didactic naturalism and mimetic humour, artlessly assuming that sexist clichés are, of course, ludicrous enough to be perceived as such by the audience.

"Humour is an area where women have been noted for their absence," says Evin Stell, of Cunning Stunts, "...not surprisingly, for while struggling hard to be taken seriously one may easily forget how to laugh at oneself at the same time. It is also a powerful weapon for change." That is increasingly understood in women's theatre, but even those who have invented a genuine brand of feminist humour, like Cunning Stunts, still have to defend the orthodoxy of their message. The case for feminist humour is the same as for Jewish or Black humour: it will be freely accepted only when the legitimacy of the women's cause is acknowledged without reservations.

Another quite different line is performance art. It may seem a rather inadequate vehicle for feminist claims, being more concerned with aesthetic research than with conveying an ideological message. Even so, a few women's performance art shows are worth mentioning. During the fall of 1978 the "imagist" company Light and Sound, who had been experimenting in non-verbal language since 1973, produced an all-women show on the theme of women and violence, directed by Harry Westlake; more recently (August 1979) another performance art group, Hesitate and Demonstrate, with a cast of three women and one man, produced *Scars*, a show on the lives of the Brontës at the ICA theatre.

Experimenting with avant-garde styles is still quite rare in women's theatre. However a survey of the shows put on by women's companies over the last three years proves that collective creation has outgrown its aesthetic limitations. Significantly, the companies which have identified themselves most closely with the women's movement, such as the Women's Theatre Group, acknowledged in the interviews conducted in 1978 that their style was changing from naturalism to more fantasy and imagination. The first years of women's theatre were those of carefully documented plays concerned with scrupulous information. The

next stage is more preoccupied with developing women's creative potentialities. Hence the new emphasis on music and script and the increasing demands on women composers and writers.

What About Professional Playwrights?

New Playwrights Directory (Theatre Quarterly) which lists information on the radical/political/fringe, includes 20 women dramatists out of 120 writers working in Britain; a higher ratio than in subsudised, commercial and repertory theatre. Michelene Wandor, in an introductory article to her interview of Pam Gems for *Spare Rib* (62 — September 1977), explains why women are still rarely attracted to writing plays as opposed to novels and poetry. Men have artistic and administrative control in the theatre and select plays whose subject matter relates to them as men as well as to their social/political interests. Even in the political fringe, plays about the class struggle present men as the protagonists and this has operated as a kind of aesthetic norm. Secondly "a woman writing plays knows that she needs to see herself as an equal to other skilled workers who may be involved in a play's production, director, designer, etc . . . Women's role in the theatre is predominantly defined (and confined) as that of the actress, in her professional role as a character who is mostly secondary to male characters (. . .) Thirdly it may be that women find the play-form harder to relate to as a form of literary expression . . . A play implicitly celebrates action on stage; women who are conditioned to a secondary passivity may find it harder to make use of the active theatrical form, and may be more comfortable with the relatively contemplative and descriptive forms of prose novel and poetry."

The breakthrough by feminist theatre groups in the mid-seventies no doubt encouraged women playwrights to come out of their isolation and to explore new subject matter, feminist and non-feminist.

The question of the feminist commitment of women writing for the theatre was thrashed out by nine women playwrights who took part in a debate organized by the weeking magazine *Time Out* in October 1977.[7] Though the average age of those writers was forty, most of them had only just been "discovered.' Pam Gems' *Queen Christina* was being produced at The Other Place, Stratford — the first play by a woman ever put on by the Royal Shakespeare Company; Felicity Browne's *The Family Dance*, was performed at the Criterion; and Mary O'Malley's *Once a Catholic* had been transferred from the Royal Court to the West End. Gilly Fraser, Cherry Potter, Tina Brown, Olwen Wymark, Caryl Churchill and Michelene Wandor wrote for radio and television and had plays produced in the alternative theatre.

7 "The Theatre (somewhat angry young women,") *Time Out* 394 (21-27 Oct. 1977).

When asked to compare their view on women's playwriting, they all agreed that their plays had many features in common which marked them out as women's plays: female characters were treated as people in their own right; they were no longer confined to the sphere of feelings and emotions; they proved that "serious" issues (philosophical, political, etc . . .) could be approached from an angle different from the masculine one. However most of them were quite reticent when asked about their feminist commitment.

Cherry Potter refused altogether to be considered as a female writer: "In the best of all possible worlds one wouldn't be thought of as a male writer or a female writer but as a writer." The others, although less categorical, felt suspicious about the label "feminist writer," as expressed by Caryl Churchill, for instance: "Like Cherry, for years and years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of myself as a woman, but recently I have found that I would say I was a feminist writer as opposed to other people saying I was. I've found that as I go out more into the world and get into situations which involve women, what I feel is quite strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write. However that's quite different from somebody who is a feminist using writing to advance that position." Michelene Wandor was the only one who didn't have any restrictions to her commitment: "I'm very conscious of trying to incorporate feminism in my writing. The time I started coincided with the beginnings of the women's liberation movement and my commitment to feminism is of a particular kind. I'm commited to it as a political force that is actually going to change not only the position of women in society, but that society as well. I'd say, definitely, yes, I'm a feminist and I would also say I was a socialist."

A poet as well as a playwright, Wandor has also reviewed poetry for *Time Out* since 1971 and has been a theatre critic for *Spare Rib*. She has been recently working on a book on sexual politics and the theatre. She is undoubtedly a leading figure in feminist playwriting at the moment. She is praised for her technical daring, her fluid stagecraft and her commitment to human values. [8] Her early one-act pieces, *Sink Songs,* produced by Paradise Foundry and published by herself and co-author Dinah Brooke (Playbooks I, London: 1975) examined the influence of sex roles on interpersonal relationships. The precise, concise and intense quality of those short plays has become the characteristic feature of Michelene Wandor's subsequent works, even though she has kept experimenting with styles. For instance in *Whore d'Oeuvres* (April 1978) a surreal situation is used to explore the liberal left view that prostitution can be acceptable, because it offers women a limited economic freedom: two prostitutes on the Thames are swept away by a hurricane and

8 "Stagecraft and sympathy," *Time Out* 420 (21-27 April 1978).

find themselves alone on a raft on the open sea. In *Aid Thy Neighbour* (November 1978), she has borrowed the Ayckbourn mould for a quite radical subject matter: artificial insemination with donor used by lesbians; hence the pun on AID in the title.

A new style of feminist writing for the stage has gradually emerged with Michelene Wandor as well as with other women writers, like Caryl Churchill, who have worked with women's companies. The gap between collective creations and plays written by professional authors has been bridged by frequent collaboration. The example of Nancy Diuguid and Kate Phelps is significant of that evolution. Nancy Diuguid, director of the English production of *Voices*, and a former member of Gay Sweatshop, is co-author with Kate Phelps of *Confinement*(which was also produced by Women's Project '78 at Oval House.) She also directed *Tissue* by Louise Page, staged at the ICA lunchtime theatre the same year. Both plays develop the theme of the destruction of identity by traumatic experience: imprisonment in *Confinement*, in which the action takes place in a women's prison; physical mutilation in *Tissue*, a play on mastectomy which explores its consequences on the consciousness of sexual identity. Both plays are characterized by alternation between two moods and two styles: naturalistic sequences are crammed with information and often relieved by humour. They slam home the naked truth and create the impact of the traumatizing image; this is taken up in counterpoint by interior monologues and dream scenes which probe into the unconscious. Their lyrical utterance stands out in sharp contrast with the everyday speech of the naturalistic scenes.

This list has been compiled from *Spare Rib*'s "Guide to Women's Theatre Groups," by Carole Spedding (*Spare Rib* 80 March 1979) with a few additions and updated material.

BERYL AND THE PERILS, an all-woman company came out of drama workshops at the Women's Arts Alliance, London in 1978.

Jan. 79 — *Is Dennis really the menace,* on women's sexuality.
June 79 — *Nuts*, about women and madness.

BLOOMERS: all-woman company — several members originated from Belt & Braces (socialst group).

July 79: — first show on working-class women's lives.
Feb. 80: — *Camouflage*, anti-army show.

BROADSIDE MOBILE WORKERS THEATRE: formed in 1974 — nine non-aligned socialist feminists.

1975: — *The Working Women's Charter Show*, a cabaret, regularly updated and re-produced since its creation.

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CLAPPERCLAW: a three woman music/theatre group founded in 1977.

1978: — *The Cabaret Show,* political feminist satirical show.
The Pink Spots, musical.

CUNNING STUNTS: formed in April 1977 (see above).

1977: — children's shows on housing estates and at Oval House, London *(Here there be Monsters).*
Wish You Were Here, a cabaret.
1978: — *Farmer Cutie-Gals Spare Parts Works.*
Hamfat-on-the-Turn.
1979: — *The Odyssey.*

COUNTERACT THEATRE COMPANY: formed in 1976 — a socialist collective.

1978: — *She asked for it,* on rape.
1979: — *Little Helper,* about women in the National Health Service.

GAY SWEATSHOP THEATRE COMPANY: the women's company became autonomous in 1977 (see above) — all its shows deal with the problems of lesbians and the recognition of lesbianism.

1976: — *Any Woman Can,*by Jill Posener.
1977: — *Age of Consent.*
Care and Control.
What the Hell is She Doing Here.
1978: — *Iceberg,* on fascism.
1980: — *Who knows,* aims at informing young people about homosexuality — performed in schools.

HORMONE INBALANCE: a newly-formed lesbian company.

Feb.1979: — their first show, a series of sketches on images of lesbians, was performed at the Gay Times Festival in London.

MAJOR DIVERSIONS: an all-woman socialist feminist company based in the Newcastle area.

Feb. 1978: — *Opportunity Blocks.*
Bouncing Back with Benyon, first performed by Team Two (see above).
The Poverty Trap Show, "the sad and true story of Punch and Judy caught in the poverty trap."
Professor Dinah Might and her Fantastic Invention, a show specially devised for educationally subnormal children.

MONSTROUS REGIMENT: a mixed company formed in 1975 (see above).

1976: — *Scum*, by Claire Luckam and CG Bond; "death, destruction and dirty washing, a musical celebration

of women in the Paris Commune, 1871."
Vinegar Tom, by Caryl Churchill; who are today's witches, the play asks.

1977: *Kiss and Kill*, by Susan Todd and Ann Mitchell; a play looking at the causes and effects of violence in the domestic sphere.
Floorshow, by Byrony Lavery, Caryl Churchill, Michelene Wandor and David Bradford; music by Helen Glavin, Roger Allam and Josefina Cupido; a musical cabaret looking at the contradictions which surround the world of women at work.

1978: *Time Gentlemen Please*, by Bryony Lavery and the company; music by Diane Adderley, Richard Attree and Keith Morris; a cabaret which explores set roles in love-making, debunking commercial and romantic mythologies.

1979: *Teendreams*, a play by David Edgar and Susan Todd which deals with the sphere of sexual and personal politics.
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, by Bryony Lavery; a musical show in which 70's feminists watch mid-20's 'kept women' play-act their lives.

MRS. WORTHINGTON'S DAUGHTERS: the only company that aims at reviving feminist plays from the past.

1979: *The Workhouse*, written in 1911 by Margaret Wynne Nevinson, a poor law guardian.
The Oracle, by Susannah Cibber; first performed by the author-actress at Covent Garden Theatre in 1752.

THE SADISTAS: a company of ten men and women, specialising in rock music an upfront feminist cabaret. Originally The Sadista Sisters.

1976: *Son of a Gun*, a play on the life story of a lesbian.

1978: *How the Vote was Won*, a programme of suffragette plays and songs, adapted from the originals by Julie Holledge founding member of the Feminist Theatre Group (see above).

1979: *Spilt Milk*, a show for under-fives on sharing roles in a household and job.

THE SOLENT PEOPLE'S THEATRE: a community theatre company working with the Adult Education Department of Southampton University. Has produced radio drama and plays on specific women's issues.

TEAM TWO: formed in 1977 by feminist members of Pirate Jenny. It is not a permanent company, but a production collective for specific projects with a different cast each time.

1977: *Bouncing Back with Benyon*, by Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray; in support of the National Abortion Campaign (see above).

1978: *Mad Micks and Englishmen*, by Eamonn McCann; a musical satire with a mixed cast on the war in Northern Ireland.

1979: *Belisha Beacon*, by Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray; a humorous play on three disgruntled feminists.

THE WOMEN'S THEATRE GROUP: came together at a season of Women's Plays at the Almost Free Theatre in London (see above) and started to work as a small feminist collective.

1973: *Fantasia*, a play with slides and music on women's fantasies.

1974: *My Mother Says I Never Should . . .*, a play about the sexual problems of teen-age girls; toured in schools, youth clubs, teacher training colleges, etc.

1976: *Work To Role*, aimed at an audience of school-leavers and also showed to trade union and teachers' audiences as well the theatregoers. It raised questions about work, trade unions, marriage and the family.

1977: *Out on the Costa del Trico*, about the equal pay strike at the Trico factory in West London, the most important equal pay strike in Britain after the Equal Pay Act became law.
Pretty Ugly, a show for 12-16 year olds which explored through their own eyes the social and personal dilemmas that can arise when the individual comes into conflict with the images created by the media, parents and friends.

1978: *In Our Way* assessed the extent to which the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act have affected women's role in society today.
Hot Spot, "a surreal, rumbustuous spoof of sexual stereotyping as it is put over to young people," commissioned from Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray.

1979: *Soap Opera*: a play exploring the experiences and relationships of a mixed group of women accidentially locked in a launderette; written by Dona Fransceschild.

Carol Spedding's survey includes very few British women's companies other than English ones. In Wales, the mixed BAG AND BAGGAGE THEATRE COMPANY specializes in shows whose subjects are relevant to women, such as *Lovely Living-Rooms* (1978/9), a musical burlesque, and *The Girls' Own Compendium*, compiled from texts or taped interviews of women living or working in Wales.

Although there does not exist any woman's company in Northern Ireland (nor in Eire either), a group of non-professional Belfast women put on a short Agitprop show in March 1978 for International Women's Day and toured it to community centres and youth clubs: *Just like a girl* traces the conditioning that women are subjected to throughout their lives. *Spare Rib*'s article records no women's theatre companies, nor any show specifically connected with women's issues in Scotland.

Laurie, in New York

Susan Glickman

Laurie, friend of many years, 9
or 90, nerves stretch between us
like telephone wire. You in New York
pavement slapping against your feet
a valiant flag of sky flapping blue between
buildings
buildings raising imperial fists. Me in Toronto
summer pouring through my window where I sit,
as ever, reading,
Something, something I wanted to give to you
out of this brief calm, to hang golden
'round your neck, to protect you.

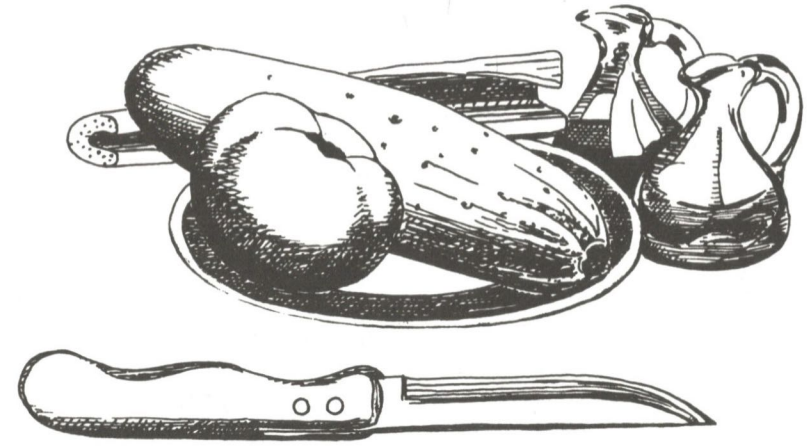
Nights in your aunt's house, tiring yourself out
with newspapers, waiting for a letter.
You lie in bed trying to quiet the tender bird
in your chest, pull covers over the cage
to sleep.

I wanted to say that love
is not lost, that all of the amazing given
is yours still. The bird sings behind the clatter
of the all-day typewriter, preens its miraculous
wings
behind coffee cups and carbons, is your own,
the triumphant
emblem
on that single blue flag
of sky.

Salad

Susan Glickman

Tomatoes are complacent, celery psychotic, cucumbers
a little embarrassed. But all fall silent before the shadow
of the knife. Destiny is a salad, an ecstatic relinquishing
to passionate oil. Vinegar is the reality principle; can't
let things get too languid. But oh, what invasions of alien
meats, of stupified cheeses and dead dead fish! The salad
is *alive*, the vegetables are reaching consummation, you are
confusing them with details of other deaths. Vegetables,
my friend, are purists. To be worthy of them, you too
must be a saint.



Denise Maxwell

LINDA GRIFFITHS: AN EYE TO LISTEN

Linda Griffiths is a Montreal born writer and performer. Her latest success, the one-woman, three-character play, Maggie and Pierre, *is the topic of Griffiths' conversation with Fireweed writer, Kate Lushington. Kate is a director who has worked on an Equity Showcase production of* The Black and Blue Review *by Robin Belitsky Endres (originally extracted in Issue 3/4).*

Henry: So what eh? I mean so what? So a man marries a woman, they have a few kids, they break up, she goes a bit wild, he loses his job, he tries to get it back. So why write about that? What's the difference between them and anybody else? You want to know what the difference is? The one that I figured out anyway . . . that everybody watched . . . millions . . . that close, like voyeurs, or like the circus . . . They're giants, two epic characters, . . . and they play out our pain way up there.

Linda Griffiths calls herself an improvisor. She is also a performer of such consummate skill that, on recalling scenes from Maggie

and Pierre, *I find myself seeing all three characters playing together on stage, although I know full well it is a one-woman show. While the play marks Griffiths' debut as a solo writer, it has evolved directly from her long involvement in collaborative theatre. One of the original actor-writers of* Paper Wheat, *she has also collaborated on many other improvised pieces, acting and "writing on her feet" under the catalystic direction of Paul Thompson, artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. These include most notably* Les Maudits Anglaises, *a piece about Quebec created entirely in French by anglophone actors, in which Griffiths first played Pierre Trudeau. That characterization gave Griffiths and Thompson the idea that was to germinate over several months of research and rehearsals into* Maggie and Pierre, *a full-length show that has been playing to sell-out houses in Toronto and Saskatoon.*

Born, brought up and trained in Montreal, Linda Griffiths went out west in 1975, spending four years at 25th Street House in Saskatoon, where she first met Paul Thompson. "You don't need a writer," he told her, "Keep doing what it is you feel you deeply want to do. Keep honing, keep working." It is exactly what she has done.

"If you don't have any ambition you can do all kinds of great stuff." Griffiths told me. Nonetheless, when the "great stuff" happens to seize the public imagination in the way Maggie and Pierre *has done, lack of ambition does not seem to prevent her from*

becoming that most public of properties, a success, torn between promotional demand and the sole responsibility for sustaining the remarkable quality of her show. Maggie and Pierre *had been the focus of Griffiths' life and work since last summer, when she spent weeks in Ottawa interviewing journalists and friends of the Trudeaus. From these contacts she drew the character of Henry, a composite version of the hardbitten journalist. Serving as commentator, Henry also plays the role of Public Eye, the third party in the Trudeaus' triangular love affair. Through her Ottawa contacts Griffiths got herself invited to the Governor-General's ball and managed to dance with Trudeau.*

Linda: I had to use all my charm and flirt a lot, just to keep him talking. I told him I was writing a play; I think he thought I was a student or something. That research period was the only time in my life when I found being a woman an advantage. Journalism is a sexist world and I got preferential treatment. I don't think a man could have done it. I'd never tried to use that part of me before, but I found I could get to social functions with journalists because they wanted a woman around. If you dress attractively they'll talk for half an hour longer: your genuine ignorance is taken for innocence. Newsmen talk shop all the time and I wasn't threatening. If I'd been male or forty-five with glasses, they wouldn't have felt so free to talk to me. Being feminine (to them) went hand in hand with being truly ignorant. At first I genuinely knew nothing, but in later interviews I got cocky, I let on how much I knew, and then I wouldn't get that person's story.

There's nothing wrong with using "femininity" to your advantage: you know nobody, you have no contacts, you've got to pass through doors all held open by men. You have to seem harmless enough to get through the door. I had to start learning the female manipulation process which I had always discounted. "Feminine wiles" if you like (that's the catch phrase from the show) — things my mother taught me to do with a man that I never did before, I began to use — very subtly and with some guilt.

It shocked me for once in my life to have power through being a woman; it blew my mind. All my adult life I had subverted all that stuff. I felt if I used it to make a man do what I want, then I was playing into that kind of a world which I wanted no part of. But then I was working on Maggie, who's a very different kind of woman than I am. Very concerned with clothes and make-up, very feline. All those feminine things. Wearing pink, making sure your legs are always shaved or waxed. During rehearsals someone told me, "You personally have not indulged the narcissistic woman in you. You'd better." It made me think. Perhaps we've cut ourselves off from that

part of us represented in the extreme by Margaret Trudeau. For the play, I had to have my hair permed and fashionably cut and had to start wearing high heels. All those things that I had repressed for feminist reasons, I had to indulge for feminist reasons, to get close to the character of Maggie and to gain power in the male world of journalism and politics.

Kate: You seem to have a positive attitude towards narcissism. To what extent has exploring the character of Margaret Trudeau — through rediscovering the narcissist in yourself — effected a permanent personal transformation?

Linda: I started enjoying a part of being female that I had denied myself before, since I had felt to allow it would mean complying with the whole set-up. Narcissism is an interesting part of being a woman: the oil in the bath, wearing perfume, feeling beautiful yet not caring for whom. It had been against my principles. What filtered through the character was a gift. In the play Maggie exudes an enormous physical enjoyment of self. That ultimate dream of a naked woman alone on a bear rug, rolling around, rubbing herself, enjoying the sensuality of self. I don't know whether this quality has been bred into us or was always there in woman. It's really apparent in Margaret; she's a woman who never denied that, ever.

It was a revelation to me: there was no good reason I shouldn't change. It isn't giving in or losing out. It allows me to enjoy my physical self more. It's made me more honest. That always helps your acting and I'm always looking for ways to make the acting better. My attitude towards feminism too has broadened in its definition. I think I'm a classic case.

Fifteen or so years ago, when women began to wake up and realise that they were politicking for a revolution where they'd still be on the bottom of the heap, we began to see that the only revolution is a feminist one; it was bad to come on to men for professional needs; it would only backfire. We learned to subvert our beauty. Clothes became a disguise to hide the body. But all that other side, the narcissism, is part of me, and I accept that as a woman. It's not wrong to like perfume, just so long as I don't lose my awareness that everything I do is for feminism, even if I'm playing a "dizzy dame." Let's not deny what's fun and don't let's lose what being on the bottom has given us. I sent up the hardline feminists in my character of Myrna Prokopchuk in *Les Maudits Anglais* because in the struggle for achievement on your own terms you can end up being just like men. And they can't do anything; they can't laugh, or cry, not even dance. They have to keep their emotions in a cage.

Enter my emotional world

Pierre: You know something, Henry? As we were going through all those horrendous fights, my wife was at my feet, and she was crying and screaming and wailing and literally banging her head against the wall, and I stood there, frozen in the classic pose of man, locked in my own gender, not knowing whether to go to her and comfort her, or leave because it's too personal to watch, or hit her or what to do. And my dominant emotion was jealousy . . . that she could be so free. Perhaps that's the tragedy of the oppressor. There is a certain joy in it, perhaps . . . for the first time, I feel a part of my entire society. The old world is behind and the new world is a bit late in coming and I ask with all of us, "What are we going to do about marriage?" It's worth at least three white papers.

Linda: I'm against what I call the Strong Woman Syndrome. The ones who can handle anything and everything, and never admit they have any trouble. Whenever I read about women in top positions who say they have no problems, I cry bullshit.

Kate: You've repeatedly referred to a male-dominated world, almost implying that it will remain so. Do you see theatre in general, and your work in particular, as any kind of an effective tool for political change?

Linda: You can only send out subliminal subversion. This show is playing to a fairly homogeneous, middle-class, middle-aged audience, with some young professionals. Yet it's anarchic in energy, and that's what's transmitted. Even if I'm the only one who knows that this is in the play, I don't care, since the alternative is to say it all directly, which I never do. I don't like message shows. I don't want anyone to say "here's Linda Griffiths wounding herself for the cause of women." It's not overt: there's subliminal energy when I'm doing it well.

Kate: If you had to learn to be a lady to play Margaret Trudeau, what did you have to draw on within yourself to create the men in the piece? and what did you learn from the experience?

Linda: Henry is a really sexist guy. I enjoy him. I tend to meet things

head on, like a bull. I learned how not to answer a direct question, to avoid the red rag of an argument or discussion. I learned to sit back and watch, to think my own thoughts but not necessarily participate. Evasive action — a sense of self where you're not always trying to defend youself, because there's no need. I haven't achieved that state, but every once in a while I can keep my mouth shut and not feel I'm repressing something. Confidence — that's what I used to play men. A centre of confidence that no woman ever has. Like being white. A deep inner confidence that the world is your oyster. It was much harder to find, and I couldn't draw it from myself. I can drop into being a man sometimes and not be on the defensive, not have to defend our right to walk the earth.

Thompson helped with the superfical movement, especially with Trudeau. We worked on Trudeau's athleticism. Like Margaret, he is also very physical. In a very different way supremely confident in his body. Henry is an insecure man who has the outer shell of the secure man. It comes out as bravado. Trudeau has it on the inside. Henry is afraid the world isn't his oyster, really, but he isn't letting anyone know.

What did I draw on in myself as an actor? I don't know. There's a magical, mystical element to the process; if you care enough and go onwards, fearlessly enough. At one point I was lost with Trudeau. Then, by accident of fate, a mystic guy came in to an acting workshop I was doing and worked on reincarnation exercises where you have to go back into a previous life as a member of the opposite sex. We put two chairs opposite each other. You sit in one and conjure up a true embodiment of the character in the other. You ask a question: what I asked was "What are your emotions, how do you feel, what is it like when you are not in control?" Then you switch chairs, materialize yourself in the original chair, and listen to the question of the character. Then you allow the character to answer through your body.

In fact, the whole of our rehearsal process was a bit like a seance. You know the circumstances, you put the character through them and just watch — and end up as surprised as anybody. That's writing and acting at the same time. I had to develop an eye to listen. The male characters have probably changed my acting more; the female had a more personal effect. I've played lots of men; in my improvising background everybody plays everybody, a kind of Canadian Commedia.

Linda: As a writer I've always had to be true and create real people, but this is the first time I've wanted the audience to forget that they're watching a woman. Yet I made no attempt to disguise the fact that it's a woman up there. The costume changes help, but

there are none in between the dialogues. Somehow I materialize the other characters no matter what the principal in the scene is wearing. It forces the audience to use their imagination. I can feel that imagination working, it's like a mass support. We all know there's only one person, we all pretend it's three. Everybody's smart, and the connection between the audience and the performer is amazing. In another way the one-person format reflects the content: we are all the same.

Kate: Yet the characters are never simplified into symbols.

Linda: No. We tend to assume a single-minded motivation in famous people; that they have simpler through lines. That way they are easier to condemn. By showing people in the complexity of their everyday life, by seeing that they have contradictions just like you and me; they become Everyman and Everywoman.

Kate: What about the future?

Linda: I can't see beyond the run of this play. I promised Thompson to commit myself to it for two years. The long run is a challenge, and since any other acting work is out of the question, I'm going to concentrate on writing. And since I want to explore language, the next phase is to get off my feet and sit down in front of a typewriter.

Walk Alone

Maggie: Mrs. Trudeau is being difficult today. No, no, I don't want to wear my galoshes. No thank you, I don't want a rain hat, or an umbrella. Don't you understand? I'm from B.C., we like the rain. I just want to go for a walk by my . . . oh no, those guys don't have to come, do they? . . . . Mrs. Trudeau is being difficult today, always a scene . . .Rain on my face, soaking through my clothes. These easterners will never understand. Oh no, one of them slipped! There's a place I like, down by the river, where the sewage dumps in. It looks like a waterfall. There's 24 Sussex Drive, way up on the cliff. They're watching me from the windows. And there's the spiral of a church we don't even go to, and there are the Parliament Buildings, where he is. Funny, there's

a kind of smoke that comes out of those chimneys, coloured like faerie dust. Sometimes it's red and sometimes it's blue and sometimes it's gold, that's when he's talking. Political dust, and pretty soon it gets all over you and you've got an ax to grind or a position to defend. Hey! Hey, what's that? What's that movement on the water? It looks like wings beating underneath the water. Pierre would say . . . "No, Margaret, it's just the intersection of the wind and the rain causing that configuration on the surface." But I know it's wings. Is it possible to think if someone is always watching you? *(Runs, hides and comes back)*

Sorry, I just wanted to hide. I just wanted to hide, they have no idea of what that means . . .do I? Someone new watching, a new maid . . . oh boy. No, it's me. It's me . . . watching Mrs. Trudeau standing just a little bit close to the water. It's me, all dressed up in my Yves St. Laurent gown, a monument to good taste. It's me watching me, down by the river, a monument to bad taste. She wants me up there . . . she's beckoning . . . *(silently mouths)* no way . . .

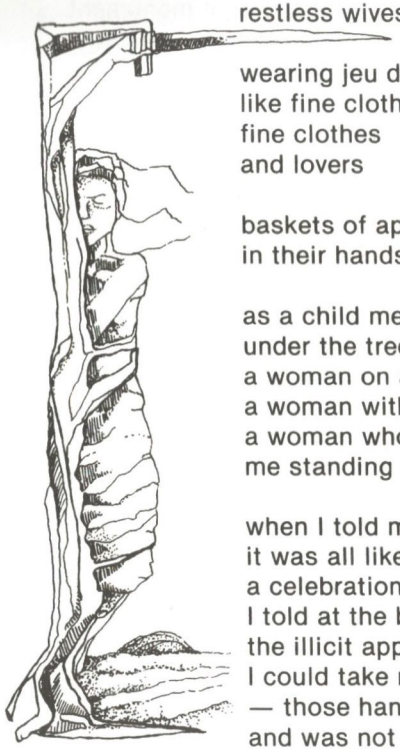
JOAN OF ARC SEQUENCE

Cathy Ford

the beech tree visible for a great distance
under whose branches met
dancing children
waiting to see fairies
— fatales —

to hear the songs that tunnelled the hills
and that place of respite
just ear shot
from the coming labours of childhood
beginning age five
or the age at which one would be useful
to the family

the keepers of peasants
also met there
restless wives conveying to leisurely places of
power
wearing jeu de dames aspirations to castles
like fine cloth
fine clothes
and lovers



baskets of apples
in their hands

as a child met
under the tree
a woman on a horse
a woman with the voice of a fairy prelude
a woman whose tall vision bolted and left
me standing

when I told my mother
it was all like morningtide
a celebration because
I told at the beginning
the illicit apples came rolling home
I could take no more
— those hands outstretched, those smiles —
and was not allowed the tree
until all the work was done

The following poems are chosen from Ford's manuscript in progress on the life and work of Joan of Arc. They span the time from when St. Joan was beginning her mission to when she goes to her first battle.

*

no, a forest cannot be betrayed
ask why I have come
I will answer

ask
what I will do
I will answer

ask
when this must happen
I will answer

but never relinquish
above all
the sweet crackle
underfoot

the pine
the soft-padded floor of nettles
the silent and damp places
home of the caress they give

as to their names
these can also be told
but they would come no differently
then

and
not to this room
under a green ceiling

and
never in chorus
as heady as red wine

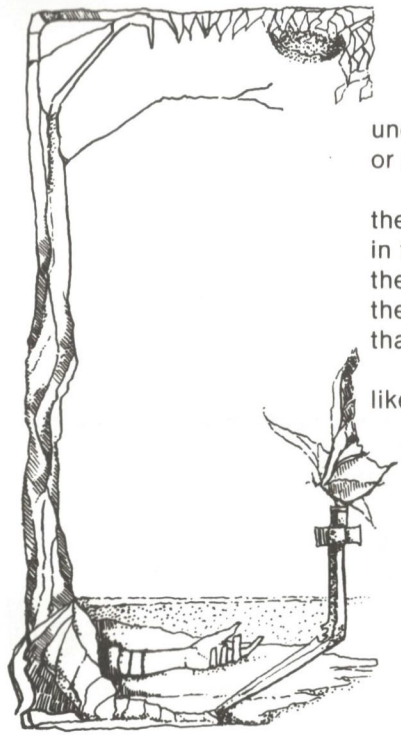
and
such wine as that
white bread is soaked in

*

to be pinned
finally
like a butterfly
ending without reason
(but there is a reason)
for the same iridescent width of wing
as
it all began
(when there was a reason)
some thing
some color
some movement

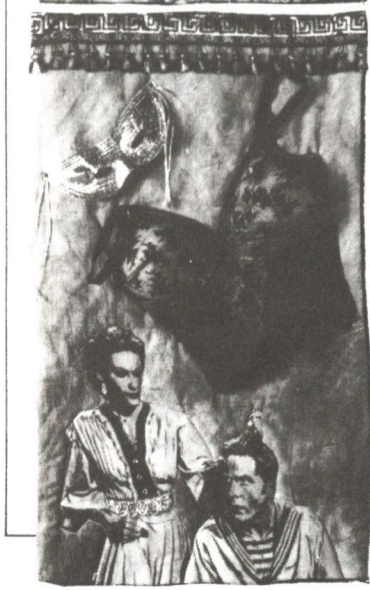
so plain

innately
that breed of butterfly



uncommon
or angel

they shout
in the streets
these fathers and mothers of me
these brothers
that I am
an angel
like an angel



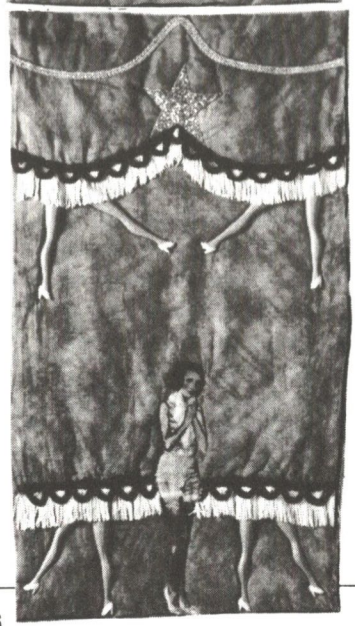
FIVE CANADIAN WOMEN

Most people are as surprised as I was to find out that Ruby Keeler

Yvonne de Carlo, Mary Pickford, Norma Shearer and Marie Dressler were all nice Canadian girls. I shouldn't say 'were,' Yvonne de Carlo and Ruby Keeler are still alive and occasionally are resurrected on talk shows — American talk shows, of course.

I was commissioned to do this work for the Canadian Film Development Corporation offices by Norman Hay, a freelance designer. Hay's concept was for me to do a wallhanging using Canadian-born women who had become movie stars. I started out looking at it as a cold-hearted illustration job but when I read the material on these women, I began to get interested. All of these women were born in Canada, but none had gone further than amateur theatricals or nightclub dancing here. All became successful in the States, lived in the States, and most even changed their nationality. All of them achieved, in

YVONNE DE CARLO



their time, enormous popular success because they fitted seamlessly into existing fantasies of ideal women: Yvonne de Carlo the third world siren, Mary Pickford the perpetual innocent, Ruby Keeler the good kid, Norma Shearer the classy lady, Marie Dressler the grand old dame.

Whatever happened to classifying women by their hair colour; sultry brunettes, innocent or dumb blondes, spunky redheads? We don't think of contemporary stars like Jane Fonda, Jill Clayburgh or Vanessa Redgrave in those terms. But the clichés are not dead — they've just moved to tv.

Yvonne de Carlo, the first panel in the mural, grew up in Vancouver, worked as a dancer in a night club and, because of her dark, unmistakably sexual good looks, made it in the movies as an 'exotic.' She played Mexican spitfires, fiery Spaniards and Arabian slave girls. Third world women in the 40s and 50s films were allowed to be openly, even aggressively sexual (primitive natures, you see) but often were punished for it. Scripts had them killed off defending the men they loved or had them abandoned for nice repressed WASPs like Grace Kelly in *High Noon*. They rarely achieved the ultimate happy ending for a heroine — marriage.

Ruby Keeler, panel two, was the 30s version of the innocent

maid. She was less frail — "I can look after myself with guys that get fresh!" — but her virtue brought the same reward: Mr. Right. She sang and danced with enthusiasm and minimal talent through a series of Busby Berkley movies, but her fans loved her anyway for her all-American girl-next-door image.

Mary Pickford, third panel, always made it to the alter *virga intacta* despite dozens of would-be ravishers that she was continually having to be rescued from. She wore her long blonde hair in ringlets, dressed in pinafores and mary-janes. Her best friend was her dog, and she usually had a silver-haired dad who needed to be rescued too. Little Mary, "America's Sweetheart," was the most popular female star of the silent film era. The caption on the top photo in the panel reads that Pickford "could go into any town in the U.S. and outdraw Mrs. Pankhurst, Billy Sunday and the Boston Braves."

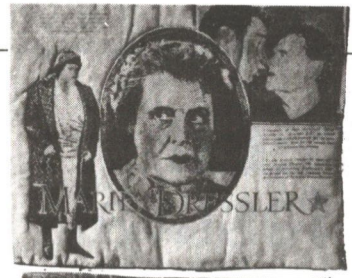
Previously audiences had gone to see two-reelers by the Pathé studio; now they went to see Mary Pickford. She played an important part in breaking down the studios' control over their creative people.

When her studio wouldn't give her a good contract, Pickford — an extremely shrewd businesswoman — co-founded United Artists with Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks.

But Pickford's public wouldn't let her grow up on screen. She tried playing mature women, even 'fallen' women, but the pictures flopped and at forty she was still playing the innocent maid in curls and gingham.

Norma Shearer, fourth panel, had pretensions to high culture and serious acting, but didn't have the mass following of Keeler or Pickford. She played the elegant lady role; the beautiful rich woman who had everything but happiness. Happiness with men of course: and middle-and working-class women loved to go and see her suffering in beautiful clothes and jewels, or weeping in her chauffered car over some rat of a man. Shearer's career began to slip in the 40s and the studio tried to humanize her image by showing pictures of her with Husband and Baby at Home. The caption on the top photo in the panel reads "Happy family life! Isn't this worth a sacrifice of one's personal ambitions? Norma thinks it is and is risking her movie career to safeguard the fulfillment we see here of every real woman's heart."

Marie Dressler, fifth panel, was a rarity in Hollywood. She was never conventionally beautiful and she made her career solely on her acting talent. She was a good dramatic actress on the stage in the 20s but was mainly used as a comedienne in films. She had a long career in character parts, and any love interest for her was strictly comic relief. She always played strong, smart, if eccentric, women, but because she was older and 'plain' she was treated as an asexual being.

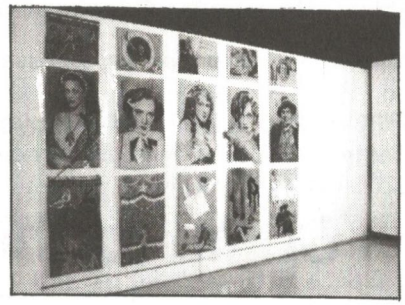


The mural is an 8' by 10' wall hanging. There are five panels, one for each woman, with three 'pillows' on each panel. The pillows are photographic images cyanotype printed on cotton and toned a sepia colour. The images were hand-coloured with chalk, sewn into pillows, stuffed with polyester filling and quilted around the images to give a slightly three-dimensional look. The pillows were mounted on 2' x 8' panels of clear, flexible plastic and hung over a metal rod.

I bought fabric, trim, feathers, sequins, underwear, gloves, stockings and toys at dressmakers' supply stores and second hand stores. After the quilting was finished I sewed these objects onto the panels.

They cyanotyping was done by Susan Taylor who also provided studio space, support, advice, tea and Joan Armatrading records to work to.

Joss Maclennan



ELIZABETH CHITTY SPEAKS WITH SUSAN BRITTON/SUSAN BRITTON SPEAKS WITH ELIZABETH CHITTY

April 11, 1980

Elizabeth Chitty is a Toronto performance and video artist whose most recent work, Handicap, *was performed at the Art Gallery of Ontario in March. Coming from a background in dance, she has been working since 1975 as an artist, administrator and writer. She is currently preparing a new work which will be presented this fall in Vancouver where Elizabeth will be working for a year as video coordinator for The Western Front.*

Susan Britton has been living in Toronto for the past three years working mainly in video. She is currently producing a new work entitled Standard Format *which includes a variety of media and is devoted to understanding Radical Nihilism.*

Susan Britton speaks to Elizabeth Chitty

Susan: Do you feel the necessity to explain or verbally elaborate on your work?

Elizabeth: Yes, I do need to be articulate; part of that falls into an educational thing, which I've always felt funny about. But it's impossible, if the art is new, for a general audience to approach it with any meaning other than the purely experiential. I'm not an "intellectual" and I don't have an academic background, but I have always believed that if art was something that could be put down on a piece of paper rationally, then why not put it down on a piece of paper.

Art is a language unto itself but words and discussion can complement the work. I don't respect the theoretical, didactic approach to art in which everything is *completely* rational and packageable. While I want cohesiveness and a certain rationality or logic, I also respect imagination and intuition. I like a sense of precipice or risk. The idea of a completely cohesive theory is a little too safe and smug.

Susan: What do you think of art criticism and writing in Toronto?

Elizabeth: My impression is that there was a huge explosion of experimentation, but very little critical consciousness, and then people became dissatisfied with this. I've always assumed that *Fuse* magazine started with the goal of closing that gap, but they have engendered a lot of animosity toward their style of criticism. I assume that we're in a transition period.

Susan: Do you feel misrepresented/misunderstood by the local art writing and, if so, do you feel this leads to ongoing dialogue or is it simply frustrating?

Elizabeth: I've definitely felt misrepresented and it hasn't led to dialogue. The only thing that's positive is the fact that it is impossible to become complacent. When confronted with dumb criticism I'm reminded that the work is still inaccessible on a general scale. I'd rather feel misrepresented than be in some ivory tower where I have a false impression that everything is hunky-dory; I would be more upset if gross misrepresentation happened in smaller art mags.

Susan: Do you think that artists are underestimated by traditional cultural institutions?

Elizabeth: I've always felt that artists are the lowest on the totem pole. Toronto artists have felt frustrated by the lack of contemporary programming at the Art Gallery of Ontario, although there have been improvements. It seems that the general public's attitude toward artists is that they are either disgusting, crazy people or, once they've made it, are deified beings. Artists have always been underestimated for their capacity to be critics and curators. An important change happened ten years ago with the artist-run spaces.

Susan: There's been a move away from the artist-run space lately.

Elizabeth: Yes. In one way I can see that move as positive, because

the attitude of artists toward self-sufficiency can become fanatical. There is a stupid elitism that happens with artists sometimes. I think it's a question of balancing the two attitudes.

Susan: Do you feel responsible to and integrated with the culture of this country, or do you feel rebellious and in opposition to it?

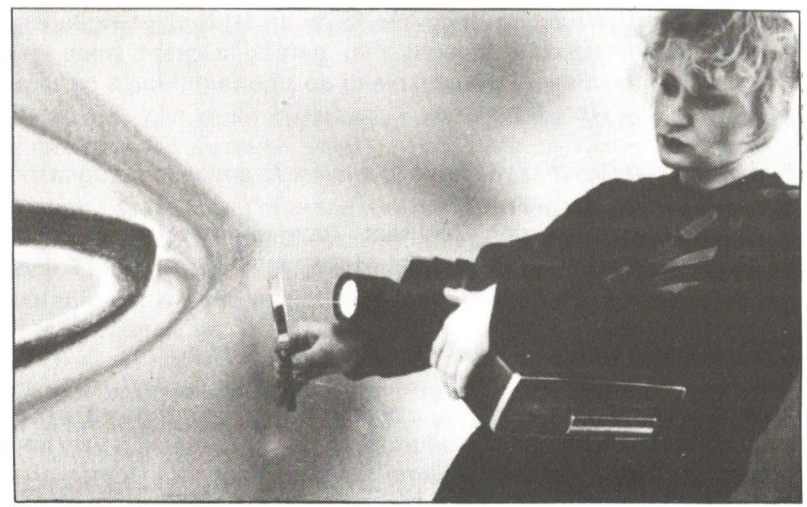
Elizabeth: I feel more on the rebellious side than the integrated side. There is a huge separation between popular culture and "high art." I have no illusions about the fact that most artists' work is totally uninteresting or irrelevant to most of the public. I don't see that as a problem, anymore than the fact that scientists' research areas are inaccessible to me. But I do look forward to a higher profile — I want to be a famous artist. Though it's impossible to look at the magazines, t.v. and newspapers and feel integrated with this culture.

Though I don't feel integrated, I know that I *am* a bona fide Canadian city kid and that my art comes from me and my environment, so there is a lot about this society in my work.

Susan: Whom do you make art for?

Elizabeth: I make art for people who are interested in art and anybody who wants to see my work. I've never felt an overwhelming desire to jump around the market place to take art to the public. It's too limiting.

Susan: Do you think that art is an important part of this society or can you envision this society without art?



Hugh Poole

What to do 'til the T.V. comes

Elizabeth: I can envision this society without art, but I wouldn't want to live in it.

Susan: Friends who just returned from Bali told me that there is no art there because there is no neurosis there.

Elizabeth: I can't envision a society in which there isn't neurosis.

Susan: What do you think is the relationship between wealth and art; do you think society has to have a certain degree of wealth to allow the luxury of reflecting on activities and art?

Elizabeth: The sick part of western art is the connection between wealth and leisure, because it reflects the ideology that the wealthy want to "decorate" their life, and I hate the idea of art as decoration.

Susan: Is that why you do performance art?

Elizabeth: I've never painted or drawn, so I've never had to deal with my relation to an object. I now find that the whole non-object art issue to be less important than it was a number of years ago; it's good to loosen up the ideology which made *any* object decadent. For that matter, a performance can also be decorative and decadent.

Susan: Do you think the financial support of the arts in this country has had a good effect on art?

Elizabeth: I would give an almost unqualified "yes," but hand in hand with public funding there has to be an attitude of vigilance toward censorship. If I thought that getting a grant from the Canada Council meant I would have to do a certain thing a certain way, I wouldn't want the money.

Susan: Do you feel that you have to answer to anyone for your art?

Elizabeth: Generally, I don't feel that I have to answer to anybody except myself. There is an element of responsibility in that I'd like to have the dialogue as open as possible.

Susan: How does being a woman affect your art?

Elizabeth: I have an underlying feminism which is addressed in my work obliquely rather than by addressing specific issues. A very important part of feminism is making the statement that women are sexual beings and have a need for sexual expression.

Elizabeth Chitty speaks to Susan Britton

Courtesy: Whiteside Photoworks

Susan Britton in 'Dada Gaga'

Elizabeth: It seems to me that there is often a separation between the intellectual and the imaginative approaches, and I appreciate work, like yours, that has both. Do you work with the dichotomy of these two?

Susan: I'm doing work because I know I'm wrong. I make mistakes and learn.

Elizabeth: You mean mistakes in the thinking, logic and conclusions that are drawn?

Susan: Yes, I guess I'm trying to work out things I'm thinking about — maybe very dry ideas — which I'm approaching in an emotional way. I feel the same about video. Video is a strange thing — cool, but all positive and negative charges. Electricity is like the brain. It's emotional.

Elizabeth: Do you think it's important to be cohesive and to be able to draw conclusions on the basis of information that is in the work?

Susan: Yes. I think art has to do with moral development, and

understanding and insight, and that the insight is the result of doing the art.

Elizabeth: Why did you start using video?

Susan: I was doing sculpture — horrible minimal sculpture — and I was reading a lot. I was trying to come up with something because I was fairly nervous. So I did these big drawings, and wrote scenarios on them and started doing video tapes where I would walk into the studio dressed up like a stewardess and say the words from the scenario. At the time the French intellectuals were being talked about a lot — it was semio this and semio that — that was why I wore those particular clothes. Then I got into video itself. Gradually a much more filmic sensibility has evolved, but in the beginning it was a way to use language and gesture.

Elizabeth: I know you're planning a trip to Germany. Why Germany?

Susan: Because it appears to be an extreme — a severe situation. I have been studying German and, just as a cultural indication, I noticed that every word ends before another one starts — nothing runs together. Their trains even run on time. Maybe the reason so much art is coming together from Germany now — especially film — is because the issues are clear.

Elizabeth: So you think a situation of opposition is the best situation for making art in?

Susan: I think I would like it right now because I'm confused about being indulged as an artist. I also want to get lost in another place, not know anybody, and have to objectify my own work and not feel so comfortable.

Elizabeth: Do you think it's important for artists to be as self-sufficient as possible?

Susan: I have definite ideas about the division of labour. I think in making art it is fundamental to oppose the division of labour that is taken for granted in our society.

Elizabeth: I would say that you have a competent technical grasp and a sophisticated editing sense. What are your priorities when you edit?

Susan: All my early tapes show a hangover from straightforward formalism. The first tapes I saw were a half hour of grey stuff — a

sculptural minimalist sensibility. I've always been referring to formal elements in my tapes — what it's made of, what it is — so the editing is very important. I'm not very good technically; I'm very intuitive with the equipment all the time.

Elizabeth: You said you were dissatisfied with art talk. What do you mean by that?

Susan: There is a certain language that you learn and it doesn't mean much once it's been said a hundred times. It needs to be disinfected — the rhetoric that goes around art needs to be cleaned out. For instance, I've really grown to appreciate things like formal logic because there's no ambiguity in a statement. I never read poetry before but I'm beginning to understand that maybe really good poetry is that way — no ambiguity. I would like my art to be like that.

Elizabeth: I would say that there is an assertive personality in both our work which is not present in strictly formalist work. Does that seem important to you? Is it conscious?

Susan: Yes, but I don't think it's necessary. It's probably a failing on my part that I often have myself splashed all over my videotapes. If I knew somebody else who could do the things the way I would like to have them done, I could be a bit more detached and objective.

Tutti Quanti: 1978

Courtesy: Art Metropole

Elizabeth: Do you think it's possible?

Susan: It's hard because I'm not very good at communicating exactly what I want from people.

Elizabeth: What do you have to say about the social/political relevance of art? Is that a standard you set for your own work and that of others?

Susan: No, and I don't think you should be in art if you want to be socially or politically effective. I don't think art is effective in this way. In this culture it is considered harmless and so it is harmless.

Elizabeth: Is that upsetting to you?

Susan: No. Well, sometimes it is. I'm surprised that ideas have so little value in Canada. There could be the most radical ideas challenging the status quo in every way — and only the nude parts would get censored. CEAC (Centre for Experimental Arts and Communication) had to threaten to kneecap them before it got through that they were not supporting the Federal Government of Canada. It's so bizarre — there is something really wrong with this society.

Elizabeth: I've always thought that art is inately social and political — that one doesn't need to approach it on a didactic level in order to maintain a political identity.

Susan: Artists are on the pulse.

Elizabeth: What do you hope for from the critics?

Susan: Everything.

Elizabeth: What is their responsibility?

Susan: To be thoughtful and to not underestimate. To pay attention.

Elizabeth: Do you think there is a relation between artist, critic, and public?

Susan: I hope for a healthy dialectical situation.

An Interview with Karen Malpede

by Gloria Orenstein

Karen Malpede is the Resident Playwright of the New Cycle Theatre in Brooklyn. In less than a decade, in collaboration with Resident Director Burl Hash, The New Cycle Theatre has produced a series of new plays which embrace feminism and pacifism as an ethical and political position. In her four plays, Lament for Three Women, Rebeccah, The End of War *and* Making Peace, *Karen Malpede has been challenging the (patriarchal) non-verbal theatrical aesthetic that prevailed in American theatre during the sixties and moving away from the "theatre of cruelty" towards a feminist vision of compassion, one that restores poetic language to theatre and reclaims the power of the word to transform reality.*

She is interviewed by Gloria Orenstein, the author of The Theatre of the Marvelous: Surrealism and the Contemporary Stage *and many articles on women in the contemporary arts. Gloria is co-founder of* The Woman's Salon for Literature *in New York.*

Marilyn Mclaren

Suzanne Hall, Ann Stanley in 'Making Peace: A Fantasy.'

Gloria: Karen, you worked with The Open Theatre and The Living Theatre and yet, even though they were formative influences in your creative background, you felt the need to leave. Could you explain the reasons why you left and formed your own theatre company?

Karen: First of all I worked with both theatres as a critic — not as a judgemental critic, but as an enthusiastic impassioned critic —rather than a creative person. I was attracted to these theatres because they had completely destroyed the realistic play, opening up new possibilities for expressing passion in the theatre. But at the time the Open Theatre disbanded, I felt that words were needed again in the theatre because the actors' new facility to embody extreme emotions and the feminist movement's increasing analysis of a new world view and new relationships could be combined to make a theatre which would show people transforming themselves out of patriarchy.

Gloria: I know that as a critic you began to speak of these ideas. What did you do when you realized that the male artists upon whom you had always relied did not see your vision?

Karen: It came as a terrible shock, because I was still under the illusion that the male artist would make the world for me as I wanted to see it. That's how it had always been and that's why I had loved Yeats and Shakespeare and The Open Theatre. But when I came up against this wall of the male artist not comprehending a feminist vision, I decided I had to take my own responsibility very seriously and write a play.

Gloria: How did you find the theme for your first play?

Karen: I began to think about the marriage I had just left and through a process of reflection I was led back to my father and his death by cancer. More specifically, I thought of my mother and the other women in the waiting room of the hospital who were all involved in waiting for men to die. The play grew out of that experience and cancer became a metaphor for the dying patriarchy. In the play, three generations of women tell their stories and, as they do, they begin to hear the similarity in the three stories. They then begin to come together and offer each other support to make a break with their draining, impossible and intolerable dependency upon the dying men. They learn to grow strong together as they learn to give up — since they will have to — the men who are terminally ill and who are merely being kept alive by machines.

Gloria: How did you actually go about getting your first play performed?

Karen: It had always been very clear to me from my study of theatre history that the great artists were always in control of their own work and that if you took your own development as a writer seriously, you didn't try to market a finished play commercially, but looked for a group of supportive artists who shared a similar vision and who would work with you. At that time there was a woman named Eleanor Johnson who had also worked with the Open Theatre. I gave her a draft of the play from which she staged a reading. I then rewrote it and she decided to stage a production with Judah Kataloni, her Co-Director. That is how *A Lament for Three Women* came into being.

Gloria: Since Lament, *you have founded the New Cycle Theatre in Brooklyn with Burl Hash so that your newer works can be produced under your own artistic surveillance. Would you talk a little about the relationship between the writer and the theatre company as you envisage it?*

Karen: It seems to me that it is vital, for the maturation of the playwright, to work with people who really care about the play and who feel they're being fed by it as well as bringing something to it. But what happens in the commercial theatre is that the playwright is the last person anybody wants to see at rehearsal. In fact, when I first met Burl Hash — he was working at the Chelsea Theatre Company which was doing the plays of Genet and Handke and Le Roi Jones — he looked at me once and said, "Well, you're the last kind of playwright anybody would want to have around." And when I asked, "Why is that?" he said, "Well, because you're alive." The combination of being alive and being a woman, is very shocking and startling to people and they don't want you around if they decide to do your play.

Gloria: Could you talk about the role you play in the production process?

Karen: Because of my wish to be actually working in a theatre and growing from play to play, I feel that the playwright should be actively involved in rehearsals by answering questions as to character development, giving insight as to character, pointing the actors and director in the direction of the historical material and discussing how it was transformed to have contemporary meaning, as well as giving the designers as much information as possible as to what I think the play should look like.

Gloria: Your plays are, for the most part, based upon historical events that have a relevance for our time. Could you talk a little

about why you choose particular historical epochs and the kind of themes that inspire you?

Karen: It seems to me that most poetic theatre was made from history and I think that a playwright goes to history for two reasons. One is that it's easier to see the present through an historical focus because the distancing of events makes actions clearer. The other is the language, and the fact that it's easier for me to imagine people speaking poetry to each other in an historical setting. The characters that live in my plays, even though they live in an historical past, portray a relevant and current understanding of relationships between women, of getting out from under the heel of the patriarchy and of building new communities.

Gloria: Let's discuss the female characters in your plays, the kinds of conflicts they find themselves in and the ways in which they solve those conflicts — ways which differ enormously from solutions proposed by playwrights in the past.

Karen: It's very rare in the works of playwrights of the past, to find two women who talk with each other, unless they are fighting or in some kind of competitive relationship. Because of this they aren't able to create the world that they might know. They are, at best, isolated moral figures and, at worst, totally inconsequential and victimized. The first thing that happens when women start writing plays is that women begin to talk with each other and out of that arises the possibility for beginning to create a world as women imagine it.

Gloria: Your plays generally lead the women characters to the point of choosing a new vision. In Rebeccah, *for example, they begin to build a new world out of the rubble of the old. What are the values affirmed in making this choice?*

Karen: I have a very strong feeling that life and art are connected. I'm writing from a sense of personal responsibility, of personal change and transformation which, of course, is only possible if one can identify with a movement which is nurturing and in a process of change. The artist, not as an isolated person, but as part of a political, moral and ethical movement, makes a great deal of sense to me. This is the kind of world view my plays espouse.

Gloria: I think that telling Rebeccah's story will give some sense of how you have worked with the historical material of the Depression and created a feminist heroine whose values are exemplary for our time.

Karen: *Rebeccah* begins in a pogrom and is about a Jewish woman who is hiding with her baby. When the baby starts to cry, she hears the fear and anger in the breath patterns of the men in the house, and feels that they're ordering her to stifle the baby's cries. She smothers the baby. When they come out of hiding, she asks them to look at her and take some of the responsibility for the horrible thing that she has done. They not only refuse to look at her; they cast her out. She then goes to America with a daughter, Sarah, who gets a job at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Sarah falls in love with another woman, Esther, who also works in the shop, and they are working together when the fire breaks out.

They have two historical choices — either to jump out the window and hope that they will be caught by a policeman or fireman below (which usually didn't happen) or to burn to death. The burning becomes a metaphor for that kind of all-consuming passion that, having no outlet in society, ate away and destroyed women — particularly working-class women — of enormous potential. So the daughter is burned to death in the fire as she declares her love to Esther. Rebeccah breaks through the police lines and begins to look among the charred bodies for relics. She puts on the garments that she finds and this act becomes the beginning of an externalization of her pain. It is as if, by wearing the wastes of the past openly on her back, some of the inner carrying of it is relieved. Through mourning for her daughter in this way, she makes a vow to herself to build something meaningful with the garbage of civilization. Rebeccah begins to build a shanty town out of the garbage that she has been collecting. In the play we actually use garbage collected from the streets of N.Y. as part of the decor for the shanty town. Rebeccah dies as seers die quite without remorse and quite responsible for her own death — she knows she's done all she can do and that her vision, as far as she saw it, is complete. She is surrounded by other young women and passes on to them the responsibility for making the shanty town work and carrying it into the future. The play goes one step further than *Lament* in terms of the new vision of the female characters.

Gloria: What I find important about The End of War, *your next play, is the way you show the devastating effects of patriarchal politics and heroism on men as well as women. In the play you have a male poet being drawn into the women's vision of a world where violence and sexism will not prevail.*

Karen: *The End of War* is about the connection between rape and war. I decided to use the most high-toned moral war that I could find for this play — one that I felt could be seen as a justifiable war — even though I feel that no war is justifiable. I chose the Anar-

chist movement in the Russian Revolution, because the Anarchists in the Ukraine were both involved in overthrowing the Czar and opposed to the Soviet State. They wanted their own free Anarchist lands in the Ukraine and when they fought for their freedom, Stalin and Trotsky marched their army across the Ukraine and murdered thousands of Ukranians.

While doing research on this period I discovered that Nestor Makhno, the great hero of the Anarchist movement in the Ukraine, used to rape women after a battle. He also had two women who claimed to be his wife. This set me to thinking that heroes, no matter what their political beliefs, seem to be composed of a similar fiber — rapists, women haters, etc. Heroes take their energy from other people who don't realize that it's *their* vital energy that goes into making the hero. I also became fascinated with women's complicity in the Revolution and as the play continues, in the ways that the three women characters slowly and painfully take their energies away from this hero and this war and join together to support each other.

Gloria: There is much in this coming together of three women of three generations that reminds me of Lament.

Karen: In *Lament,* cancer represented the patriarchy, whereas here, war is the major dramatic event. In *The End of War* the Old Mother has a son who is sacrificed in order to save the life of the hero. Even though there is a scene in which the Old Mother is visionary and transcends all differences and hurts from the past by bringing the three women together, she is not strong enough to survive. Why some people go further than others is the human mystery and the human tragedy. This woman, who is a seer as well as a victim, has the whole range of possibilities within her, but simply isn't strong enough. However, the male poet, Voline, who has been madly in love with Makhno is increasingly unable to use his pen to glorify the male hero, and he is drawn more and more into the woman's sphere and brings his own support. At the end of the play, the two women and the male poet are left on the battlefield. They haven't yet made a safe new place and the play ends with their pledges to each other to take the next step.

Gloria: Could you talk a little bit more about the process of change — of self-transformation?

Karen: We call our Theatre The New Cycle Theatre because we think that change really is a cyclical process and to the extent which one is able to experience the grief and sorrow of the past, one can also envision the joy of life. The notion of linear progress with a great climax at the end is, I think, a western male notion that

Dolores Brandon, Elia Bracca, Martha Elliot in Karen Malpede's 'The End of War.'

is promising to end in nuclear holocaust. But the notion of cyclical change, of death and rebirth, is an ancient pagan woman-centered one connected with women's bodies, their cycles and the cycles of the moon. Therefore, life in these plays tends to be cyclical and with each growth in awareness and transformation, the possibilities for pain and joy become richer.

Gloria: If we want to talk about the possibility of radical change, we must discuss the relationship between the two Shaker women in your most recent play, Making Peace. *It seems to me that all of the characters in this play are called upon to make peace with the parts of themselves that have been denied expression under patriarchy.*

Karen: The metaphor in *Making Peace* has to do with setting your burden down and being brave enough to take in love and to accept love — which is often very frightening. Intimacy frightens most of us so much that, as we reach a new level of intimacy in a relationship the first thing we do is cut off. But when we are in a trusting situation and don't have to defend ourselves so much, we can slowly let those barriers down.

One of the crucial relationships in *Making Peace* is between Mary Soule and Charity Still, two Shaker women who grew up together, slept in the same bed, are the same age, and are very much in love with each other. Charity Still is frightened of the love because it's forbidden in the Shaker community. She feels so much passion that she is afraid that if she were to let it out she might

literally break apart. She becomes a religious fanatic and joins the millenarian, patriarchal sect of Father Trapp. Mary Soule, who is less frightened of this love, is completely distraught and totally unwilling to give up the belief that love is possible. She eventually marries a man who is sexually brutal to her and doesn't allow her any experience of the sex act or the birth of her child. She goes mad, and only comes back to her senses when she suckles the parents of Harriet Tubman during their escape from slavery. The play, you must remember is a fantasy.

Through a series of fantastical events Charity is restored to herself. She thinks that the Apocalypse has come, and when she realizes it hasn't, her belief in religious fanaticism falls away. Mary Soule reaches out to her with great love which Charity accepts and is able to take in because all the other false supports have fallen away. The play ends in a dance. It ends with the coming together of these women which I see as one of the most redemptive events in our times.

Gloria: Karen, your plays are lyrical and well-crafted. How do you respond to the theatre people of the sixties who elaborated the method of collective creation in order to do away with what they then referred to as "the tyranny of the writer?"

Karen: I think that what happened with the so-called "collective theatre movement" of the sixties is that the so-called "tyranny of the writer" became replaced by a charismatic director figure — usually a man — who wasn't apparent in the same way that a text is apparent, but who was picking and choosing in a way that suited his own private vision. He pulled from the actor exactly what he wanted, discarded what he didn't want and created from that a directorial concept. I prefer the idea of an actor coming as an independent person to a text, entering that text out of the wealth of his or her own humanity and creating the human understanding of a character.

Gloria: You have had to work with your actors to teach them a new way of working in a non-sexist theatrical environment. Could you talk a little bit about the actors who come to work with you and the experiences they have had in non-feminist theatres, as contrasted with the way in which you work?

Karen: I think that actors have a great sense of being tyrannized. In many ways they are like the women of the world because they see themselves as victims and they are often victimized, used and manipulated. We've had actors begin to work with us who literally couldn't work unless they were being sexually manipulated and

either they get over that and learn how to generate their own juices, or they try to establish a system where everybody gets drawn into sexual manipulation. But it just doesn't work here because we work on a different principle! Yet it has often worked in the commercial theatre and in the so-called avant-garde or experimental theatre. My work is involved with blending the extreme physicalization of the so-called avant-garde theatre with the extreme emotions of the poetic theatre. As I am a playwright, the innovations come less from an improvisatory rehearsal period (like the Open or Living Theatres), and more from the scripts themselves. Actors approaching these lyric, non-realistic plays have to find a way to embody the psychic actions present in the words of their own physical presences (voice and body). The physical and vocal expressions are different, too, from a theatre of cruelty, alienation or minimalism because they are concerned with the possibilities for tenderness between people. There is a great deal of touching, holding, rocking, suckling, birthing in the plays, and these healing, redemptive images need to be physicalized by the actors. Hence, trust needs to be built up carefully in rehearsal so that the actors are able to reveal their deepest selves to each other, and give shape to the deep longings of the characters they play.

We now find that there are two kinds of actors who come to audition. One feels freed by language and the poetic text and in touch with his or her own depths of emotion. The other feels completely traumatized by language and by having to make a commitment to the character. The latter obviously choose to work in a different kind of theatre from ours.

Gloria: Karen, if you had to define the essence of the new feminist art as you see it and are trying to shape it, what would you say?

Karen: The most important thing about feminist art is not the style one works in, which has to do with one's own creative nature, but with the fact that feminist artists are re-imaging the world. Because our experiences with women and with compassionate men have opened us up, we are beginning to envision a world where competition, violence and fear are mitigated through real human caring and the chance to know and be known by others. This means that feminist art is now in the process of creating an entirely new moral, as well as aesthetic, sensibility.

Karen Malpede's plays, *Making Peace: A Fantasy* and *End of War* are available for $7.00 a script from New Cycle Theatre, 657 Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11215.

English lady cutting hay, Alberta 1906

Rosemary Aubert

Maybe this photo
was posed by the government,
intended to draw
to the empty west
the better sort.
Maybe it was real
and their first crop
so that no winter
had yet molested their hope
nor a full year's wind
frayed the delicate scarf
that holds the lacy sunhat
on her head.
Maybe she took
that filmy white skirt
from the top of a trunk
not yet unpacked —
waiting for cupboards
and a proper armoire.
At any rate
she sits on the seat
of this mower
as though it were
a well-bred steed
and cuts slim swaths of hay,
her head held properly.
In the background of
the photograph: only level sky,
possibility, though no clouds show
of storms this lady
has not been taught
to expect.

The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work,

by Germaine Greer, London, 1979, Secker & Warburg.

by Susan Poteet

Any work by a woman, however trifling, is as astonishing as the pearl in the head of the toad. It is not part of the natural order, and need not be related to the natural order. Their work was admired in the old sense which carries an undertone of amazement, as if they had painted with the brush held between their toes.

Germaine Greer's important new work, the result of ten years of research and writing, is actually two related studies. The first part of the book is a sociological investigation of woman's place in the visual arts since the Middle Ages, a study which more than answers the question, why were there no great women painters. The second part of the book is a history of women's painting from the cloisters of the Middle Ages to 1900. The book as a whole is sad and infuriating, and it requires a certain distance before it also becomes inspiring. Imbedded in this litany of woe and neglect are acts of courage and genius, as well as a slow, almost imperceptible development of women's painting over the last five hundred years.

I

Part one includes seven chapters entitled "The Obstacles." Actual oppression is really only one of the obstacles, and ultimately not the worst, which prevented women from attaining enduring fame in painting. Initially, as we might expect, it was impossible for a

woman to acquire the tools, much less the skills, necessary to become a painter. In the Middle Ages, many suspected that women didn't have souls, were not actually human. Their *place in society* was clear, and menial. It was the accident of birth which allowed a lucky few women in the late Middle Ages to acquire some skill in painting. As painting moved out of the cloister, skilled men taught their families (siblings, wives, children) some of the skills required in the complex art of painting. Some of the women became quite proficient, and it was not long before the painters were eager to train female family members who were a good deal more docile, better perhaps at following instruction and seldom insistent on personal recognition. Indeed it was often to the family's advantage to pass off the women's work as the master's, which commanded the best price.

So by accident or necessity, we find there are women artists by about 1450 whose works, few enough albeit, can be seen today. Women have continued to paint, seldom gaining lasting recognition, although a few have gained notoriety.

In the Renaissance, women were not permitted to join the *botteghe*, where men were trained. They were dependent on their relatives for instruction. This situation continued until the 19th century. Modesty demanded that women be sheltered. Life drawing classes were unthinkable. Women were also regarded as a serious distraction to male students, so that by the time art education began to be open to women, sexual segregation prevented them from any contact with their male peers. Modesty also demanded that women remain humble, concerning themselves first with others, eschewing the egotism which appears to be an essential part of the Western artist.

Thus, perhaps the most depressing phenomenon is that most women's painting is lifeless, dull, at best conservative. Women followed their teachers/masters, did what they were told, were copiers, not innovators.

If a woman was assertive and talented enough, she was regarded as a prodigy or freak, overpraised for her slightest effort. Of Elizabeth Sophie Chéron (1648-1711), who specialized in portraits of her quite pleasing self, a scribbler wrote:

When Chéron takes up her brush
Without effort she would make that of Apelles tremble:
And when her mind in some new transport
Abandons itself to the work to which the Muse calls her,
One wonders who of the Gods, Apollo or she herself,
Uses a more beautiful language,
Chéron, without being a painter, I make a picture of you.

Self-portrait by
Elizabeth Sophie Cheron

By 1860 we find Hawthorne in *the Marble Faun* describing a talented girl (modelled on his own wife) producing "scenes delicately imagined, lacking perhaps the reality which comes only from close acquaintance with life, but so softly touched with feeling and fancy that you seemed to be looking at humanity with angel's eyes."

These women became successes, were patronized by the courts, and set to painting portraits. In the 19th century they were able to carry off most of the prizes from those terribly conservative academics.

It took the passage of, at the most, a generation, for the works of these women to be recognized as twaddle and promptly forgotten.

The second major obstacle faced by women painters was that western art theory was male-defined, beginning with Aristotle's notion that art must have dimension — scope, significance, grandeur or size. By the Romantic period the great artist had attained a heroism which allowed Shelley to speak of poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the universe."

Western art has given a great deal less attention to Aristotle's other idea — that art must be beautiful. It is in the beautiful genres — flower painting, miniatures, illustration, pastel portraiture, landscape — that women have excelled. Not being the legislators of art values, however, has consigned most of their work to neglect or oblivion. Virginia Woolf has said:

It is probably, however, that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus...she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values — to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what it to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticized; for the critic of the opposite sex will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental, because it differs from his own.

The greater part of the works by women artists of the past has been lost. The paintings remain anonymous, are falsely attributed to masters, or moulder in museums which are "graveyards where they lie buried until they rot," as Greer says. How this happened is a chilling story, and has everything to do with art as a commodity, and our notion of "great artists."

"Major artists must accumulate an oeuvre; minor artists must lose theirs . . . the very closeness of a great artist to his colleagues and contemporaries leads to their eclipse." Museums and collectors are extremely reluctant to allow attributions to be changed, as minor artists "cannot earn anywhere near as much either in the salesroom or as a drawcard on a museum wall." (A "Romney" was bought in 1913 for $100,000, and sold in 1944 as an Ozias Humphrey for £63.) There is much to be done by the feminist art historian, work which many will not thank her for.

Finally, the last obstacle and to the artist today, the most important and disturbing, since the others have been ameliorated over the past 500 years — LOVE. Here we encounter the enemy within. It is not merely that we love, but what love is for us and who we love that becomes our downfall. While a man seeks love in a personality which complements and nourishes his own, looks for support and comfort, a woman loves what she *admires*, her senior and her superior. Most frequently for women artists,this is the proverbial male art teacher. And what does a woman do when she is in love? She tries to please; hardly very likely to foster her own artistic development.

Gabriele Münter said of her lover. Kandinsky, "I gave myself no worth next to him. He was a holy man." Think of Sonia Terk and Robert Delauney, Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy, Sophie Tauber and Jean Arp; the male was the innovator, the woman the emulator.

Worse yet were the multitude of women who ceased painting at marriage, who became the loving supports to fragile male egos, or my personal favorite, again from Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, a

woman who ceased painting her own works on beholding the great masters:

Reverencing these wonderful men so deeply, she was too grateful for all they bestowed upon her, too loyal, too humble in their awful presence, to think of enrolling herself in their society. Beholding the miracles of beauty which they had achieved . . . all the youthful hopes and ambitions, the fanciful ideas which she had brought from home, of great pictures to be conceived in her feminine mind, were flung aside, and . . . relinquished without a sigh. All that she would henceforth attempt — and that most reverently, not to say religiously — was to catch and reflect some of the glory which had been shed on canvas from the immortal pencils of old.

She turned to copying the masters. Colonized minds of this sort simply do not have the insight, the ego, and the will-power to create art of an individual vision, the only kind of work we recognize as art in the Western world.

II

At this point, the reader is sufficiently discouraged. I put the book down for several weeks. Part II, a short history of women's painting, is not a happy tale either, but it does show how, against the aforementioned odds, women constantly improved their work, redefined art in their own terms and began to win a measure of success for themselves. The anonymous daughters of Renaissance masters have been replaced by women like Emily Carr and Georgia O'Keefe, and while there has been little direct influence of women on those who came after them, there was a slow building upon past rights won, and genres developed.

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) appears to be the first truly innovative woman painter in the Western tradition, and perhaps the greatest before the 20th century. By a rather horrible mischance, she was unable to live a conventional feminine life, choosing rather the role of roving painter who relied on patronage. Though influenced by Carravaggio, she developed her own dramatic language, passionate instead of soft, and an ideal of heroic womanhood which imbued her few remaining works with a power and uniqueness for which she deserves greater credit. Germaine Greer calls Gentileschi "the magnificent Exception" and certainly all the rest of the moments in this book owe more to the delicately beautiful than the sublimely great.

Still life and flower painting were not separate genre until the 17th century. Artists did studies from nature, and included objects and flowers in their great canvases, but the "reverent contemplation" of objects for the purpose of rendering them on canvas would have been outside the narrative and didactic purposes of painting as then conceived. Women were initiators in this genre, which was suited perhaps to their cloistered life style and enforced ignorance of and modesty about the human body. Especially in the field of flower painting, women excelled, producing a great artist in Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) and a number of minor artists as well. Here we see the beginnings of a real tradition, culminating in the works of Georgia O'Keefe, and today, Judy Chicago.

With the development of pastel, women found a new medium suited to their skills, developing the pastel portrait, with its more informal manner, into an absolute craze in the 18th century.

In the late 18th century, women early expressed interest in "taking views" in watercolours, again employing "reverent contemplation" of the natural world, an attitude that requires an abnegation of self which came all too easily to them.

By 1800 art teaching had become a profession and good training was available for the first time to any woman who could afford it. The Academies were open to women, who succeeded in taking most of the prizes from the young men, who quickly rejected the Academies as stultifying institutions demanding abject "imitation" and developed brotherhoods of artists leading a bohemian existence, which of course again excluded women.

Now that women could be artists, the conflict moved inside. Did women want to be artists, or were they more often driven to support themselves with their skills because of lost lovers, husbands or fortunes? It was after all better than being a governess, but not as secure as wedded bliss. And worst of all, most 19th century women artists failed to find an authentic mode of expression. They specialized in genre pieces, loveable and intensely pleasing, which appear today to us as false, even perverse.

It wasn't long, however, before truly good artistic and enduring works appeared: Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Cecilia Beaux. Unfortunately this is where the book stops, with the promise of things to come.

III

Germaine Greer has carefully documented the role of women in the essentially masculine world of Western painting, cataloguing both her obstacles and the not infrequent triumph over those obstacles.

It's a negative book in way, though. Women excel, when at all, in "minor" genres (flower painting, pastel, watercolours, genre).

Women spread themselves too thin. Mrs. Delaney (Mary Granville), an 18th century English artist, is an example:

> *Although not rich or beautiful, she became the centre of a brilliant circle of charming and clever women whose only enemies were sloth and self-importance. Her activity was prodigious: apart from her wonderful letter-writing, she worked at the making and sticking of pincushions, Japan-work, pastel portraits, copies of great masters, designs in shellwork, lustres, candelabra, cornices and friezes in cut-paper on wood, chenille work, cornices made of shells painted over like fine carving, upholstery, quilt-making, embroidery, cross-stitch carpets, miniature playing-card painting, chimney boards and finally, when she was pensioned by the King and living in a cottage where the royal family visited her almost every day, her prodigious paper mosaic.*

In the 20th century Sonia Delaunay preferred "textiles, décors, illustrations, soft-sculptures, collages, book-bindings." Some of the battles and defeats are unforgettable moral lessons for the woman artist of today. The fight against feminine submissiveness and self-destruction waged by these painters, the difficulty of attaining a personal and authentic artistic vision — these are battles which must be waged anew by each young woman artist. The lesson of history is absolutely necessary.

What this book calls for is many more works which focus on some of these worthy painters, on some of these genres. But the book which remains to be written is one which explores the real roots of women's art, and does not limit itself to painting alone. It is a feminist history that does not accept Aristotle's definiton of art, nor any other man's (as Germaine Greer does, as indeed all women did to some extent), but searches for a new, feminist defintion of art, which places the sublime in its proper context, honors the beautiful, the crafts,the life patterns, and the personality structures of women. It would be an alternate history of art, where the miniature, the quilt, the china painting, sit with the canvas in places of honor, where the multiskilled amateur would be honored as a comment on and perhaps a criticism of the "heroic male" egotist and his massive designs.

While our contemporary painters challenge the male artist at his own game (Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* is as momumental as any great male work of art), let us also redefine art and the artist, so that they and their works are not masculine, but human.

Becoming visible

by Chris Bearchell

the coming out stories
edited by Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe, Persephone Press, Mass. 1980, $6.95

Tolerance kills: What you do in bed is your own business . . . Why do you have to flaunt it? . . . If you would only keep quiet about it, you'd have much less trouble. Gay men, and especially lesbians, have been and are, with a small percentage of exceptions, an invisible and a silenced minority. The logic of telling us to "stay in our place" (the closet) "for our own good" is a bit like telling East Asians that, if they don't want to be pushed onto the tracks, they should stop riding the subway. As Adrienne Rich says in a letter to the editors of *the coming out stories*, "Living in the void of namelessness, as so many lesbians do, living in the silence, we must all have had intense experiences of immense significance which became unavailable to us because we had no names for them. When I think of the 'coming out process' I think of it as the beginning of naming, of memory, of making the connections between past and present and future that enable human beings to have an identity."

Becoming visible, shattering the silence, is the first step to making real, lasting changes in the way gay people lead their lives — in the way a racist, male-dominated, and heterocentric society allows us to lead our lives. The struggle is first and foremost a challenge to the fact that there are those who have the power to allow, or forbid. And that process begins with the ritual we call coming out.

I have looked at the remains of lesbian lives that litter the pages of abnormal psychology texts and I have raged. I have raged that

our lives and loves could be reduced to manageable bits of data and plotted on their charts and graphs (I'm a Kinsey 5.7, how about you?) — categorized and quantified. I have raged at the transformation of real live flesh-and-blood women-who-love-women into case studies for the "freaks of nature" freaks and their endless array of lay followers. I longed to hear us expose the conspiracies of "science" and silence with a chorus of our own voices. And I sighed with relief when I read *the coming out stories* — knowing that the project had begun in earnest.

Many lesbians have told their stories at other times in poetry, political analysis, and fiction. The coming out story has appeared in the form of an article here and there, but mostly it has been reserved for new friends over bar room tables, new lovers in bed, and the obligatory letter home to mom. The power of *the coming out stories* is that it brings them all together in one place at one time. It lets us savour each individual story and life as we would a new friend, or lover, or long lost daughter. And then it lets us hear all of those voices and stories and lives as one. This book is more than the sum of its parts: it is a window on the lesbian collective consciousness. "Suddenly you aren't alone anymore. This closeness, this sharing with another womon amazes you . . . Friendship had drifted into love and you hadn't noticed it flowing that way." (Martha Pillow)

The first time I read *the coming out stories* I saw lesbian diversity: names I recognized; names I didn't; mothers; daughters; white, middle class academics; working-class women of colour; younger women, and older women. The second time I read the book I saw the similarities: the tenderness, anger, joy, bitterness, wit, fear, and warmth that lesbians share. In fact I couldn't remember, after a while, whose story I was reading — where one woman's experience left off and another's began. I kept recognizing myself, and the lesbians I know, in other women's words — in the events and emotions of their lives. For instance, many of the story-tellers turn the light of their new-found lesbian awareness onto their pasts — their girlhoods. "The grade school teachers called one name and both of us would come; they mixed us up. Together at age eight we became swift horses running the Derby every afternoon across the lawns. (Diane Stein)

As an "out" lesbian for the past eight years, I still found reaffirmation in this book — even in reading such things as confessions of insecurity. "I was fussing about it one day, shocked and irritated that I hadn't become an entirely new woman; my friend nodded: 'Still playing with the same old bag of marbles, hey?' And I grinned suddenly realizing I was saying this to a woman I had just met, with whom I was not at all being afraid and passive. 'Ya, but I play a whole lot better.' " (Judith Niemi) (I'm not the only dyke in the

world who has ever doubted herself? What a relief.)

And some of them shared their first tentative hopes and fears as they actually lived them — or at least recorded them at the time — from journals kept through the process of coming out. "I have this image of announcing to the world (ie, myself, then Phyllis) that I am a Lesbian and having the world pat me on the head, take my pulse,and tell me I'll get over it soon." (Judith McDaniel)

On later reflection, I decided that I had to temper my enthusiasm a bit. As a window on the lesbian reality, *the coming out stories* cannot show the whole of lesbian experience. Certainly the anthology provides evidence for lesbian diversity, but despite its attempts to invoke the lives of as many gay women as possible, it is clearly a window from the perspective of white, middle class Americans. That only means that there isn't time for disappointment. There are more coming out stories to tell, other books to publish, new windows to open. The other criticism I have is of the tendency to feminist orthodoxy and the attendant idiosyncracy of hybridized language which is used by the editors (whose opening sentence in their introduction reads: "This book exists because wimmin love wimmin.") and some of their contributors, in an assault on both the familiar and the rational.

Essentially *the coming out stories* is a collection of invaluable documents of the reality of some lesbian lives. As soon as I'd finished it I wanted to run out and share the anthology with lesbians who don't yet have a basic commitment to feminism, young lesbians who have yet to come out, and feminist lesbians who refuse to. And there are those outside the lesbian community who crop up in *the stories* as important forces in many lesbians' lives — people who have genuinely sought to understand the lesbian reality: some of our parents, gay men and heterosexual women, and anyone else who feels the need to understand lesbians in order to better understand themselves. Reading *the coming out stories* couldn't help but help.

Fireweed Ourstory

FIREWEED is and will continue to be a journal in the process of continual change and growth as collective members leave and new women bring their ideas and energy into the shaping of the journal. This section, entitled *Fireweed Ourstory*, is intended to keep you in touch with the women working on FIREWEED.

Leaving the Collective:

Lynne Fernie has nurtured FIREWEED since its birth. Her dedication, loyalty and love in sustaining this publication has been only one expression of her caring for women. All the members of the Collective have benefited from her experience, support and articulate feminist consciousness. We wish her the best.

Contributor's notes

Kathryn Anderson is a visual artist. Originally from Jamaica, she is a graduate of the Fine Arts Department of University of Waterloo. **Rosemary Aubert** is a Toronto poet and author of *Two Kinds of Honey* (Oberon '78). A member of the Phoenix Poetry Workshop, she has been published in a number of Canadian periodicals. **Peggy Smith Baker** is a choreographer, dancer, teacher and director of Dancemakers in Toronto. **Chris Bearchell** is a lesbian writer, activist and and editor of *The Body Politic*. **Constance Brissenden,** the editor of seven anthologies of Canadian plays, is currently working for the Writers' Development Trust.

Susan Britton is currently living in Toronto producing a new work devoted to understanding Radical Nihilism. **Anne Cameron** (Cam Hubert) is a poet, playwright and screen writer. **Elizabeth Chitty**, a Toronto performance and video artist, will be working for the next year as video co-ordinator for Vancouver's The Western Front. **Ann Cipriani** lectures at the University of Bordeaux. Born in Ireland, she is currently working on Irish modern theatre. **Maya Deren** was born in Penticton, B.C. and conceived in the wilderness. Her extensions are the recreation of feminist ideologies through film and words.

Robin Belitsky Endres is a Toronto poet and playwright. **Cathy Ford** is living in B.C. She has published five books of poetry and is currently preparing for a publication of a collection of poems on Joan of Arc. **Susan Glickman**, from Montreal, is currently teaching Shakespeare while working on her Ph.D. on Renaissance Drama. **HAG** went to York and O.C.A. and works in her studio as well as freelance. **Valerie Harris** is a New York City playwright and journalist. She is project consultant for Third World Newsreel and is working on a play about filmmakers.

Lynda Griffiths is currently touring her one-woman, three-character play, *Maggie and Pierre.* **Kate Lushington** is a director currently working on an Equity Showcase production of the *Black and Blue Review.* **Joss Maclennan** works with photo xerox and is a member of the Fireweed Collective. **Catherine Macleod** is a Toronto feminist and writer currently producing a film on the women's movement in Toronto. **Karen Malpede** is resident playwright of The New Cycle Theatre in Brooklyn, New York.

Denise Maxwell's illustrations have appeared in *Fireweed* Issues 5/6 and 7. She is a graphic artist and Collective member. **Gloria Orenstein** is a writer and co-founder of the New York Women's Salon for Literature. **Maureen Paxton** is in Toronto working in both fine and commercial art areas. The first of her short stories will appear in the Press Gang anthology, *Common Ground.* **Susan Poteet** teaches English at Dawson College. She has been writing criticism for six years. **Marie Claire Rouyer** is a writer and professor of English literature at the University of Bordeaux. She has recently lectured in Toronto on French feminism today.

D. Ann Taylor is a playwright, singer, rock video artist, former Hummer and co-director of VideoCabaret.

Dear anonymous writer of September 15th,
We did read your letter, and were very moved by it. Thank you for sending it to us.

FIREWEED Collective

Acknowledgements

MAPLE LEAF BALLROOM BENEFIT DANCE

The women on the **FIREWEED** Collective would like to express our appreciation to all the women who offered their time and work to make the Mama Quilla II/**FIREWEED** benefit dance a great success:

A special thanks to the members of **Mama Quilla II—Nancy Poole, Gail Flintoft, B.J. Danylchuk, Linda Jain, Linda Robitaille, Lorraine Segato, Jackie Snedker, Susan Sturman** and **Maxine Walsh** — for a wonderful concert and for their work in organizing this event; to **Debbie Bloomfield** for her tremendous job in organizing all the volunteers and for working far beyond the call of duty on the night of the dance; to **Pam Godfree** for her help with finding a hall, input and organizational work for the dance; to **Catherine Macleod** for her assistance with publicity; and to all of the women who so generously worked the night of the dance — without you the dance would not have been possible and we thank you.

DONATIONS

The FIREWEED Collective would like to thank Joan Vinall Cox and Marilyn Trews for their donations to the journal. A special thanks to David McIlwraith, our angel and heartthrob of the month.

THIRD ANNUAL FIREWEED FESTIVAL

Thanks to the hard work and generous time/talent giving of many people, the Festival, held at Harbourfront on September 12/13, was an exciting and successful time. The Fireweed Festival Committee and the Fireweed Collective thank them all — those who performed, helped and attended.

FIREWEED Festival Committee:
Ayanna Black, Sheilagh Crandall, Susan Turner.

JANE FAIR/KIERAN OVERS, THE BILL GRAHAM TRIO/BOBBIE SHERMAN, CARLETON VAUGHAN TRIO, sponsored by the Toronto Musicians' Association with special thanks to Jim McHarg. **CHARNIE GUETTEL/LEN GRAF** — thank you.

For a wonderful afternoon of poetry and prose — **HIMANI BANNERJI, DIONNE BRAND, MARY DI MICHELE, JOYCE NELSON, CAROLYN SMART, BRONWEN WALLACE, HELEN WEINZWEIG** and **ADELE WISEMAN.**

To **LYNNE FERNIE** for emceeing the Anthology with such warmth.

To **BOO WATSON AND LORRAINE SEGATO** for coming to our aid so smoothly and powerfully.

To **CHARLENE ROYCHT** for her splendid job of emceeing the festival and **CAROLINE** for her moral support.

To **MAMA QUILLA II** for Saturday night.

To **HARBOURFRONT STAFF — Mary Ellen Spence, Vivian Krugler, Debbie Westfield, Ruth Winestock, Elve Foote** and the Graphics Department, **John Richardson** and technicians **Costas and Steve.**

To the women who helped — **Lisa, Joyce Matthews, Sarah Crandall, Kari Reynolds.** And to anyone whom we have missed - thank you.

To the Toronto Women's Bookstore, to Fred Gallagher of Carling O'Keefe; Randy Crane of Landemark Corporation for so generously donating the tablecloths and Pat of Signatures for sign painting. And to Earl for his help.

A special thank you to **KAY ARMATAGE** for allowing us showing of her new film "Striptease".

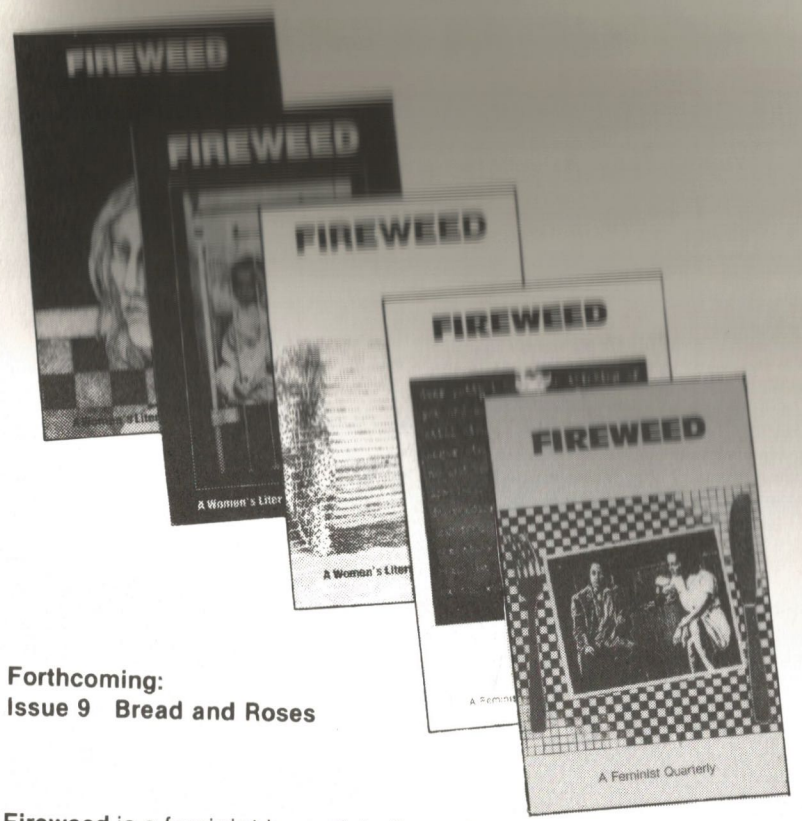
And to **JOSS MACLENNAN** for her beautiful poster design.

Classified

ANNOUNCEMENT *Women in Focus* is a non-profit feminist arts and media centre. Our distribution library of video tapes and films, on women's and other issues, is available for rental or sales. We are also looking for new material by women to add to our library. Women producers or anyone interested in our free catalogue can contact us at; *Women in Focus,* No. 6-45 Kingsway, Vancouver, B.C. Canada, V5T 3H7.

WANTED: Photographs, Newspaper Clipings, Documents, Posters Personal Recollections related to the Women's Movement in Canada from 1960—1980, for use in a film retrospective of the Women's Movement. Please write to: *One Woman, Many Women*, 100 Bain Avenue, Apt. 11, the Elms, Toronto, Ontario. M4K 1E8.

WANTED: Women's Plays for the *Womyn's Theatre*, 6757 Palatine Avenue North, Seattle, Washington, 98103, U.S.A.



Forthcoming:
Issue 9 Bread and Roses

Fireweed is a feminist journal dedicated to publishing a wide range of women's work: • the arts • politics • ideology • herstory • lesbian feminism • book reviews • interviews • visual art • photography

Submissions

Fireweed welcomes previously unpublished submissions from new and established writers; work in all areas of feminist interest, including poetry, fiction and drama in other languages (please send translation). MSS should be typed, double-spaced and accompanied by a biography and stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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- **Marie Claire Rouyer** on *Women's Theatre in Great Britain*
- **Kate Lushington** interviews **Linda Griffiths** of *Maggie and Pierre*
- Interview with **Karen Malpede,** playwright

The cover shows Susan Taylor, creator of the environmental piece Pink Lullabies.