

# HERESIES

A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics

## WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER

#7

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#3



# HERESIES

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*Heresies* is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that *Heresies* will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, encourage the writing of the history of *femina sapiens*, and generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to the broadening of the definition and function of art.

*Heresies* is structured as a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture and film-making. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff made up of women who want to work on that issue as well as members of the collective. Proposals for issues may be conceived and presented to the *Heresies* Collective by groups of women not associated with the collective. Each issue will take a different visual form, chosen by the group responsible. *Heresies* will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. Topics for issues will be announced well in advance in order to collect material from many sources. It is possible that satellite pamphlets and broadsides will be produced continuing the discussion of each central theme. In addition *Heresies* provides training for people who work editorially, in design and in production, both on-the-job and through workshops. As part of its commitment to the public, *Heresies* houses and maintains the Women Artists' Slide Registry.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of critic to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

*Heresies* collective: Ida Applebroog, Patsy Beckert, Joan Braderman, Su Friedrich, Janet Froelich, Harmony Hammond, Sue Heinemann, Elizabeth Hess, Arlene Ladden, Gail Lineback, Lucy Lippard, Melissa Meyer, Marty Pottenger, Carrie Rickey, Elizabeth Sacre, Miriam Schapiro, Amy Sillman, Elke Solomon, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Elizabeth Weatherford, Sally Webster. Associate members: Mary Beth Edelson, Joyce Kozloff, Joan Snyder, Michelle Stuart, Susana Torre, Nina Yankowitz.

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# WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER

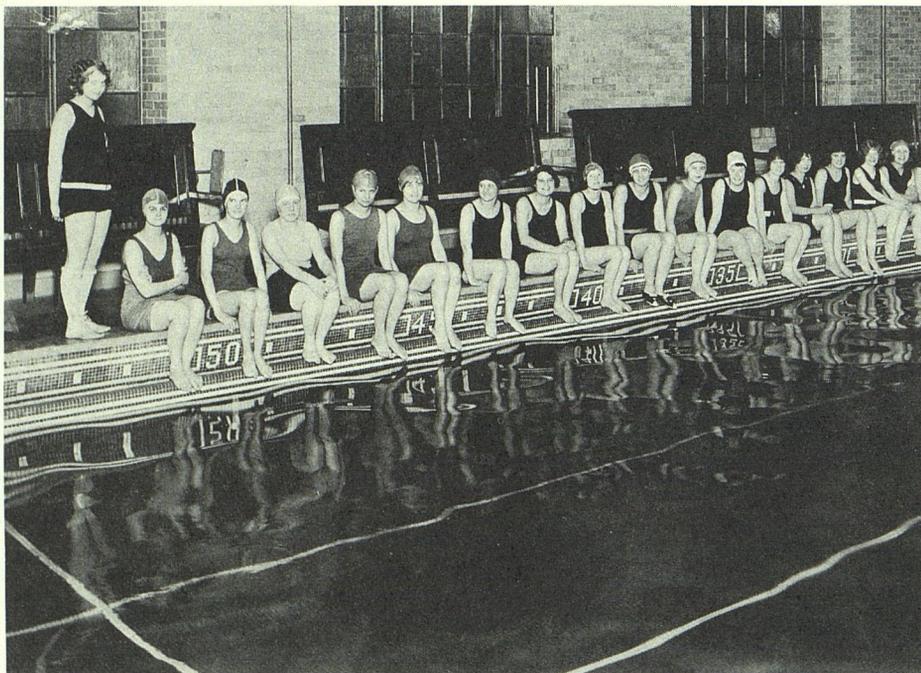
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## EDITORIAL

The Heresies #7 Editorial Collective. Seated from left: Linda Marks, Janet Froelich, Sandy Straus, Jole Carliner, Patsy Beckert. Standing: Eleanor Batchelder, Sara Ruddick, Pam Fishman, Elke Solomon, Lyn Blumenthal. Not pictured: Jane Kaufman.

“ We haven't yet learned to analyze 'women working together.' When a group is working well, we assume nothing is worth analyzing. When problems get hairy, we're so bummed out that we grab the handiest explanation ('If only she'd stop doing that, everything would be okay'; 'Nobody is committed enough'). Women need to develop ways of thinking, looking, talking about our processes. That it is frequently painful to work together cannot be permitted to excuse us from examining what is going on. In the women's movement, we finally started sharing bedroom secrets. It's about time we talk as frankly about the internal cleanliness and dirt in our collectives. Eventually, the sacred moral tones can be replaced by practical discussions that could also provoke exciting analysis.”

We have been working together for about a year. We share a sense of confusion, disappointment and frustration as we look back. For a while, the causes of our malaise were obscure to us. Although we had our share of angry exchanges, we did not suffer from evident political division or serious, chronic, personal antagonism.

*I have really enjoyed the people working on the issue. Getting to know the women has been important to me.*

*In general, the women in our group are clear about themselves and their lives and have shown themselves to be pretty open and direct in dealing with each other.*

We established a "friendly-but-impersonal collegial atmosphere" which we would only later call a "conspiracy of niceness." Months later, we remain friendly, more often than not "cheerful and polite with each other," "comfortable in our work."

Yet something went wrong.

*It was far more boring than it was stimulating.*

*The decision-making processes have been tedious and verbose.*

*It seemed that we so often looked for the weak points in the articles we received (or in the back issues of Heresies) that I began to lose confidence and interest.*

Our "conspiracy of niceness" took its toll. Although we might have been "appalled that one or two people could, at times, so effectively control the time, energy and direction of the group," we were usually "too polite" to name—let alone to deal with—the problem. A kind of disaffection set in; as a result, "we did not allow ourselves to respect our mutual decisions." And, it seemed:

*We know very little about one another's lives.*

*We don't respect each others' feel-*

*ings about writing solicited or submitted.*

*Everyone in the collective seemed to connect through a web of mutual acquaintances with other members of the collective or people outside—whom I never knew or had heard of. I ended up feeling insignificant.*

While we made some alliances based on past friendships and current social, sexual and political allegiances, they were neither fierce nor exclusive. Yet most of us felt locked out, by and large, from what seemed to be a cohesive group for the others.

Not surprisingly, in such an atmosphere,

*We never became a work group, only the seeds of one. We did not agree on our goals or the means we would and wouldn't use to meet them. Since we did not commit ourselves to anything, we have not been able to demand much from each other nor has the main Heresies Collective been able to demand much from our group. A certain cynical pragmatism became the dominant element of our working together.*

*We talked, argued a bit, but never became passionate. We became very pragmatic decision-makers, reluctant workers, bare friends.*

*It is not a work environment I would choose if there were other possibilities.*

Now, toward the end of the time we've worked together, we have identified at least three of the causes of our situation: our subject, our relation to the main collective, and our prior self-identification as artists or writers. From the outset, we found it difficult to focus our issue's topic. We agreed that we were interested in the experiences women had had and the methods that had been developed in working together, in either alternative or traditional work structures. We did not want sentimentality or idealization, but "true confessions" of conflicts,

doubts and ambitions. Some of us were primarily interested in traditional structures and ways of changing them. Others dwelt on general questions about the meaning of work or on conflicts between professionalism and feminism. Occasionally, it seemed we wanted to include almost anything women might do together as part of our interest. These differences in emphasis caused some misunderstanding and difficulty within our group as we evaluated the material we received or discussed solicitations.

Much more serious were the problems with our topic as we mutually understood it. We—women in general—scarcely have a vocabulary for talking about women working together. We hardly know the outline of the subject, much less how to define solutions to its problems. There are serious obstacles to "truth-telling" among women, of which we are only now aware. It often means identifying specific people, which threatens relationships and projects; it requires self-exposure and makes us feel vulnerable. For weeks, our group could not understand why it was so difficult to get material which addressed our questions in an interesting, intelligent way. Now we know that we are all inexperienced in dealing with our subject, emotionally and conceptually.

In retrospect, we realize that there was a vacuum—a lack of focus around which we could define political and intellectual issues. Because we weren't clear about our topic, it was easy to make our goal merely to get out the magazine. We complained that we weren't talking enough, that there was too much "business," too little camaraderie, politics or debate. We momentarily would become "passionate" about procedural matters or a particular article. But this was no substitute for political passion about substantive

issues—hard to achieve about a topic which is both new and disturbing. Because of the lack of passion and goals, we were not sufficiently motivated to explore and modify the personal relationships we felt were increasingly unsatisfying.

These problems were compounded by the particular history of our issue. This issue originally was intended as a project of the main *Heresies* Collective. It was to be a statement about and examination of their process and history, along with “true confessions” from other women’s groups and collectives. When *Heresies* realized they could not follow through with their project, they opened up the issue to the feminist community. Coming to this decision took time and meant, paradoxically, that the issue was “late” before our editorial group had ever met. We were confronted with a practical task: to put out an issue quickly, according to the schedule demands and topic definition of the *Heresies* Collective.

At first we were a shifting group of women who appeared to be under the direction of whichever member(s) of the main collective happened to be at that night’s meeting. It was their task to clarify the project and to communicate a sense of urgency about *Heresies*’ schedules. Throughout the production of this issue, we have worked with a series of unrealistic and unnerving deadlines which blighted our spirits, inhibited our thinking and bred numerous resentments. By the time we might have calmly and productively talked of ways of finishing our project, we no longer trusted ourselves or *Heresies* to be honest about any deadline, and many of us could no longer care.

The three members of *Heresies* who were part of our group were torn between our editorial interests and those of *Heresies*. The rest of us came with varying degrees of com-

mitment to, and familiarity with, the magazine. But whatever our initial allegiances, most of us occasionally felt harassed and misunderstood by a collective whose operations were confusing, even unintelligible to us. It was easy to feel antagonistic toward the very group for whom we were working and who made our existence possible. We had conflicts with the larger collective over the size of the issue, its budget, and our time schedule. These problems became more explicit as our project wore on. We sometimes felt that the final control over “our” magazine lay in “their” hands. This tended to reinforce the sense of an adversarial relation.

In our final months we have developed still another division—a strongly marked version of the split between writers and artists, which we tend to justify as a split between editorial and design. This division has compounded the disconnectedness of the group.

*The schism between the artists and writers is very apparent. There is a politic in it that hasn't been discussed. I am appalled to think that discussion could be considered bullshit and that visuals could be seen as merely decorative.*

*We decided collectively about the value of written material. We were shown visuals, but we didn't discuss them much and certainly didn't vote on them collectively. I couldn't find words to ask about the politics or meaning of the visuals. I feel cut off from a large part of the magazine.*

*My level of ambivalence about the content of the issue is enormous. I'm primarily concerned about design and visuals.*

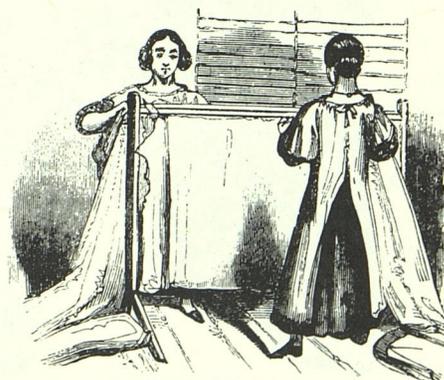
*I care more for the look and feel of the publication, now, than for the editorial work. I want to design a beautiful magazine with the few of us who care about design. I hope that the editorial material will carry its own weight, but I seem to have*

*separated myself from that.*

At times it has seemed as if we have two subcollectives with occasional cross-overs. Some of us didn't see each other for weeks.

All this is disheartening. But we have stayed on. There are still ten of us actively putting out the magazine. We came together recently to reflect upon our individual and collective experiences. Now, at last, we are engaging in the kind of nonjudgmental self-criticism necessary to group projects. We have worked hard, laughed a lot, and are feeling better about our experience.

Although we are not happy with the way we've worked together, we do like what we have produced. We see this issue as a groundbreaking one. We are presenting material which, as a whole, may allow all of us to begin to see what “women working together” looks like. Women have many options: more and more women are exploring them and feeling good about the results. It is good to work together, but it isn't easy. We must learn to make compromises and relinquish control, at the same time maintaining political passion and assuming our responsibilities. We hope that this issue adds to the body of information and usable wisdom that women can draw upon, not just for inspiration but for practical help in analyzing and solving our difficulties.



Measuring Calico, before Printing.

# WORKING

Sharli Powers Land



At the end of last summer, on the tip of Cape Cod, Mimi died. She meant so much to me when she was alive, always jarring my sense of reality with her sharp observations and quick wit. She loved the bar scene that I hated, with all its degenerate, eccentric characters. Everyone came to her funeral, peering into the open coffin for a last look at a rare friend dressed in red.

Afterward we went down to the Fo'cs'l'e "to have a drink on Mimi." She had died as she lived, a writer-actress revising her roles. She never altered the play's structure but she squirmed, laughed, cried under its constraints. I call her an actress not because of the parts she played in the Provincetown Theatre Company productions, but because of her frequent complaint that she felt like a performer in life. Her cancer was attacked by surgeons, her woman's existence was challenged by men and children, and her short life was crowded with broken washing machines, miserable relatives and late alimony checks. It is not Mimi's courage that impresses me, but that she died intact: Mimi.

I try not to lose her. My own life is in pieces, not broken but fragmented. Mimi's death coincides with my thirty-fifth year, the first time both children are in school. Six hours of

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Sharli Powers Land is a painter who teaches Adult Education in Provincetown, Mass.

Illustrations from Covers, Sharli Powers Land and Martha Fowlkes, © Land-Fowlkes, 1978.

# UNDER COVER



silence broken only by "Morning Pro Musica" instead of "Captain Kangaroo," the vacuum cleaner and constant cheery chatter. Surely I can concentrate long enough to do something this year.

A few years ago, I had a part-time job as an administrator at a Provincetown art center. I worked with Martha there. A few years earlier we had both been fellowship artists at the center; now we were bosses. I was head of a staff much older than I with whom I respectfully disagreed. I wanted to change the hierarchical structure of the art center, imagining I could dissolve the whole art world by so doing. I did bring about some changes, but the structure of the center did not change. My attempts went unnoticed for the most part—and I wanted credit. Martha was the only person to whom I explained my actions and with whom I shared my view of the center. We were confidantes, feeling we had to keep ourselves under cover if we were ever to effect change.

We were actresses, like Mimi, playing grownups at our first real job. We felt we must behave differently in our responsible positions. I felt that we should act as if we had power and status when we were with those in our debt, and be humble toward those who paid our salaries. It was an exhausting game we played. When, after two years, we quit the center jobs, it was to return to our studios to paint.

By October, my studio depresses me. It is cold. I look at the cement floor and drafty garage door and know it will only get colder. I long to work in the house, but it is small and my family prefers cooking aromas to paint fumes. The temptation to vacuum away cat hairs is there. I am impatient with the new work I have begun. Figurative work turns abstract, idiosyncratic and stiff. Old work looks as schizophrenic as my life. I am stuck between paintings that do not follow smoothly from one to the next.

At first Martha and I talk about working together again, to generate some income. "Two heads are better than one." Martha needs to supplement her unemployment checks and I need money for art supplies and studio heat. We talk about becoming window dressers. We joke that we are experienced in dressing ourselves, our apartments, so why not? We have both made paintings of windows, in periods where we look from the inside out. Now we want to look from the outside in.

We are regulars at a nearby thrift shop and ask if we can experiment with their windows. We make a Halloween window, costumes from costumes. Next we ask a grocer to lend her window to the experiment. There we spend a week making a three-dimensional kitchen from cardboard boxes. It looks like a page from a child's giant pop-up book, a kitchen for all to see, big and bright. But no

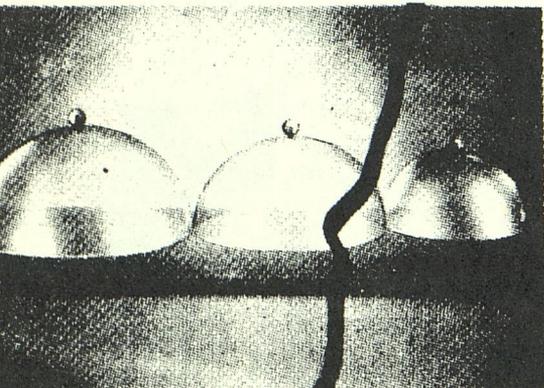
one does see it. Perhaps because the store has never used its window this way before, it is out of the line of focus. One more try and for the first time we are paid, ten dollars each. This time it is a shoe store. Although it is December, the weather is warm enough for a group of young men to gather on the benches across the street. They watch us. I am clumsy, tiptoeing between shoes, always conscious of the glass. My jeans are too tight, but I can find no way to arrange shoes without bending over.

I used to love shoes. Even when we were broke I always figured out a way to buy a new pair of shoes, but last summer I was perfectly comfortable in the pair that came in a box of kid's hand-me-downs. After fifteen minutes it turns out the only shoes we want to put in that window are cheap colored plastic ones, and those are the only ones the owners want to keep out. Eventually, the window is so crowded with clumsy boots, furry bedroom slippers and men's jogging shoes that it looks worse than it did before we started. As soon as the owners go out to lunch, we throw in a bag of confetti to cover everything. After that day, we do not talk about window dressing any more, but we feel responsible to follow through somehow. We put ads in local papers. "Naked windows? Have them dressed for Christmas." The response is obscene phone calls.

Admittedly most windows on Cape Cod are boarded up after Labor Day,

so our choice of employment reflects our disinterest in paid work. Nevertheless windows, or the absence of windows, become a source of inspiration. We are both stuck, looking for something to do that will take us beyond our studios, ourselves. It is as if we are window shopping, but there are no windows. So we decide to examine mail order catalogs instead.

When Martha finds the right look in one of them, she brags that she can copy it at a thrift shop. I seldom get that far into the process. Imagination satisfies me. I fill in all the mail order forms several times, to the bottom line, totaled, including



CLEAR ACRYLIC FOOD COVER

postage. I'm ready just in case I do five paintings at once or win a National Endowment grant. Just the thought of money makes me anxious. I feel more secure when I am prepared to spend it.

As we glance through the catalogs, talking about movies we will make, we laugh at funny products. We begin to cut out pictures. Itsy-bitsy piles of pictures fall from the kitchen table, phrases are collected in an envelope. My children are ashamed of my mess. What are we doing? We are making a mail order catalog.

I have had the idea of working with someone for a long time. Despite my constant whine at home, "I need time to myself," I do not need

all my time to myself. Possibly two working together can get twice as much done. Eleven years ago I married a would-be filmmaker and for several years held onto vague fantasies of a creative partnership, but the reality of making a family—or just a meal—has been all the creativity we can embrace.

Martha is able to take my ideas one step further than I can, to give them the substance of her experience. We work together joyfully at first—it is too early to wonder what we are doing. Slowly we begin to realize that we are making a statement about society in our catalog and the responsibility for doing so makes us uneasy, silly. We invent an invisible playmate, Harmony Cahoots, to take the rap. The name describes two contradictory feelings we have about collaboration: the good feeling of turning one another on and acting in unity, and the bad feeling of private secrets, a conspiracy.

When we talked about making movies, we meant to be funny, but we did not consider how much nerve it takes for humor. Harmony Cahoots is not afraid to be funny. We are the ones with reservations. During endless meetings last spring, Martha and I collected quotes, things people did not mean to say, words that summed up their roles at the art center, or their real views of life. We were angry and wanted to make everyone look as silly as we felt. We talked about making a movie "On Administering." But over the hot summer we mellowed. We laugh at ourselves when we are together; alone it is harder to laugh.

In our catalog we ask everyone to laugh at him/herself. We cross the lines of taste, mixing a photo from the Metropolitan Museum catalog with one from Sears or one of those grimy, nameless booklets addressed to "Dear Postal Patron."

We make a catalog of covers. Harmony herself is a cover. It is no accident that we, trying desperately to cover ourselves, stumble upon what we see at first as a sorting device: covers. When we begin cutting things out of catalogs, we cut out covers. By reading the thesaurus, we verify the many categories of the pictures of covers we are collecting in folders. We are amazed by the multitude of covers on the market and try to invent absurd ones ourselves. But they have all been invented already—or will be. A plant cover? It is called a plant "babysitter" and amounts to a mini-greenhouse or a plastic bag.

No cover comes without a reason. We enjoy collecting documentation.

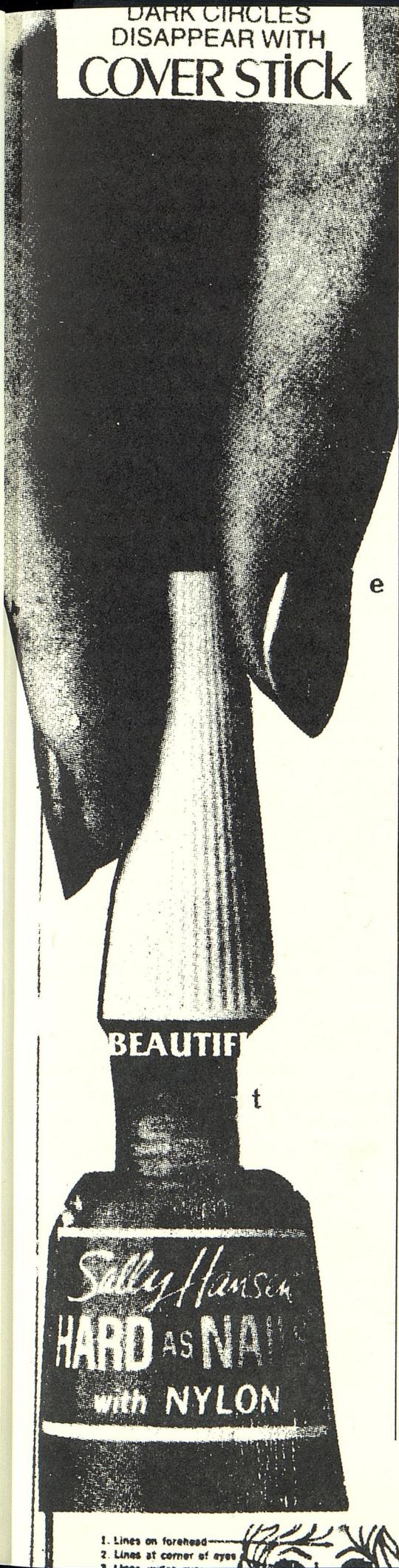
*Clear adhesive vinyl covering protects anything too pretty to hide! Just peel off backing and press-stick in place! Protect painted walls and wallpaper from dirt and finger smudges. Cover or laminate maps, recipes, clippings, documents, so they last years—in spite of handling! Cover books, place mats too. Uses are endless.*

Or:

*No reason for you to be a red-hot panhandler. This thickly quilted Teflon-treated jacket slips over the handle of any pot or pan and allows you to carry and hold it safely. It can't unfold or slip out of place. Washable 2½ x 6¾" holder has perky print binding and a hanging loop. A must for pots and pans with metal handles. We'll give you a bargain and send you a pair . . .*

We do not tell our friends what we are doing for the first month or so. Then one night Martha is at a dinner party, a little high, and she begins talking about covers. The man next to her smiles and says, "Women do not usually have world views." Then it is Harmony speaking: covers cover everything. Covers offer protection against dirt, dust and rust, germs, climate, mildew or sunlight, time, visibility. Covers pro-

DARK CIRCLES  
DISAPPEAR WITH  
**COVER STICK**



1. Lines on forehead
2. Lines at corner of eyes

tect the personality, the spy, the status quo. When a society has everything, covers keep it that way. Harmony sees covers as a reaction against planned obsolescence. If you cover your car in plastic, the body may last longer than the engine. (My mother tried something similar on her body with creams.) Harmony Cahoots is particularly interested in insurance coverage, perhaps because it is as invisible as she is.

Here is the Cahoots economic theorem: the greater the cover, the lesser the covered (see the thick-skinned orange). Harmony's household homily or the more, more, more formula: 1 object + 1 cover = 2 things to clean. For holiday dinners, my mother-in-law dusts and waxes the buffet before she opens it to take out the good dishes. They are zippered away in quilted, gold-colored cases which are wiped off before they are returned empty to the buffet. Cup-shaped sponges are removed from the cups and then all the dishes are rinsed. We set the table first with a cardboard pad, then cloths, then the dishes. The dish covers tell oblivious daughters-in-law, ignorant of the finer things in life, that these are very special dishes.

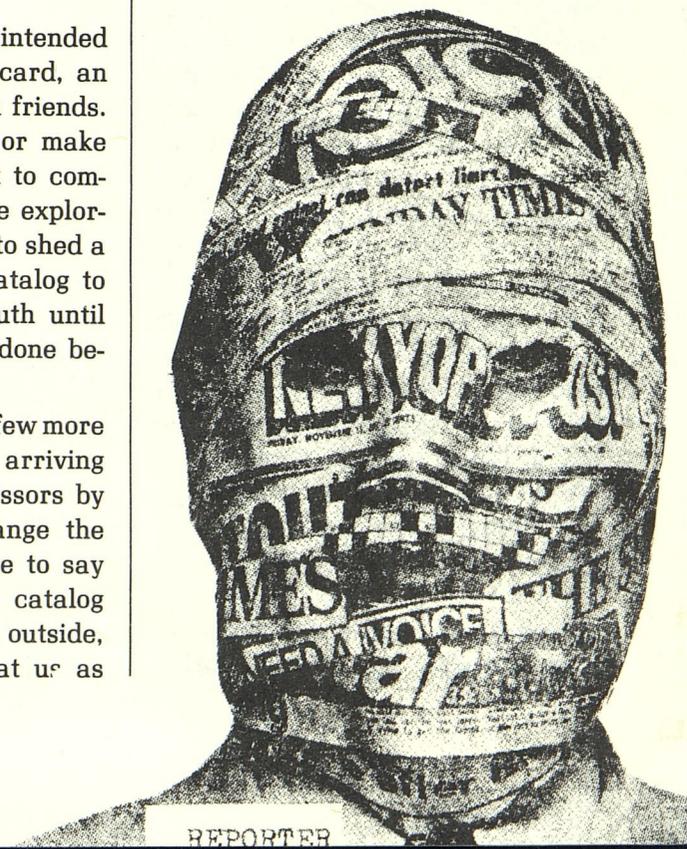
The catalog of covers is intended to be a kind of Christmas card, an effort to communicate with friends. Not an effort to catch up or make new social obligations, but to communicate. Martha and I are exploring our own covers, hoping to shed a few. We do not take the catalog to our local printer in Falmouth until December, so it cannot be done before Christmas, after all.

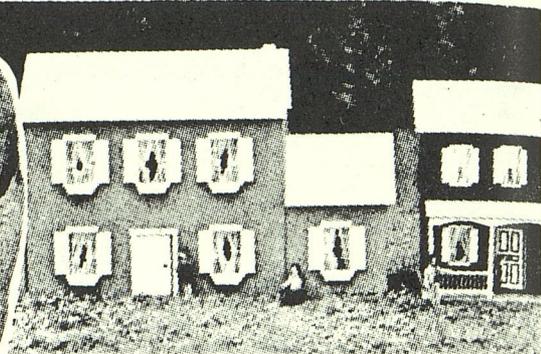
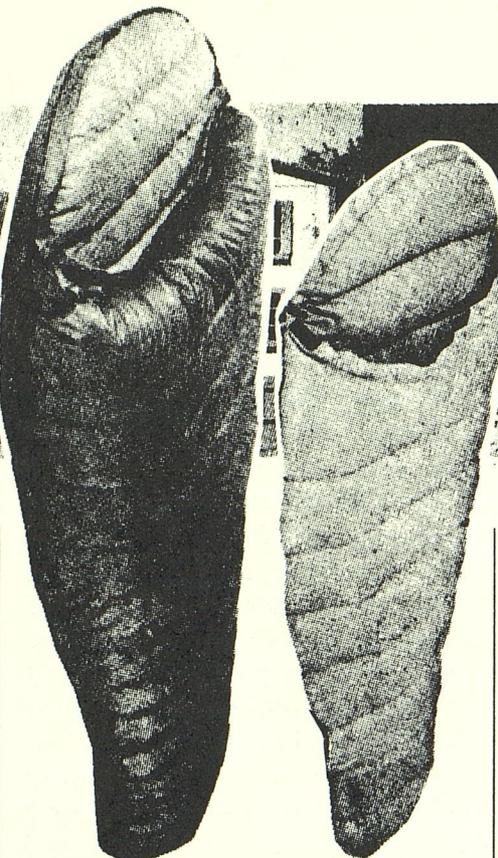
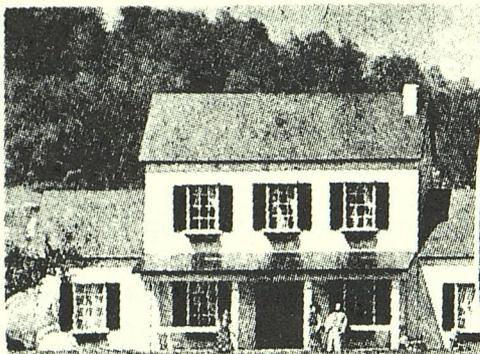
Six weeks later we add a few more pages. Catalogs have been arriving and we are addicted to scissors by now. We decide to rearrange the new pages at a diner. I like to say that Harmony grabs the catalog from us as soon as we are outside, yelling over her shoulder at us as

she races for the car, "New York or nothing!" Had I been alone, I am certain that the catalog would still be in Falmouth.

We do not get to New York until after the snowstorms and floods. Outside the city we stop at my parents' house to sleep and leave the car. But they will not let me leave until I call one of sixteen friends they insist can publish it for us. I choose the easiest, a man who sat in corners at my parents' cocktail parties, talking to me as an equal about twenty-five years ago. He invites us to his new office on 34th Street. Leny's office is on the forty-eighth floor. "Just look at that view!" he cries, wincing as we rush toward the floor-to-ceiling glass. He clutches walls and desks as he takes us on a tour of the floor. Perhaps he sat in corners years ago to avoid the windows. He looks at each page of the catalog and then announces, "It is too short for publication." Too short! Why do our friends say it is too long?

Next stop Soho. We already know it is not a commercial venture. Now we discover it is not an artists' book





either. The format is wrong, the look, the message. We read in *Art News* that artists' books are not slick, but here they are, all lined up in a book gallery looking very professional to us. Our catalog is intended to look like a cheap mail order catalog and cheap mail order catalogs do not look like artists' books.

We look for names of printers and we go to the first one we find. We like him right away because he answers questions, but the price is much higher than the Falmouth printer we have forgotten. Five hundred down, five hundred upon completion with just one catch: 3,000 copies will be printed instead of the 300 we might possibly distribute.

I write a \$500 check and hurry back to Provincetown to take out a low-interest loan. The bank asks just one thing: Will my husband co-sign the loan? He does. Until now, Martha and I have not talked about money. What was there to say? We had half intended to make money as window dressers. Moviemaking talk was farfetched; although Martha has a camera, neither of us has cash. Sometimes, I use my lack of money to prod me on. My philosophy is: money makes money. Unfortunately, I have never been able to put my philosophy to the test.

We send out a fund-raising letter, asking two hundred people for donations. Since most of the two hundred are neighbors, we tell ourselves that Harmony wrote it. Neither Martha

nor I would ever have had the nerve to do it alone. Few people understand that we are asking for money so we make little more than what the letter costs in printing and postage. I think that the letter is clear and that our friends cannot read, but I am reminded of the grocery store window kitchen that no one saw.

When finally we are ready to mail the catalog, I have an argument at the post office about whether it is a book or printed matter. "It is not words," the postmistress declares, "so there is no message." "A picture is worth a thousand words," I answer, wondering if I am being obtuse. "There is a message! It is about materialism, manipulation, fear, death, planned obsolescence..." "That's okay, Mrs. Land," she says. "It's a difference of four cents."

An unexpected result of our appeal for money is that people have begun to notice Harmony Cahoots. "Here come those unsavory Girl Scouts," greets us one day as we walk down Commercial Street. I know the speaker likes me, and Martha knows he likes her, so who could

he be talking to if not to Cahoots? At openings, we have only each other to speak to now, and space enough for three to stand in surrounds us. It is like being newlyweds, but even then someone comes to talk to the man.

We applied to the Massachusetts Council on the Arts for money in Harmony's name. Actually, it was then we realized she had a name. There are grants for individual artists but none for partners, like us. We know of husband-wife teams where she does at least half the work but gets no credit, or second billing maybe. We think of a marquee and wonder which of our names would go first. We had made one product together. Neither of us could have done it alone.

When we discovered that we were making something we believed in, we created a third person to take responsibility. Harmony Cahoots is our silent partner. She is our cover. She provided support when we had no other. But by creating strength in Harmony, we made our weaknesses evident. Like my lost friend Mimi, we are actresses, but unlike Mimi, I am uncomfortable acting. To fill in when experience or character is absent, I pretend. When I feel that there is no place for me in a world outside myself, I pretend. It is a matter of looking in and out of windows. Covers express a need for hiding, for being protected. Seen in quantity and by juxtaposition, the absurdity of covers is evident.

# WOMEN AT WORK REBUILDING COMMUNITIES

Rocky Christy



Beverly, Carol and Leslie at Earthtones Boutique

Penny Coleman

**L**eslie Artis, Carol Bracey and Beverly Nedd opened the Earthtones Boutique last May because they believed in rebuilding communities. Their small clothing store is in the South Bronx, an area of New York City known as an urban wasteland, littered with abandoned buildings. But because of people like Beverly, Carol and Leslie, there is hope it will become a vital neighborhood again.

When Beverly Nedd speaks of “an

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Rocky Christy is co-director of Project Work, a New York City based action and research collective.

area where people were sort of pitching in,” she is talking about that section of the South Bronx where the People’s Development Corporation (PDC) is based. This group rehabilitates abandoned tenements and then cooperatively manages them, experimenting with solar and wind systems; transforms empty lots into parks and greenhouses and puts people to work creating a neighborhood out of a slum. When they began in 1974, PDC’s purpose, as a small group of unemployed community people, was to stop the decay of the South Bronx area—decay caused by

redlining, abandoned buildings, unemployment and most of the other factors that contribute to the creation of ghettos. Four years later, the goal is no different; but PDC is now a federally funded, not-for-profit corporation with three hundred staff members who have organized over one thousand tenants to run their apartment buildings cooperatively, and whose work has empowered and inspired people like Leslie, Carol and Beverly to take control of their own work lives.

Earthtones had its beginnings in conversations at a social club of

which Leslie, Carol and Beverly were members. A group of women began to talk about their work lives and about skills they had but were not able to use. Beverly worked for the city, in the Child Welfare Department, and had no opportunity to use the merchandising and sales knowledge she had acquired in high school. Carol worked for the Welfare Department in a job with no chance to use her bookkeeping skills. Leslie, a welfare mother with two children, designed and sewed clothes but had never sold them commercially. All three felt their present lives and work afforded little security or challenge.

Their decision to open a boutique was partly a response to this lack in mainstream work. With jobs that had no lasting quality, Carol and Beverly decided to risk creating work for themselves—work that would at least bring them satisfaction and could provide to their community an important symbol and useful service. “When you live in a community like this,” says Beverly, “you get a lot of shoddy merchandise, rancid food and clothes that fall apart. Whatever they can’t sell, they send out here. Personally speaking, I think it’s about time that we have something in our community—something nice we can be proud of.”

The decision to get started was easier for them when Beverly’s husband mentioned there was a storefront for rent in a tenant-managed building. The \$150-a-month rent, promise of repairs and general community support encouraged the women to make a commitment to opening a store.

There followed a year-long process that Carol calls “finding out just how big everything is and then realizing that once you get into it, it’s not so big and scary.” Through a network of friends and family, they gathered the legal and business in-

formation needed to raise necessary funds.

“Beverly, she was our confidence,” says Carol. “We got all these big ideas, but then there was tax forms, and this, that and the other thing—they didn’t mean nothing to me—but Beverly, she had it all down.”

It was not long, however, before the women at Earthtones realized that confidence and community support were not enough, especially when there were no precedents for the kind of business they wanted to create. None of them had experience working for herself; they planned to open a community-focused business in a slum where most small businesses had left five or ten years earlier. With the help of an accountant who donated his time, they devised a financial plan to present to banks.

Ideally, Earthtones would make enough to cover its expenses and pay back its loans. Their plan was a twofold program: free sewing and pattern-making classes for neighborhood kids, and a process by which community residents would advertise and sell their own custom work through the store. Neighborhood canvassing determined that the people were ready to participate in both projects. “We want to be here so that kids don’t look at the pimp or the prostitute and say that’s the only way to make money. If all you see is the pimp—and you only hear about people who have done it differently, but they’re not the people you talk with—you don’t see any other way. The Barbara Jordans, they’re in the newspapers, they’re on TV, but they’re not here.”

But the banks wanted to see more than an enlivened neighborhood or a few women developing skills. The Earthtones proposal was turned down by all ten banks they approached. Some, like the First Women’s Bank, spoke to them only by

phone and said they made no loans to small businesses. Others would ask them to come down to the office. “They’d give us coffee, look at our proposal and say, ‘You girls are terrific. We think what you’re doing is wonderful, this is a great proposal,’ and then they’d turn us down.” All the banks were more than willing to give them the rejection slips that the Small Business Administration requires of its applicants.

“We might feel that they discriminated against us because we were women, but we can’t prove that. I don’t know of any examples of men trying to do what we’re doing. In the civil rights days, you had something to compare. I would go first, then you. But we don’t have something like that now. Would they have given us the benefit of the doubt if we were men? Personally, I think they would have.”

Their experiences with the banks confirmed for the women that they should turn to the community for funding. They incorporated as a for-profit corporation and began to sell shares for \$10. They turned the process into an educational one, sending announcements to their friends, families and neighbors, explaining the ideas behind the boutique, and what owning a share meant. They contacted people through churches and social groups, hoping that once a few people bought shares, others would follow. Here was an opportunity for people who had never owned a share of any business to support one in their own community, one that would serve them with quality products.

The risk paid off. At first only friends and family bought shares. Then people from the neighborhood began to take an interest as well—some because they wanted to support people who had taken a risk for their community, and others because the return of small business

into the area meant they would gain some power over their own lives.

Thirty-two people have bought 2,416 of the 3,000 shares. Not everyone has paid. Some contributed labor on renovation of the store in exchange for shares.

Earthtones is now covering expenses, and the women are content for the time being to put any profits they make back into the store. They can do this because Carol and Beverly continue to work in their city jobs, while Leslie and her sister, Peaches, work as volunteers at the store. They now realize it will take time before the store becomes solvent, but they feel they are a success simply by being there. "I see us as an inspiration," says Leslie. "Just the other day someone came in and told us we were like an oasis out here. I like that idea—an oasis. It's really amazing, you know. People come in and they say, 'You girls are so brave,' and then they start asking questions about how we did it and all. Even if some day we have to close up, it'll have been worth it."

They have divided up the work in such a way that each person has final say in the area of her expertise, be it inventory, financial matters or publicity. They saw no reason to incorporate as a collective or cooperative and then spend the time developing by-laws that would spell out a democratic way of making decisions which they felt they already had. "Well, you know, when you talk about presidents and vice-presidents, you're just talking about words, really, and words mean what you want them to mean. You set up according to how the law says you set up a corporation—we're not inflexible. We're friends who happen to be in a corporation together. But there are certain rules, and that's just part of life," they say.

The women got together later in life, and in a business capacity, not

as friends. This may be a reason for their success. Carol explains: "We all met after we was grown. We all had ideas about what we wanted out of life. When it comes to making decisions, we don't say 'Wait, you're supposed to be my friend.'" Beverly talks about their working process: "We're not going to agree all the time, but for one to feel as if they're better than the other, it just would never work. We all have the same goal, for the most part. We're working as one, really."

Beverly, Leslie and Carol agree that the most difficult problems have involved the adjustments that each is making between her work schedule and family life. Since Beverly and Carol have income-producing jobs during the day, they work at the store evenings and on Saturdays. Leslie and Peaches share their store hours to suit their children's school schedules. This schedule leaves little time for their families. Beverly, who has a two-year-old son and two older children, worries about the long-term effects. More often than not, at least one child is at the store to spend time with her/his mother. "It's important to have your family's support," says Beverly.

All the women realize that the success of Earthtones depends not only on their own ingenuity, but also on the continued efforts of the People's Development Corporation to attract people and money into the South Bronx. Earthtones is a symbolic first step toward this kind of stability. There are already signs that other businesses and cooperatively-managed ventures will follow. A food co-op of thirty families was recently organized through PDC; a warehouse project, boiler repair business, typewriter service, food service, and cooperatively-owned-and-managed print shop are being considered. With examples like Earthtones, people are coming to re-

alize that progress can be made by cooperating with those who are already committed to the area's revival. Beverly's next plan, when she feels that Earthtones is better established in the community, is to approach other businesses in the area and to exchange services where possible. She intends to go to the bigger businesses that supply the community and ask them to help cover the costs of sewing machines for the sewing classes that Earthtones will offer. In addition, with the \$1.2 billion set aside by the Carter Administration for the revitalization of the South Bronx, and the \$300 million available through the Consumer Co-op Bank for the establishment of consumer co-ops, there is good reason to believe that the kind of network and support system created with the establishment of Earthtones will become a reality.

Whatever happens, the women at Earthtones have provided an important service to the PDC, the surrounding community and those fortunate enough to know about them. Steve Boss, one of the economic development planners of the PDC, sums it up best. "They're an important symbol—three women who bucked the banks and did an amazing thing." Since they used their own resources rather than those from the mainstream, the women also proved the power of self-help—indeed, its necessity—for community businesses. And although it cost them the bank's financing to emphasize community, rather than commercial aspects of their work, it also provided an important model for businesses to come. Finally, in a specific way, their example has given the women's community a message about women's courage and commitment—a message that is an integral part of the larger movement toward community development in this country.

# LESBIAN ART PROJECT

Terry Wolverton

In February of 1977 I attended a one-day workshop presented by Arlene Raven at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> This workshop, called "Lesbian Art Worksharing," was attended by about 20 women who were identified with, or at least intrigued by, the notion of "lesbian art."<sup>2</sup> Arlene asked each of us to discuss our connections to art and lesbianism. I remember saying that lesbian art is characterized by the breaking of taboos about women's bodies and spirits, "speaking the unspeakable."

As we then shared our own work—paintings, fabric sculpture, drawings, graphics, ceramics, poetry and "coming out" letters—we saw the diversity of form, as well as some remarkable similarities in issues addressed, and in our process of art-making. We began to name these similarities "lesbian" and to explore their connectedness.

In April, during a second work-

sharing at the home Arlene shared with art historian Ruth Iskin, Arlene announced a research project she would begin on the history and meaning of lesbian. The effect on me was profound—for the past five years I had been involved in a number of feminist and lesbian groups, some artistic, some political, some educational, but I had always felt

apart from them. I knew immediately that I wanted to work on this project.

A number of women were interested and we decided to create a project group and met to discuss the kinds of agreements needed. We decided that the group would be non-hierarchical, based on peership and collectivity, and would utilize consciousness raising, mutual support and mutual responsible criticism. Our relations were complicated by the fact that Arlene had been a faculty member at the Feminist Studio Workshop while the rest of us had been students there. Few of us had achieved the professional credentials or status Arlene had. Moreover, Arlene wanted to require all participants in our group to be involved in FSW. Her own work on lesbian art



Tough Dykes: The Natalie Barney Collective. Left to right: Arlene Raven, Nancy Fried, Sharon Immergluck, Maya Sterling, Terry Wolverton. Not pictured: Kathleen Burg.

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Terry Wolverton is a writer, and she has been a performer, director and producer in feminist lesbian theatre since 1973.

1. The Woman's Building is "a public center for women's culture," founded in Los Angeles in 1973. It houses community galleries; Women's Video Center, Women's Graphic Center, Women Against Violence Against Women, the Lesbian Art Project, Ariadne: A Social Art Network, and a host of other women's cultural projects. The educational component includes the Feminist Studio Workshop, the Extension Program and the Summer Art Program.

2. For more information about the feminist art movement in southern California, consult Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands*, Double X, 1977.

had grown from her work there and she wanted to bring a powerful lesbian presence to the school. We discussed these difficulties. Each woman asserted her desire for equality in our working relationships.

We decided that the project group should meet regularly, once a week, and that this time would be a priority commitment for everyone. Arlene requested that we all commit ourselves to working in the project for one full year. This was especially hard for me; the idea that I would be restrained from being able to take off at any moment (a hippie leftover from the '60s) was terrifying. I had previously been unwilling to make such a commitment to friends, lovers or institutions.

By May of 1977, six women were

committed to work on the Project: Kathleen Burg, an artist and gallery director at the Woman's Building; Nancy Fried, an artist and dough sculptor; Sharon Immergluck, a writer and feminist therapist; Maya Sterling, a writer and witch; Arlene, and me. Nancy and Maya were lovers. Kathleen, Sharon, and Maya were longtime friends and CR-group members from FSW. Nancy was helping me print my book, *Blue Moon*. Arlene had once been involved with my lover, Cheryl.

We named our work the Lesbian Art Project and our group the Natalie Barney Collective.<sup>3</sup> Among our

3. For more information about this outrageous lesbian writer, consult George Wickes, *The Amazon of Letters: The Life and Loves of Natalie Barney*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

goals: educating the public; conducting research and creating theory; making art; establishing support groups of lesbian artists; connecting with other lesbian creators, nationally and internationally; attaining national media coverage. We wanted to sponsor community events, conduct lesbian CR groups, develop a slide library and archives and be elegant and outrageous lesbian creators. We agreed to meet at one another's houses rather than at the Woman's Building, to create a more comfortable and intimate environment.

Almost immediately, a number of events occurred that provoked sudden and deep transformations among all members of the group. Arlene and Ruth decided to end their lovers' relationship at the same time that Cheryl and I decided to end ours. Arlene and Cheryl resumed their relationship. It was a time of intense personal pain for all of us, and although we recognized it as transformative and ultimately positive, it was impossible to avoid feelings of hurt, anger and mistrust. It is a common situation in a lesbian community, but one which I have never been able or willing to deal with. My first impulse was to move out of town. It was our commitment to the Lesbian Art Project that allowed Arlene and me to view our pain in a context of our vision, which motivated us to work out our difficulties.

These personal changes coincided with the national uproar over gay rights and the anti-homosexual campaign headed by Anita Bryant. With the repeal of the gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida, gay and lesbian groups all over the country began mobilizing for protest, action, legislation. The connections between homophobia and misogyny were revealed to us in the utter mystification and/or complete erasure of lesbians in the "gay rights" issue.



E.K. Waller

Nonstereotyped Images: The Natalie Barney Collective. Left to right, top: Maya Sterling, Sharon Immergluck; bottom: Arlene Raven, Nancy Fried, Terry Wolverton. Not pictured: Kathleen Burg.

As a result of this national crisis, we decided to become more “public” with our lesbianism—individually, with our art work, and as the Natalie Barney Collective. Women in the group implemented this immediately by “coming out” to parents, to co-workers, to strangers on the street. Those of us already “out” as lesbians confronted our families, friends and associates, demanding their active support for gay rights. The response was often disappointing, or, in the case of Maya, one of outright family rejection. We had not previously realized how affirmed we were in the feminist community at the Woman’s Building.

Throughout this period of personal and national turmoil (June-July of 1977), we were engaged first in creating and then in administering the Lesbian Art Project—advertising, seeking funding, developing a mailing list. A lot of work—and no salaries. We all had other full-time jobs for our survival.

Fall 1977, we began the project as a program within the Feminist Studio Workshop. FSW provided us with an established structure, space for our activities and students, and the status of a nonprofit organization. We also offered events available to non-FSW women, since many lesbians could not afford or did not choose to enroll in FSW.

The Natalie Barney Collective became a powerful presence in FSW. We were a strongly-identified group; we had a deep and common purpose; we were producing a lot of art, theory, information, energy. I think we provided a model for other women. As a staff member, Arlene incorporated her lesbian sensibility into all of the classes she taught: identifying the lesbian content in students’ work, articulating the lesbian perspective when a feminist issue was discussed.

The project sponsored a lesbian/

feminist dialogue for students and faculty, attended by about 40 women. This was the first time in the five years of the FSW that lesbianism as a consciousness (rather than a sexual preference) had been discussed among the community. I began sponsoring monthly worksharing sessions. These were free and open to women in the community, as well as FSW. Many attended, bringing writing, music, visual art of all descriptions. At first, the sessions were exciting and nourishing, but I did not know how to channel the energy generated.

At the same time, Arlene sponsored a Lesbian Creators Salon at the Woman’s Building, where she presented her research on lesbian art and artists. She invited Alice Bloch, a lesbian writer and educator, and Joanne Parrent, at that time an editor for *Chrysalis: a magazine of women’s culture*, to discuss their work. Arlene discussed the place of lesbian artists in their communities, their relations and their portrayal of each other in their work. Alice talked about lesbian writers in Paris in the early 1900s (particularly Gertrude Stein), and Joanne talked about witchcraft, lesbians as witches, the importance of being “out” as a witch, women’s spirituality and the growing awareness among lesbians of the spirit of the Goddess.

In the fall of 1977, another series of personal transformations occurred: Bia Lowe and I became friends, and soon, lovers. Nancy and Maya were ending their lovers’ relationship; it was hard for them to relate within the collective. In November, Sharon and Nancy had a serious argument while working together on a Lesbian Art Project event; this produced a deep rift in their friendship. As winter neared, almost everyone was feeling bad about herself—depressed, physically ill and over-

worked.<sup>4</sup>

In the Natalie Barney Collective, we held a criticism/self-criticism session and realized that we were unable to share our deepest feelings. Maya left in the middle of the meeting, announcing her intention to quit the group. All of us felt wounded. We did not understand what had happened. We were angry, doubtful, afraid, but lacked ability to understand what had happened. The fragility of our commitments and our trust, the tenuous nature of women’s bonding in patriarchy, were all too clear.

Only four of us attended our first meeting in January: Sharon, Kathleen, Arlene and I. Nancy decided to participate only as an artist, not an organizer; Maya was unwilling to participate at all. It was clear that the Natalie Barney Collective as an administrative group had dissolved.

Finally, Arlene and I formed a partnership to co-direct the Lesbian Art Project. It was important for us to build on the experiences of the Natalie Barney Collective, to analyze the issues that had emerged, and invent some strategies for dealing with them.

● The issue of homophobia, self-hatred and alienation shows how much pain we have as lesbians and how embarrassed we are by it, how we deny it, how we are isolated in it. We have seen how hard it is to commit to lesbian consciousness, because the “reward” is so often a confrontation of deep pain of lesbian oppression within the self.<sup>5</sup> We know that this issue will rear its

4. In the process of feminist education at the FSW, it has been observed that this time of year is especially hard on women. It is expected that women will have difficulties with issues of work and community at this time.

5. Mary Daly eloquently discusses the pain involved in committing to the journey into consciousness in *Gyn/Ecology, the Meta-Ethics of Radical Feminism*, Beacon Press, 1978.

head again and again. Taking control of the situation involves naming it. To combat lesbian oppression we must be willing to take more risks, become more vulnerable to one another.

● How do we create peership? Arlene is ten years older than I, has been married, has a Ph.D., has taught, lectured, published, co-founded FSW and the Woman's Building, is well known and well respected in her profession. I am younger, less experienced, absent (by choice and by design) from the professional sphere; my achievements and activities have all occurred within lesbian culture, and I have ultimately refused (and have been denied the opportunity) to direct my creative energies to the patriarchy. Arlene is clearly a mentor to me: she offers me her knowledge of art, education, politics, psychology. She shares her organizational and leadership skills with me. Most importantly, in naming lesbian art and lesbian sensibility, she has illuminated my own vision, brought me to an awareness of its possibilities. In a patriarchal context, a mentoring relationship stops here: the older, more experienced woman gives to the younger, untrained one. In this model, there is no room for peership or mutual growth.

In taking an active step towards peership with me, Arlene not only had to transform her vision of herself, to be "student" as well as "teacher," but also face ridicule and devaluation from her professional colleagues. In return, I needed to assume equal responsibility, commitment and participation, to give up acting like the "student" or a lesser participant.

● Although we did not want to retreat from our desire to publicly manifest lesbian sensibility, we were also aware of the unsatisfying na-

ture of "serving the Public." We knew that in the Natalie Barney Collective women had been expected to do administrative work that was personally unfulfilling, and got burned out doing organizational/maintenance/"shitwork."

Arlene and I decided to implement "making administration fun"; that is, we created the work of the project so that it was satisfying. In realizing a lesbian separatist vision, we decided against writing grants; we could not stake our survival upon patriarchal funding institutions. Instead, we planned a membership campaign and solicited donations from other lesbians.

Through this process we began to uncover many aspects of our vision of a lesbian sensibility. One way of manifesting this was the decision to use Arlene's house as a gathering center for lesbian artists, emulating the salons of La Belle Epoque. Cheryl and Arlene had transformed their space with plush fabrics, lush colors, and beautiful objects. There was an air of Victorian elegance. Lesbian art adorned the walls, and the images evoked the presence of the spirit of the Goddess—the rooms took on lives of their own. One entered here into a new environment, sensuous, pleasurable—a lesbian space.

In this atmosphere, we discovered the identities that characterize our lesbian relationship: The Mentor/Peer, the Mother/Daughter, the Lovers, and the Triple Goddess: Nymph/Maiden/Crone. In each case, we were first confronted by the patriarchal deformation and debasement of these identities, the distortion or disguising of their true and mythic meanings.<sup>6</sup> We experienced our own deep rage and despair at the loss; we saw how we (women) had been

6. I use the word "mythic" here and throughout the article to mean larger than life, supernatural, or having a significance beyond its tangible or apparent existence.

turned against one another. By supporting each other, we were able to see possible transformation of these roles, which suggested a new vision of their meaning for lesbians.

*The Mentor/Peer.* In patriarchy, the hierarchical structure of Teacher/Student and the fixity of those roles dictate a separation and a polarization between women who are teaching and learning from one another. The "Mentor" is all-powerful; the "student" must overcome or rebel against her teacher in order to become powerful. In our relationship, Arlene and I actively develop consciousness of what we are learning from each other and make an effort to acknowledge these things both publicly and to each other.

*The Mother/Daughter.* When Arlene first suggested that there was an element of the mother and daughter in our relationship, I was fearful. This seemed like a dark connection, taboo. Under patriarchy, the Mother and the Daughter are forced to separate, betray each other, compete for survival.<sup>7</sup> In studying the patriarchal myth of Demeter/Persephone<sup>8</sup> we read of how the daughter is taken from the mother, how the daughter is raped, how the mother is forced to comply with the will of the gods, how the daughter must pretend to like it. It is no wonder we experience alienation, rage, resentment and betrayal in this most primary connection.

*The Lovers.* When Arlene and I acknowledged sexual energy between us, we both responded with immediate and instinctive fear. We discussed the sources of the fear:

7. The issue of betrayal between mothers and daughters is insightfully articulated by Barbara Love, Elizabeth Shanklin and Jesse Slote in "Matriarchy: The End of Woman-Hating," in *The Matriarchist*, Volume 1, Issue 4.

8. See Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Mythology*, Moon Books, 1978; also Nor Hall, *Mothers and Daughters*, Rusoff Books, 1976.

that our working relationship would be threatened, that it would be too emotionally intense, that our lovers would be alienated, that the pain we share would devour us.

Yet we acknowledged that we have a lovers' relationship: inspired by mutual love and respect, by connection, by the sparking of creative energy. After agreeing not to engage in a sexual relationship, we both felt safer to explore this area.

*The Triple Goddess: Nymph/Maiden/Crone.* Working in the Lesbian Art Project had deepened our belief and understanding of the power of the Goddess (by which I mean the power of women's/lesbian energy).<sup>9</sup> We had learned that magic is common to women: in our ability to create life in our bodies and our imaginations (the power of the Nymph); in our ability to maintain and preserve life, our ability to heal (the power of the Maiden); and in our ability to change and transform our lives, to enact alchemy (the power of the Crone).

A major manifestation of the Lesbian Art Project was the development of the Sapphic Model of Education. This is a conceptual model which draws inspiration from the community and school of Sappho on the island of Mytilene (Lesbos) in Greece, nearly 2,400 years ago. Women who went to live and study there created some of the finest art, verse and music of their times. Their education included living within a community of women, having love affairs, worshipping the Goddess, developing creativity and self-awareness, and celebrating the seasons.

My vision is of a lesbian/learning community, dedicated to the holistic development of each woman in the

community, expansion of the interconnections between each woman, and the survival of the group. I posit six roles which derive from Arlene's and my exploration of our relationship and now seem necessary to fulfill this vision. The functions of the roles are interchangeable, and they are:

*The Visionary.* She who looks to the future, anticipates what cannot be known, imagines what does not yet exist—the Dreamer, the Prophetess. *The Organizer.* She who creates and maintains structure, is responsible for continuance, and actualizes plans in the material world.

*The Artist.* Translator of metaphor, shaper of communication; she who creates cultural language and mythology, conducts ritual, transfers energy from spiritual to material to spiritual form.

*The Lover.* She who generates pleasure, beauty, joy, celebration and dancing; includes, but also goes beyond, the concept of a sexual lover; the energy of bonding between women.

*The Mother.* The Life Giver, the nurturer, the caretaker, the healer, the comforter; the blood ties between women.

*The Mentor.* The Teacher, she who provides a lesson or example, and she who is also committed to learning from those around her.

Another component of the Sapphic Model is a seasonal structure.<sup>10</sup> Fall is the time for gathering, community-building and self-discovery. Winter brings the energy of focusing, delving into research or concentrating on a work project. Spring is the season for bursting forth, with events and celebrations to share publicly. Summer is migration time, devoted

to traveling and exploration, making connections with other communities.

At this time, the model is theoretical; I have neither a clear intention nor a clear strategy for putting it into practice. Still, it articulates a vision of a lesbian community. Arlene and I planned an educational program, based on the Sapphic model, which we began teaching in October, 1978. The topics were:  
Lesbian Creators' Herstory  
Feminist/Lesbian Dialogue  
Lesbian Art Worksharing  
Sapphic Education  
Lesbian Relationships  
Lesbian Writing  
I Dream in Female: Lesbianism as Nonordinary Reality<sup>11</sup>  
The Lesbian Body

Our current plans for the third and final year of the Lesbian Art Project (1979-1980) revolve around the creation and publication of a large volume presenting the story of the project; the theories of lesbian sensibility we have discovered; the artwork, writing and theater that have emerged from the project; our work processes; and our visions of the future.

The work of the Lesbian Art Project is valuable to women interested in creating a vision and then implementing it; to women who wish to seek an alternative to patriarchal reality; to women who have a commitment to work, to art, to lesbianism; to women interested in exploring their unique identity as lesbians; to women interested in establishing community; to women who research; to all women who are committed to undertaking a journey in consciousness.\*

\*We welcome questions, feedback, information and responses to this information. Write us at P.O. Box 54335, Los Angeles, CA 90054.

11. This course includes information about lesbian consciousness and magic. Slides are shown of art made by women relating to ritual, transformation, alchemy. Then women share their experiences of nonordinary reality: dreams, visions, telepathy, past lives, astral projection, imagination.

9. The Los Angeles women's community has been involved with spirituality and Goddess consciousness since 1970, when Z. Budapest founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven #1. See Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows*, Luna Publications, 1976.

10. The concept of seasonal education was first developed by Jere Van Syoc and Linda Smith, lesbian artists, philosophers and educators who work with ARADIA, a women's learning community in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



for E. and L.

morning broke. I mean, fell right on its goddam ass and broke. no walking barefoot if you care about yr feet, kid.

I waited and waited. no call came. I cant say, the call didnt come because it wasn't a question of one really. it was a question of any one. it was a question of one goddam person calling to say I like this or that or I want to buy this or that or you moved my heart, my spirit, or I like yr ass. to clarify, not a man calling to say I like yr ass but one of those shining new women, luminous, tough, lighting right up from inside. one of them. or some of the wrecked old women I know, too late not to be wrecked, too many children torn right out of them, but still, I like the wrinkles, I like the toughness of the heart. one of them. not one of those new new new girl children playing soccer on the boys team for the first time. young is dumb. at least it was when I was young. I have no patience with the untorn, anyone who hasnt weathered rough weather. fallen apart, been ripped to pieces, put herself back together, big stitches, jagged cuts, nothing nice. then something shines out. but these ones all shined up on the outside, the ass wigglers. Ill be honest, I dont like them. not at all. the smilers. the soft voices, eyes on the ground or scanning outer space. its not that I wouldnt give my life for them, I just dont want them to call me on the telephone.

still, business is business. I needed one of them, the ass wigglers, to call me on the phone. editors. shits. smiling, cleaned up shits. plasticized turds. everything is too long or too short or too angry or too rude. one even said too urban. Im living on goddam east 5 street, dog shit, I mean, buried in dog shit, police precinct across the street sirens blazing day and night, hells angels 2 streets down, toilet in the hall and of course I have colitis constant diarrhea, and some asshole smiler says too urban. Id like to be gods editor. I have a few revisions Id like to make.

# the new womans

so I wait. not quietly, I might add. I sigh and grunt and groan. I make noise, what can I say. my cat runs to answer and then demands attention, absolutely demands. not a side glance either but total rapt absolute attention, my whole body in fact, not a hand, or a touch, or a little condescending pat on the head. I hiss. why not, I mean I speak the language so to speak.

which brings me to the heart of the matter. ladies. for instance, a lady would pretend she did not know exactly what to say to a cat that demanded

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Andrea Dworkin is the author of *Women Hating* (Dutton, 1974) and *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (Harper and Row, 1976).

her whole life on the spot. she would not hiss. she would make polite muted gestures. even if she were alone, she would act as if someone was watching her. or try to. she would push the cat aside with one hand, pretending gentle, but it would be a goddam rude push you had better believe it, and she would smile. at the window. at the wall. at the goddam cat if you can imagine that. me, I hiss. thus, all my problems in life. the ladies dare not respect hissers. they wiggle their goddam asses but hissers are pariahs. female hissers. male hissers are another story altogether.

for example, one morning I go to cover a story. I go 1500 miles to cover this particular story. now, I need the money. people are very coy about money, and the ladies arent just coy, they are sci fi about money. me, Im a hisser. I hate it but I need it. only I dont want to find it under the pillow the next morning if you know what I mean. I dont wear stockings and I want to buy my own hershey bars. or steal them myself at least. Id really like to give them up altogether. but I wouldnt really and its the only social lie I tell. anyway I pick my own health hazards and on my list sperm in situ comes somewhere below being eaten slowly by a gourmet shark and being spit out half way through because you dont quite measure up. its an attitude, what can I say. except to remind the public at large that the Constitution is supposed to protect it.

so I go to cover the story and the ass wigglers are out in large numbers. I mean they are fucking hanging from the chandeliers, and there are chandeliers. ritzy hotel. lots of male journalists. whither they goest go the ass wigglers.

so its a conference of women. and the point is that this particular event occurred because a lot of tough shining new women have demanded this and that, like men not going inside them at will, either naked or with instru-

# broken heart

ments, to tear them up, knock them up, beat them up, fuck them up, etc. and suddenly, the ladies have crawled out of the woodwork. so I go to pee in the classy lounge where the toilets are, and one of the ass wigglers doesnt talk to me. I mean, Im peeing, shes peeing, so who the fuck does she think she is. so the line is drawn. but its been drawn before. in fact its been drawn right across my own goddam flesh, its been drawn in high heeled ladies boots trampling over me to get into print. I mean, I cant make a living. the boys like the ass wigglers.

so I work you know. I mean, I fucking work. but theres work I wont take

Andrea Dworkin

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on, like certain kinds of ass wiggling at certain specific moments. the crucial moments. like when the male editor wants that ass to move back and forth this way and that. as a result, I am what is euphemistically referred to as a poor person. I am ass breaking poor and no person either. a woman is what I am, a hisser, a goddam fucking poor woman who stays goddam fucking poor because she doesnt fuck various jerks around town.

its the white glove syndrome. the queen must be naked except for the white gloves. while hes fucking her raw she has to pretend shes sitting with her legs closed proper and upright and while hes sitting with his legs closed handing out work assignments she has to pretend shes fucking him until she drops dead from it. yeah its tough on her. its tougher on me.

I dont mean for this to be bitter. I dont know from bitter. its true that morning fell flat on its ass and when morning breaks its shit to clean it up. and I dont much like sleeping either because I have technicolor dreams in which strangers try to kill me in very resourceful ways. and its true that since the ass wiggler snubbed me in the toilet of the ritzy hotel I get especially upset when I go to pee in my own house (house here being a euphemism for apartment, room, or hovel—as in her own shithole which she does not in any sense own, in other words, where she hangs her nonexistent hat) and remember that the food stamps ran out and I have \$11.14 in the bank. bleak, Arctic in fact, but not bitter. because I do still notice some things I particularly like. the sun, for instance, or the sky even when the sun isnt in it. I mean, I like it. I like trees. I like them all year long, no matter what. I like cold air. Im not one of those complainers about winter which should be noted since so many people who pretend to love life hate winter. I like the color red a lot and purple drives me crazy with pleasure. I churn inside with excitement and delight everytime a dog or cat smiles at me. when I see a graveyard and the moon is full and everything is covered with snow I wonder about vampires. you cant say I dont like life.

people ask, well, dont sweet things happen? yes, indeed. many sweet things. but sweet doesnt keep you from dying. making love doesnt keep you from dying unless you get paid. writing doesnt keep you from dying unless you get paid. being wise doesnt keep you from dying unless you get paid. facts are facts. being poor makes you face facts which also does not keep you from dying.

people ask, well, why dont you tell a story the right way, you woke up then what happened and who said what to whom. I say thats shit because when you are ass fucking poor every day is the same. you worry. ok. she had brown hair and brown eyes and she worried. theres a story for you. she worried when she peed and she worried when she sat down to figure out how far the \$11.14 would go and what would happen when it was gone and she worried when she took her walk and saw the pretty tree. she worried day and night. she choked on worry. she ate worry and she vomited worry and no matter how much she shitted and vomited the worry didnt come out, it just stayed inside and festered and grew. she was pregnant with worry, hows that? so how come the bitch doesnt just sell that ass if shes in this goddam situation and its as bad as she says. well, the bitch did, not just once but over and over, long ago, but not so long ago that she doesnt remember it. she sold it for a corned beef sandwich and for steak when she could get it. she sold it for a bed to sleep in and it didnt have to be her own either. she ate speed because it was cheaper than food and she got fucked raw in exchange for small change day after day and night after night. she

did it in ones twos threes and fours with onlookers and without. so she figures shes wiggled her ass enough for one lifetime and the truth is she would rather be dead if only the dying wasnt so fucking slow and awful and she didnt love life goddam it so much. the truth is once you stop you stop. its not something you can go back to once its broken you in half and you know what it means. I mean, as long as youre alive and you know what trading in ass means and you stop, thats it. its not negotiable. and the woman for whom it is not negotiable is anathema.

for example, heres a typical vignette. not overdrawn, underdrawn. youre done yr days work, fucking. youre home. so some asshole man thinks thats his time. so he comes with a knife and since hes neighborhood trade you try to calm him down. most whores are pacifists of the first order. so he takes over yr room, takes off his shirt, lays down his knife. thats yr triumph. the fuck isnt anything once the knife is laid down. only the fuck is always something. you have to pretend that you won. then you got to get him to go but hes all comfy isnt he. so another man comes to the door and you say in an undertone, this fuckers taken over my house. so it turns out man 2 is a hero, he comes in and says what you doing with my woman. and it turns out man 2 is a big drug dealer and man 1 is a fucking junkie. so you listen to man 1 apologize to man 2 for fucking his woman. so man 1 leaves. guess who doesnt leave? right. man 2 is there to stay. so he figures hes got you and he does. and he fucking tries to bite you to death and you lie still and groan because you owe him and he fucking bites you near to death. between yr legs, yr clitoris, he fucking bites and bites. then he wants breakfast. so once you been through it enough, enough is enough.

ah, you say, so this explains it, whores hate men because whores see the worst, what would a whore be doing with the best. but the truth is that a whore does the worst with the best. the best undress and reduce to worse than the rest. besides, all women are whores and thats a fact. at least all women with more than \$11.14 in the bank. me too. shit, I should tell you what I did to get the \$11.14. nothing wrong with being a whore. nothing wrong with working in a sweatshop. nothing wrong with picking cotton. nothing wrong with nothing.

I like the books these jerko boys write. I mean, and get paid for. its interesting. capital, labor, exploitation, tomes, volumes, journals, essays, analyses. all they fucking have to do is stop trading in female ass. apparently its easier to write books. it gives someone like me a choice. laugh to death or starve to death. Ive always been pro choice. the ladies are very impressed with those books. its a question of physical coordination. some people can read and wiggle ass simultaneously. ambidextrous.

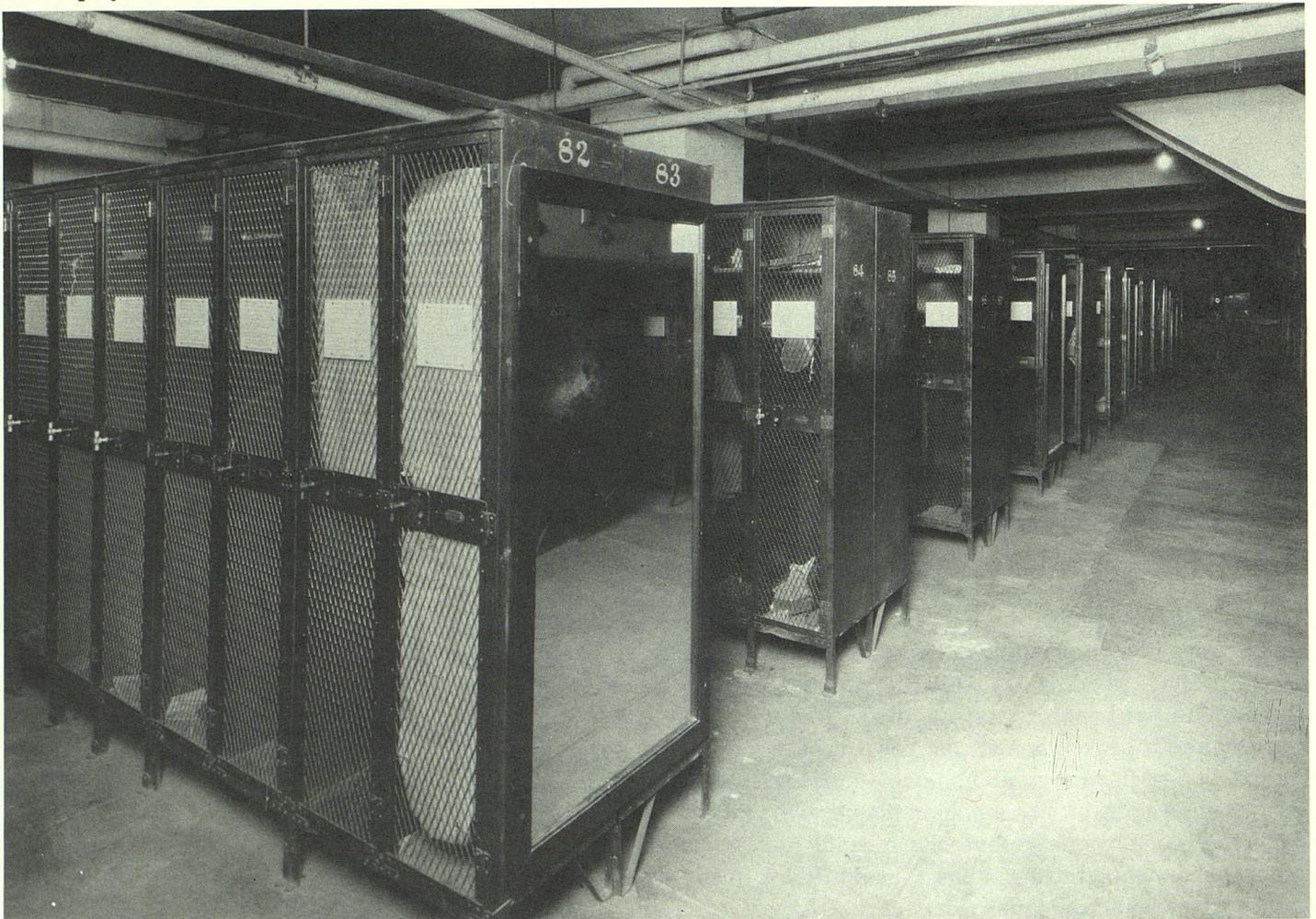
so now Im waiting and thinking. Anne Frank and Sylvia Plath leap to mind. they both knew Nazis when they saw them, at some point. there were a lot of ass wigglers in the general population around them wiggling ass while ovens filled and emptied. wiggling ass while heroes goosestepped or wrote poetry. wiggling ass while women, those old fashioned women who did nothing but hope or despair, died. this new woman is dying too, of poverty and a broken heart. the heart broken like fine china in an earthquake, the earth rocking and shaking under the impact of all that goddam ass wiggling going off like a million time bombs. an army of whores cannot fail—to die one by one so that no one has to notice. meanwhile one sad old whore who stopped liking it has a heart first cracked then broken by the ladies who wiggle while they work.

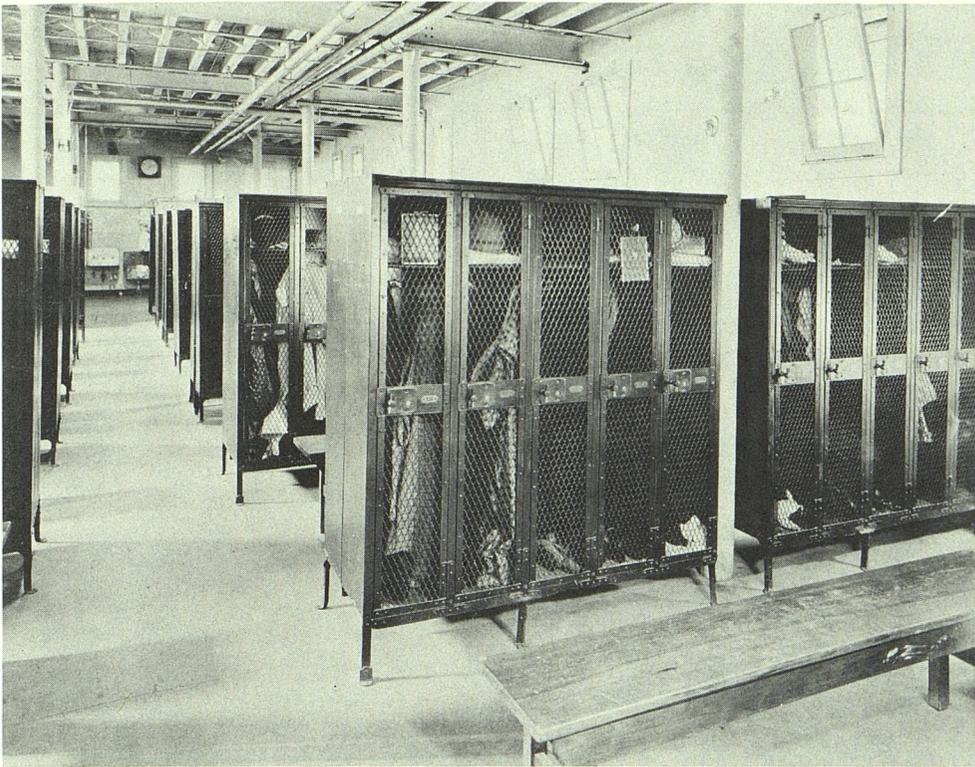
# LOCKERROOM/SHIFT

Lyn Blumenthal

Consider a black and white photograph: a room of lockers numbered 81, 82, 83, a room where women change for work. Rule the photograph into a matrix of minute cells. The precise tone of each cell is easily coded by a chain of numbers that express the picture. Any work is a finite number of discrete elements. *Their work is sometimes undirected, unoriented, unimagined, unanimated. Its deepest significance is that it provides a mock-up of everyday life.*

The tendency to see what we want or need to see has been demonstrated by numerous experiments in which people report seeing things that in fact are not present. Does a parallel exist between the mechanisms of the physical world and those of the brain?





In the early 1900's a theory evolved in which it was supposed matter and energy were but two aspects of the same primal force. Physicists all over the world were discovering waves. A female magician brought masons onstage who built a brick wall ten feet high which she then walked through. She made a full-sized elephant disappear with a clap of her hands. Coins poured from her fingers, doves flew from her ears. She stepped into one of the lockers. It was riveted shut. No drape was set up in front of it. It was pried open. It was empty. A collective gasp went up from the audience. She was seen running into the theater from the lobby. She leaped onstage. Her eyes seemed to gleam the color of blue diamonds. Slowly she lifted her arms. Her feet rose from the floor. Suddenly she collapsed in a heap.

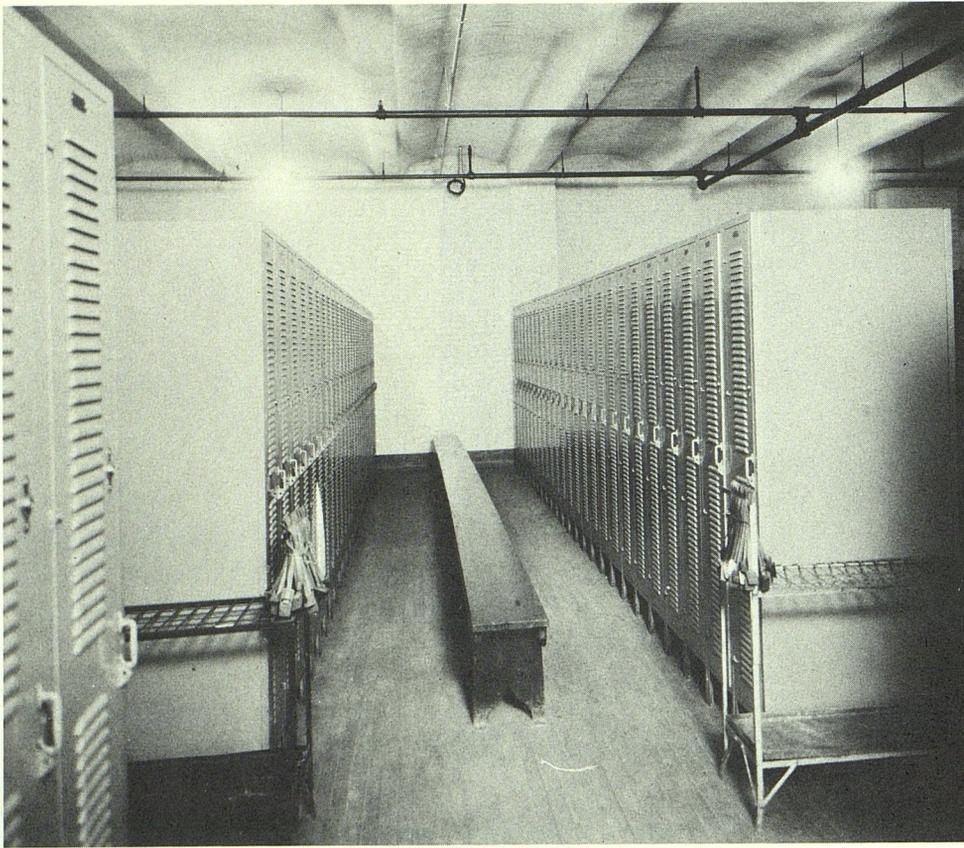
Her assistants helped her to a chair. She asked for a glass of wine. She held the wine up to the spotlight. It turned colorless. She drank it. The wine glass disappeared from her hand.

Psychologists studying the capabilities of the sense organs speak of an ideal observer, one who would respond to light or tones with unbiased eyes and ears.

Lyn Blumenthal is an artist and feminist. She is working on "Mirage," a video tape shot in Death Valley.



Large clean cloakroom with clothes hung in rows on stands. Peerless Laundry, 1928.

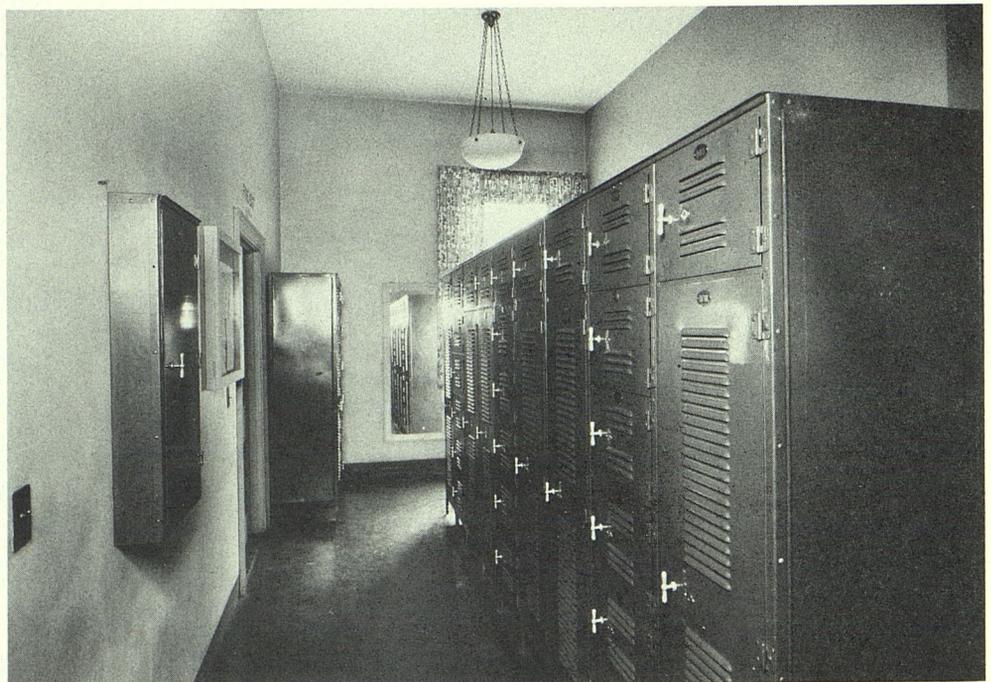


Many of her co-workers have disappeared. Their daydreams are seen as private matters thinly disguised and self-referential. An effort is made to treat these as symptomatic.

Consider a photograph: a long row of lockers, a bench, two plants, one mirror, a skylight, one cast shadow, one reflection. One of our earliest ancestors was the Amphioxus, a cross between a fish and a worm, a link between vertebrates and invertebrates.

The first chordate fish had a spinal cord with a slight bulge on the end which over the millenia developed into the human brain. *Their work was suffering from bad reviews.* An artist rented a studio in Brooklyn and went to work there. She took to sitting on a wooden chair in the middle of the room. One day she decided her chair was facing in the wrong direction. Raising her weight from the chair she lifted it with her two hands and turned it to the right to align it properly. For a moment she thought the chair was aligned, but then she decided it was not.

She moved it another turn to the right. She tried sitting in the chair now, but it still felt peculiar. She turned it again. Eventually she made a complete circle and still she could not find the proper alignment for the chair. The light faded through the windows of the studio. Thru the night she turned her chair in circles seeking the proper alignment. Consider a photograph. Rule



Full-length mirror and lockers supplied the women for coats and hats. Chesapeake Telephone Co. April, 1927.



Two hundred ten lockers costing \$1,500. Company unknown. 1922.

the picture into a matrix of minute cells. The precise tone of each cell is easily coded by a number. Scanning the cells yields a chain of numbers that express the photograph. Since numbers do not decay, a photograph can be recreated as long as the number of sequence is preserved.

# PORTRAIT OF AN OFFICE

Margaret Willey

This is a portrait of a registrar's office at a small Midwestern college. Like most offices, it was staffed, managed and run by women. Ultimately, though, it was headed by a male executive, installed at the top of the office echelon by other college administrators to create an aura of masculine authority and respectability. All the women in the office recognized this as an illusion; he had no real authority. Some of them saw the situation as inevitable, even normal, others found it ridiculous and frustrating, but none of us was really surprised by it.

All the women in the office, except for Red, made less than \$150.00 a week. Most of them were local women who had grown up and married in the community adjoining the college. Three were divorced, single parents; four were married; the seventh woman divorced her husband during her year on the job. I was the only one in the office who had never married. We all worked from nine to five in a small, square, gray-white space packed with desks, typewriters, wastebaskets and six-foot file cabinets. Mr. Dickson and Red each had a small private office. Red often worked in the big office with the staff, but Mr. Dickson came out of his office only on his way to lunch or to attend meetings. He was, as he would occasionally say with sigh, "a

very busy man."

Women who are stuck together for eight hours a day in a small, windowless space tend to become frustrated. In a situation where power is scarce, they sometimes victimize each other, attacking some individuals for openly wanting power, and others because they do not want it. Office workers in an academic setting are particularly defensive because students and faculty see them as generally stupid and unresourceful. But they are certainly never too stupid not to notice this insult.

In our particular office, the work was tedious, impersonal and dreadful. The tasks, which required prolonged attention to alphabets and numbers and various categorizing systems, inhibited personal connection. Our conversations were few. When we did talk, our conversations rarely had anything to do with our tasks. If one of the supervisors observed us talking, she could pretty correctly assume that we were not talking about work. Periodically, the supervisors attempted to rearrange the office, moving us away from each other, putting file cabinets between us, turning our desks to face the walls. Despite these obstacles, we managed to connect the way women have always connected. We talked, we whispered, we giggled, we joked. This was our conspiratorial flow of information.

Mr. Dickson was head of the eight-woman office. The thought of this

alternately amused and annoyed him. He joked about it with his administrative pals, and they all chuckled and made jokes about his little harem. But at times it embarrassed him, having only women to supervise. He was like a professor with no really good students. And he resented his "girls," collectively and individually, for not being more docile and gracious. They just didn't seem to appreciate the privilege of being on his staff.

Mr. Dickson was 46, short, pudgy and energetic in a blustering, ineffectual way. He constantly spoke in clichés because they were safe and protected him from everybody's hatred for him in the office. He made feeble, foolish jokes about race and sex. He felt that everybody in the office was too straitlaced to appre-



Mr. Dickson

ciate his humor. He didn't know that the office nickname for him was "Dildo."

Mr. Dickson did know that Red knew ten times more than he did about running the office. He knew she put in long hours and weekends to keep everything running smooth-

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Margaret Willey has lived most of her life in Michigan. She is presently enrolled in the creative writing program at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

ly. He also knew that his salary nearly doubled hers. There was no confusion in his mind about any of this. One thing that seemed to puzzle him, though, was this: Why doesn't my staff have more respect for me? From time to time he called staff meetings which everyone grudgingly attended. Afterward, he and Martha, his private secretary, would discuss the difficulty of maintaining an office with such a lethargic group, and he would wonder how he had ever been stuck in such an unrewarding situation.

"Ungrateful bitches," he would mutter.

Red was the perfect name for her. It was neither male nor female—a genderless name, like one you'd give to a car or a tractor. An impersonal,



Red

hard-edged nickname. I wondered at first why she was identified by this particular color, what characteristic it described. She didn't have red hair, freckles, pink cheeks or an easy blush—typical attributes of redness. She was slim, nervous and burned with energy. After working under her for several months, I decided "red"-ness alluded to her smoldering ambitiousness, persistence, drive.

We were as intimidated by Red as we were unafraid of Dickson. The only quality the two shared was a belief that the office was important. They were the only ones who be-

lieved it—and the only ones with enough prestige involved for it to matter. But unlike Dickson, Red firmly controlled the office flow. Its organization was her special project, its performance was her brain child. For Red, the deadlines were truly a life-and-death matter, the schedules crucial, the print-outs gospel. We were baffled by her dedication to alphabets and numerical systems and timetables. She, in turn, was appalled at our inability to appreciate the beauty of harmoniously flowing information, and our lack of loyalty to the maintenance of an efficient system.

Red had grown up on a small farm nearby, and had clear-cut ambitions for a more glamorous future. She was certain of her superiority to Dickson and the network of male administrators he represented. We loved to watch her deal with rude students in her superior tone. She could handle the most mind-boggling recordkeeping crisis with a cool, crusty exterior. Her dedication and drive seemed positively exotic.

At times, however, Red was a cold and unapproachable supervisor. She simply could not relate to our lack of dedication to the office, and expected us to work overtime, skip lunches and work without breaks when the office was busy. She showed irritation whenever one of us called in sick—or had to stay home with a sick child. (She was never sick.) Anything that interrupted the office flow annoyed her. It was several months before I learned, with surprise, that she was divorced and had a three-year-old son.

Red didn't like me very much. She realized early on that I wasn't going to take the job seriously. My lack of clerical ambition offended her. I hated Red's intolerance of human "frailty"—sickness, family crises, the need for vacations. And I hated her bullying. Red paid a high price

for her limited power. We all knew the cost and marveled at her endurance. At times, we hated Red for being unyielding, unsympathetic, "male."

Jean wasn't really a clerical worker. She was a college graduate with a business major, fast-talking and ambitious, with a sophisticated ability to manipulate situations to her favor. After only two months in the office, she was promoted, given a



Jean

title and a significant raise. Several other women in the office had been waiting years for just such a break. Jean managed to convince Mr. Dickson and Red that if she were promoted, she would be reliable, efficient and cooperative. And so she was.

She had just one problem. Nobody in the office liked her. She was a climber, and everyone resented the way she told her friends who visited the office that this job was just "temporary," as she looked with disdain around the room.

Jean felt an active contempt for Mr. Dickson and resented his power. She had a keen, judgmental eye for competence, and it didn't take a genius to see that Dickson was an ass. It was Red who ran, controlled and managed the office from her subservient position. At times this disturbed Jean, because it ran counter to her own bid for administrative power. She strove to be competent

REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

Red Valley State College



Mr. Dickson  
Registrar



Martha Lewis  
Secretary



Red Davis  
Asst. Registrar



Jean Meyers  
Administrative Aid



Sharon Scutt  
Typing/Grades



Luane Peters  
Computer Records



Margaret Willey  
Files & Records



Verna Poll  
Transcripts



Ruth Peters  
Admissions



Suzy Hanson  
Student Aid

even as she witnessed incompetence rewarded. She could not relate to the other women in the office, nor could they relate to her. Of course, this, combined with her manipulative skills, may make her a useful patriarchal administrator some day.

Martha was a funny combination of power and powerlessness. She was Mr. Dickson's personal secretary. She kept his schedule of meetings, of dinners and luncheons; she screened his phone calls, kept his office tidy and reported any unrest in the office. She was the only employee who didn't call him "Dildo"—the word embarrassed her. The women in the office disliked her,



**Martha**

despite her pleasant and helpful manner. Luane made fun of her, Jean ignored her and Red endured her. The rest of us quietly resented her without knowing why. Her salary was modest, her position was unimportant, she had no prestige or power of her own. Outside the office, she had a loving husband and two teenaged sons. She was too willing to settle for her position. She was even grateful for such a good job. She was content and unquestioning. To the rest of the office, she was an unforgivable fool.

Luane was the most attractive woman in the office. She was 26—divorced, thin, with beautiful red

hair which she washed and curled every morning. She and Martha



**Luane**

were the only ones who wore dresses to work but, unlike Martha's, hers were sexy, strikingly out of place in the office. Luane had two children, both of them hyperactive and, she admitted, out of her control. She took them to a sitter each morning before work. She spoke bitterly of her ex-husband, who took no responsibility for their children.

Luane was tough, brittle, smart and very funny. She had a coarse sense of humor; if she didn't like somebody she would deride them with obscene banter. She had a natural flair for understanding computers and had learned computer language informally, without training. Luane never played up to her supervisors. She was as tough and flippant with them as she was with everyone else. She despised Martha and Jean because they "sucked ass" in a way that she would not, and she ridiculed Suzy for being naïve. Luane, with her uncompromising attitude, had perhaps the most integrity of any one in the office. She bristled with resentment, from her beautiful tense face to her nervous, manicured, nicotine-stained fingertips.

Margaret was a college graduate, like Jean, but she had majored in English and had drifted through her undergraduate years, assuming that

something nice would be waiting for her after all the classes and papers and tutorials. Had anyone told her that she would become a secretary after graduation she would have scoffed.

The nine-to-five world was a great shock to Margaret's delicate system. It shattered all her fantasies about work, independence and fulfillment. The promise held by her education began to fade into the background of working. Work, she suspected, is largely exhausting and futile.

At first, the rest of the staff distrusted Margaret as an alien, an academic. They watched carefully, waiting for her to exhibit the signs of elitism—aloofness, snobbishness, refusal to dress properly or wear makeup. Her unmarried state was an added source of confusion to everyone. As far as they could tell, there was nothing seriously wrong with her, no reason for her not to be married. Although the institution of



**Margaret**

marriage was often derided by the women, it was still assumed that everybody is engaged, married or divorced, or is in transition to becoming one or the other.

Margaret was saved from boredom with the work by a need to "fit in," to be accepted and liked by the others. Part of her need stemmed from predictable middle-class guilt. After all, she knew she wouldn't always be a secretary. But she began to realize that many of her idealistic notions about "liberation" were

simply rhetoric to these women. She found herself trying to please them, to be efficient, to dress carefully, to talk about clothes and hair, food and babies and television. It was like learning a new language, but it came quickly; her need to know was genuine. The work itself was repugnant, boring and draining. She watched the women as they worked around her, listening to them, looking for explanations and revelations. She found herself shrinking and growing at the same time. How can we make sense of this place? she would ask herself. And what does it mean to be stuck here together every day? Is it all right to be inside and outside at once, always interpreting, always speaking guardedly, hiding so much, wanting to explain, to help, to reveal, to connect?

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Ruth was the stabilizing influence in the office. She was hard-working but cynical and humorously dis-



**Ruth**

respectful of authority. She was not as funny as Luane, but her humor was suggestive in a shy way that made us all giggle.

Ruth was a 35-year-old woman who looked 50. She wore three outfits to the office, one after the other, each of them dark-colored and shapeless. There was a warm quality about her that made everyone like her. She had a beautiful lilting voice, with a faint Scottish accent (she was originally from Scotland).

Ruth's job was one of the most meaningless jobs in the office. It was repetitive, enlivened only by pressing deadlines and urgent demands from other departments. Somehow, Ruth managed to do the job and stay pleasant and unruffled. She never took her duties too seriously, somehow remaining detached from the pressures of the job. She did her work well, but never let the job ride her. In this, she was an example to the rest of the office. When she was sometimes criticized by her supervisors for not being more committed, for being slipshod in her attitude, she listened but paid little attention to them.

Ruth considered divorcing her husband throughout the year she worked in the office. He was slender, handsome—and unfaithful. They stayed married because of their four beautiful, tow-headed daughters. Ruth often asked me to explain the more fundamental beliefs of the women's movement. She often counseled me not to marry or have children, despite the fact that she clearly loved her daughters. Sometimes when I carefully explained the changes in sex roles advocated by the women's movement, Ruth looked pleased, as these principles confirmed her husband's guilt. But other times she snorted and protested, saying that those crazy women were "asking for the moon," and she argued that men would never consent to a reallocation of power.

After Ruth had worked with us for a year, she decided to divorce her husband and to move back to Scotland with her three oldest daughters. She left her youngest, the baby, with her husband and his mistress. Almost everyone was horrified—Martha even stopped speaking to her. But Luane said simply, "You never would've made it with a baby." Ruth left the country a few weeks after making her decision.

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When anyone leaves the office, whatever the reason, it throws the remaining staff into a state of disorientation and regret, threatened by the reminder that there are possibilities for a life without the office. After Ruth left, the staff reeled with the loss of stability. Then Suzy, a local newlywed right out of high school, was hired to replace her.

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Suzy was a pretty, scared 19-year-old when she joined the staff. She constantly apologized for her inexperience, her mistakes. This approach got her off to a bad start; everyone became impatient with her. She was overwhelmed by Ruth's job, and after two weeks it was clear the job would always be too much for her. Her errors created problems for the others, as many responsibilities overlapped from job to job; her incompetence was unforgivable because other people in the office



**Suzy**

had to cover up for her. Suzy knew she was botching it, and as her nervousness increased, she became more timid and apologetic. She began to chain smoke, and always seemed to be in a daze, waiting for someone to tell her what to do next.

The women in the office teased Suzy because she was newly married. Luane and Sharon made bitter, sarcastic remarks about how nice it must be to have a husband, but at

the same time indicated that marriage was for the ignorant and stupid. The teasing confused Suzy, who thought her handsome husband Nick was a prize. She continued to talk about him, shyly yet insistently, as if she were determined to be congratulated. "He looks like a drip," said Sharon loudly once when Nick came by the office to say hello to Suzy.

Four months after she was hired, Suzy was rescued from her plight by Nick's graduation. They returned to Nick's hometown, where he had a job as a pharmacist. Suzy spent her last week in the office staring off into space, giggling to herself.

Sharon was probably harder to get to know than anyone else in the office. She had a cold, set face, heavily made-up eyes and stiffly sprayed hair. Her voice was low-pitched, she had a slight Southern accent, and she spoke curtly, in short sentences. It was Sharon who first called Mr. Dickson "Dildo." She looked like a country Western star, with her thin, curvy body always dressed in tight clothes. Her appearance made smug little coeds laugh, in their gauzy shirts and big sweaters and straight hair. But after a few weeks of working with her, I realized Sharon thought she was something else—really beautiful.

She had a string of boyfriends who were all crazy about her. She was divorced, with a small daughter who was left with Sharon's mother much of the time. Apparently Sharon drank like a fish on her frequent dates, but she rarely missed a day of work, even if she was badly hung over. Once I asked her which of her many boyfriends she liked best and why. She said: "Oh, Mike, he can keep it up all night." Luane laughed, but Sharon wasn't trying to be funny, she was really telling me the best she could expect from her boyfriends. She lied to them all, toying with them

and making them jealous. She often bragged about her lying, as if she had some kind of fundamental permission to do this to men for the hell of it.

Sharon was a typist. She was tough and competent in the office,



**Sharon**

fast and accurate no matter what condition she was in. She would set her face, purse her mouth and pound the typewriter, and nobody with any brains dared interrupt her. Nobody but Luane, who occasionally threw paper clips or paper wads just to hear her swear, which she did with a snarling laugh. She and Luane were friends, although they were very different, and they sometimes went out together to singles bars in the city.

Verna was a shy, soft-spoken woman with frizzy blond hair and eggshell-pale skin. She always seemed overwhelmed by the push and pull of the other office personalities and kept to herself. She was married to a postal worker and the mother of three children. The youngest of her children seemed always to be sick. A cold, a virus, an infection, the flu, you name it, Billy had it. So she was often late and had to make up hours. Although the supervisors, especially Red, bitched about her absences, they never said anything directly to her. I think they knew that if they did, Verna, with her pale, tired eyes and her quiet, dependable nature, would quit on the

spot. She was the only woman in the office who clearly would have preferred to stay home. There seemed to be a silent, ever-present strain in her life. She rarely mentioned her husband, except to cluck-cluck her tongue and shake her head whenever his name came up.

Everyone in the office liked Verna. There was something in her weariness



**Verna**

and frustration that we all understood. Sharon always spoke to Verna, asking her about Billy; Sharon never asked anyone about their children. There was a constant attempt to protect Verna, and to make her life easier. It was something that we never really spoke about.

The office opens at 8:30. Red and Martha come in at 8:00, Red to start organizing the day, Martha to make coffee and tidy up Mr. Dickson's office.

The staff begins to trickle in from 8:15 to 8:45. Sharon is always early, Jean is always on the dot. Sharon spends the extra 15 minutes "making up" in the bathroom under bad lights. She comes out to her desk looking stiff, colorful and singularly awake. The rest of us trickle in unpredictably, early, on time, late. Punctuality is an issue. Everyone watches to see who will be late. It's often Luane, as it is today, and she comes in looking tense, complaining about her babysitter. Verna, who is always late, comes in quietly, in pointy-toed blue sneakers and an old

coat. Everyone greets her; she seems to signal the workday's beginning.

It is Margaret's turn to make coffee. She is careful not to make the coffee too weak or too strong. Mondays depress her; she feels the weight of the week ahead. Everyone talks about the weekend, how much house cleaning and errand running was accomplished, where they took their kids. Margaret feels guilty that she spent her weekend reading and visiting friends. She says nothing.

The coffee is too strong. Everyone teases Margaret about it, and Ruth says it's no wonder she's not married. Ruth tells us her husband was gone all weekend again. Red comes through the office with a few terse greetings, silently communicating that it is time to get to work. Typewriters are clicked on, file drawers are opened noisily, endless piles of paper are shuffled and moved.

Mr. Dickson comes in looking cocky and well-fed. He smiles and throws his arms around in the air and says, "What's the good word? ...How's tricks?" After he has asked what the good word is for the third time, Sharon says, "Fuck."

At 10:30, it's time for a break. Verna has brought chocolate cookies. Luane has begun another of her elaborate diets, this one uses bran tablets to curb the appetite. Conversation drifts to the success and failure of various diets, then to the

effectiveness of "underalls" and the oppressiveness of girdles. After the break, the office gets busy. There is a backlog of filing and alphabetizing from Friday. Students come to the counter with questions about record-keeping errors and crises.

A professor approaches Verna, asking her casually for a list of all the students to whom he has given failing grades for the last five years. Verna blanches and consents, returning to her desk muttering and groaning, "Why does he have to know that today?"

"Maybe," Ruth suggests, "an anonymous student has threatened to have him murdered."

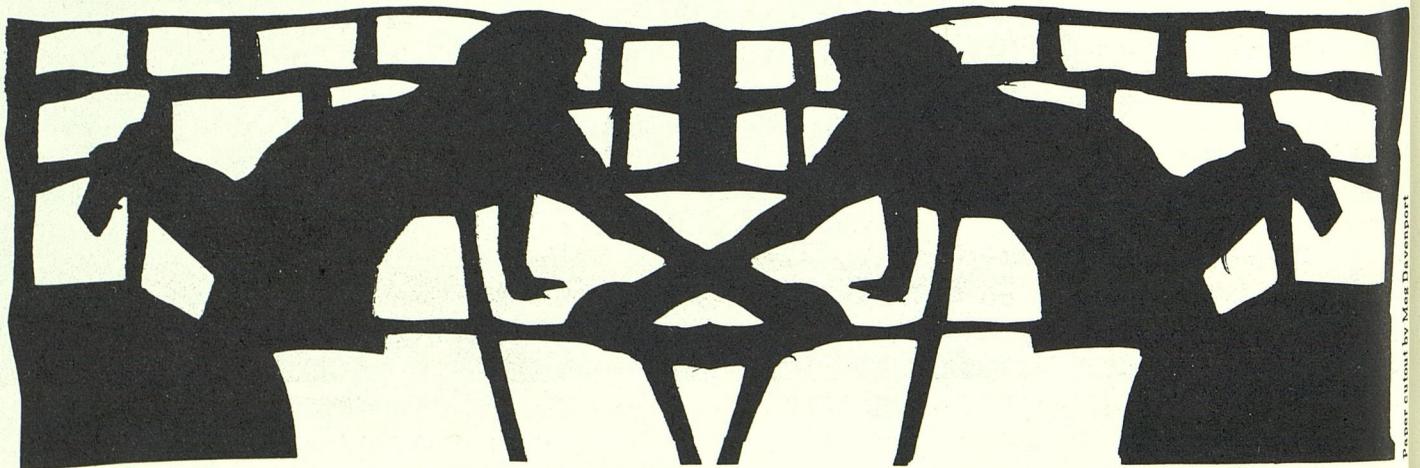
Eventually it is lunch time. Everyone decides to go to MacDonald's because the food is cheap, fast and effortless. Before coming to the office, Margaret had not been to a MacDonald's in five years. Now she goes twice a week.

After lunch we return to work in better spirits. Everyone shuffles to her desk amid much talking and giggling. The high spirits are so obvious that Red asks Jean to tell everyone to shut up and get to work. Jean does, and the mood sours, everyone sullen and resentful. Luane makes fun of the dowdy outfit Jean is wearing. Martha brings Sharon an unusually large pile of mail, and Sharon reacts as if she has done this on purpose, slamming the pile of envelopes down

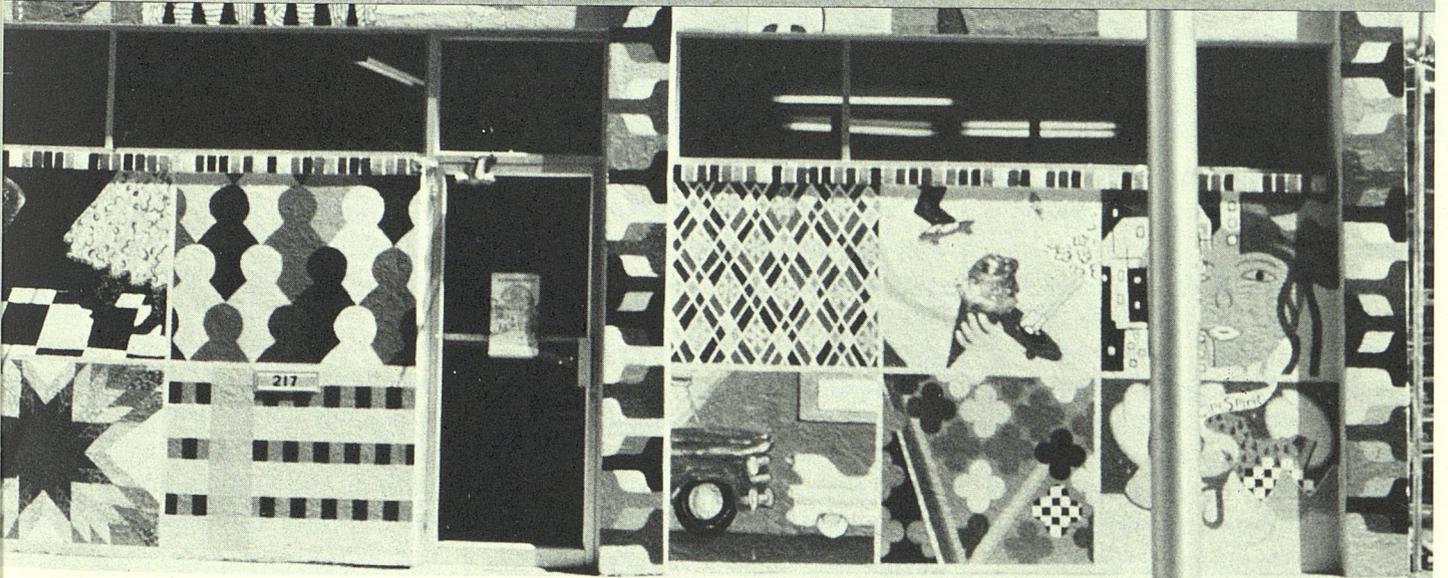
on her desk with a snarl. Verna is still struggling over the assignment for the professor, her face flushed with aggravation. Ruth is describing to Margaret an encounter with an insulting student, when Red comes through the office and asks them both if they need something to do. A few minutes later, Dickson comes to the counter and asks Sharon if she got up on the wrong side of the bed. This remark is so stupid that for a few seconds everyone stares silently at Dickson. He goes back into his office after receiving a sympathetic nod from Martha, and shuts the door. Everyone begins to work again.

At afternoon break, Ruth asks if anyone has aspirin. Verna, rooting through her purse full of medicine and pills, takes several minutes to find some for her. We talk briefly about doctors and doctor bills and Luane tells us how costly it is to buy the Ritalin her daughter needs. While we talk, Sharon raises the top layer of her hair several inches with the end of a rat-tail comb. After 20 minutes, Red comes into the small lounge to tell us that our breaks are getting too long. She tells us this several times a week.

It is 4:00. Margaret has been alphabetizing registration forms since 1:00. She closes her eyes for a moment and Luane throws a clip at the back of her head with a laugh. Margaret feels flattered.



# DOWNTOWN SATURDAY NIGHT



Members of New Mexico Women in the Arts were given a wall to paint at 217 Marquette in downtown Albuquerque. The city supplied exterior latex base paint. Each woman was given several squares to "work"—somewhat as in quilt making. It took about two months to complete the mural, which was painted by participants in Joyce Kozloff's "Feminism, Art and Politics" seminar at the University of New Mexico and others: Sharon Siskin, Bonnie Putnam, Marcia Perkins, Barbara Nugent, Joyce Mills, Liz Hale, Liz Christensen, Tina Newberry, and Sharon Chavez with Shelly Joyner and Tanya Driscoll.

# IS THERE ROOM FOR ME IN THE CLOSET OR MY LIFE AS THE ONLY LESBIAN PROFESSOR\*

Judith McDaniel

I didn't know what to expect. I had never done it before: moved to a new job and community—and announced that I was a lesbian. I knew why I was doing it. I could think of no other way to live sanely. My announcement was the solution to a black depression that had felt like walking a tunnel with no light at the end. It was survival: the only way I could imagine facing a new life. I jeopardized no one but myself, I thought. I was going alone.

But I didn't know how to announce it. I went to my first faculty meetings. I taught my first classes. I assigned *Rubyfruit Jungle*. I wore a ring with a double woman's symbol, but almost no one noticed. A woman who lives with a woman lover is a lesbian; a woman who lives alone is single.

One of my students did notice. She came and sat in my office to talk about George Eliot, but the double woman's symbol she wore on a small chain around her neck spoke more eloquently than her words. We began to speak about our lesbianism, the problems of organizing and running a Women's Coalition on campus.

Judith McDaniel, writer, critic, teacher, is co-founder of Spinsters, Ink, a feminist publishing company.

\*This article will appear in *Labyris: Autobiographical Sketches of Lesbians*, edited by Margaret Cruikshank.

One afternoon during that first hectic month, two faculty women invited me to have coffee. Except for department functions, it was my first social contact. My students had told me that one of the women was a lesbian, but no one must know; the other, they said, was a feminist with a "closet" boyfriend.

We spoke briefly about our work. "Why did you leave your last job?" they asked. "I was fired," I said, "with another woman. We were too 'feminist.'" "Did you sue them?" one woman asked. "It was difficult," I said. "We were both lesbians."

My comment lay like something unpleasant in the middle of the table. No one referred to it. As our half-hour chat ended and we stood to leave, one of the women turned to me and asked angrily, "Just where do you expect to fit into this community?" "I don't know," I responded. And I didn't. It was a question I would ask myself many times.

Not everyone responded with fear. My students asked me to come to their first Women's Coalition meeting, where we shared ideas and experiences. Another young faculty woman was there. She noticed my ring and began to speak enthusiastically about Charlotte Bunch's speech on lesbian feminism at the Socialist Feminist Conference. She

wondered whether I'd be interested in a feminist study group. We began to plan for the future.

At a formal dinner for the trustees and faculty, I sat across the table from a faculty wife who told me she was a feminist and—very confidentially—that more students didn't attend Women's Coalition meetings because of rumors that LESBIANS were in control. "Oh," I said, gesturing magnanimously with my wine glass. "That's why I always say I'm a lesbian. It helps other women to know where I'm coming from politically." Her eyes glazed and her wine glass thumped on the table, belying her casual attitude. "Oh, really," she said, as her gaze cleared.

In the classroom I was less daring. An audience of one is less intimidating than a group of thirty. At the beginning of the semester, however, I had assigned *Rubyfruit Jungle* in my Introduction to Fiction course—as an example of the modern picaresque novel. During the first weeks, as we struggled through Dickens and Virginia Woolf, I waited anxiously for a comment from someone who might have read the back cover blurb, announcing gaily that *Rubyfruit Jungle* was about "growing up lesbian in America." Not a word from my students. When the time came, I announced that Ruby-

Les'bi-an (lez'bi-än) noun

1. women who (love) women
2. women identified, one whose sense of self and energies including sexual energy centers around women.
3. women identified women. One who commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical and economic support.

fruit *Jungle* was due on Monday. I told them about the picaresque novel and Fielding and socially unacceptable or shocking behavior. And then I stopped. I couldn't say the word "lesbian" in my own classroom. I spent that weekend in a panic. How the hell was I going to teach this book? What could I say about it? Was my own sexual preference relevant to teaching this novel? What would I say if they asked me whether I was a lesbian?

By Monday I had resolved nothing. I had spent all weekend preparing a class for which I was totally unprepared. I walked into the classroom,

perched casually on the edge of my desk, and asked vaguely, "Well, what did you think of *Rubyfruit Jungle*?" Responses ranged from "best book in the course," "I loved it," "she was so funny," to "weird" and "it was perverted." Now I had something to deal with; we worked intensely with the novel and the students' attitudes for three meetings. At the end of our last scheduled class on the book, a woman raised her hand and hesitantly asked, "Um, can I ask you, um, it may not, um, but..." Here it comes, I thought wryly, my moment of truth. "Ask," I said bravely. "Is Rita Mae Brown a

lesbian?" "Yes," I answered laughing, dismissing the class. "Yes, for sure she is."

Three years later, after many such encounters, I have begun to understand those feelings of fear and insecurity which I experienced in first teaching a lesbian work. The students I teach have been raised in a society that fears and hates homosexuals. When my students did not know I was a lesbian, and when the material we were dealing with made homosexuality a topic of discussion or reference, I was in an extremely vulnerable position. In talking about *Rubyfruit Jungle*, my students—as-

suming they were among a peer-heterosexual group—could easily have said things that were threatening and hostile to me.

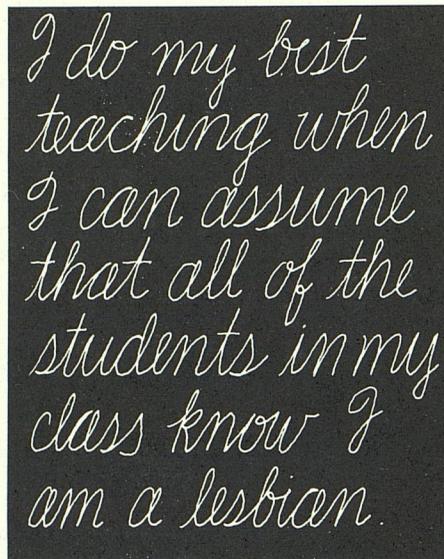
What I feared then happened, in fact, this year. A student wrote a poem about how unfortunate it is that the pansy, a delicate and complex flower, has been so maligned. In discussing the poem, I assumed she meant that the flower and male homosexuals—those named for it—were maligned. “No,” she said, “isn’t it awful to name faggots and queers after such a sweet flower?” I went numb. I stared at her, momentarily unable to speak. My impulse was to scream, to let her know that I took this affront personally. I knew I could silence her, if not change her mind. But *this* was what I had feared in that first class. I was personally assaulted, and whatever I did to correct her, I was still left shaken and raw. “I will not allow those attitudes or that language to be expressed in this classroom,” I told her. But I did not say, “I am one.”

I do my best teaching when I can assume that all of the students in my class know I am a lesbian. Whatever the particular focus of the literature we are discussing, I encourage students to bring their own experiences to the literature and to relate literature to their own lives. I need to be able to do the same, and my sexual preference is one important part of my identity and experience. When I introduced a course on the poetry of Adrienne Rich, it seemed natural in talking about her journey from daughter-in-law to lesbian feminist for me to identify with that process.

Within my wider social community, I gradually became identified as a lesbian, a free spirit, as it were. I had hoped I would find a lover in my new community. I had expected I would. I did not expect—and did not understand until much later—that I was a hot sexual prospect: a new

dyke in town.

I also applied what I called Rule Number One: teachers do not become involved with students. At the time, it seemed a clear statement of intention to me—one that would make relationships with my lesbian students open, above-board and simple. I believed if I stated my understanding of the contract between us, that would be sufficient. From the very beginning of my contact with students in this new job, I made Rule Number One an open subject of discussion.



*I do my best teaching when I can assume that all of the students in my class know I am a lesbian.*

Students seemed to think Rule Number One was funny. It usually came up in those conversations about male professors who had affairs with their female students. We all had opinions about such things. Mine was that power in such relationships was unequal, and I presumed therefore that the relationship was exploitive; hence Rule Number One, which I have never broken, I explained. Laughter. Insistence on exceptional relationships. Tension. And I did not realize that Rule Number One left unstated the most essential understanding of my relationship to these students: that an affair or the slightest implication of seduction would make me subject to administrative and possibly legal

scrutiny of a kind rarely experienced by a heterosexual teacher.

By the end of the first semester I had found a new lover, not in my own community, but within commuting distance. I had not told many women about her. When she moved in with me, I did not consider it a community project. My love life was my own, I thought. A student confided to me later that when my lover had appeared on the scene, her friend had seemed shaken, come late to class, and scribbled in the margin of her notebook, “I’m going to commit suicide. J.M. has a new roommate.” “Why did she do that?” I asked, puzzled. “She told us she was having an affair with you,” my student answered. “Did the other students believe that?” “We did for a while,” was her reply. So much for Rule Number One.

Then I began to understand a confrontation with that student which had occurred midyear. We had been working together on several projects. I had thought her a friend, until she walked into my office one day and announced that she couldn’t work with me any more. I was exploiting her. I was a fascist. She was smiling. I looked at her, trying to decide between the expression of my fury and the efficacy of a low-key response. Could she be more specific, I asked, watching her tight grin. No. She had nothing else to say. Her attitude toward me the rest of that year was one of belligerent confrontation. The student had lost track of reality. In lying about our relationship within her own peer community, she had taken an enormous risk—a risk I didn’t understand at first. But it was a response to tensions she must have felt in my openly lesbian presence on campus. In the beginning I had not understood that I would create such fear and tension. I had thought coming out was something I would do by

myself, implicating only myself.

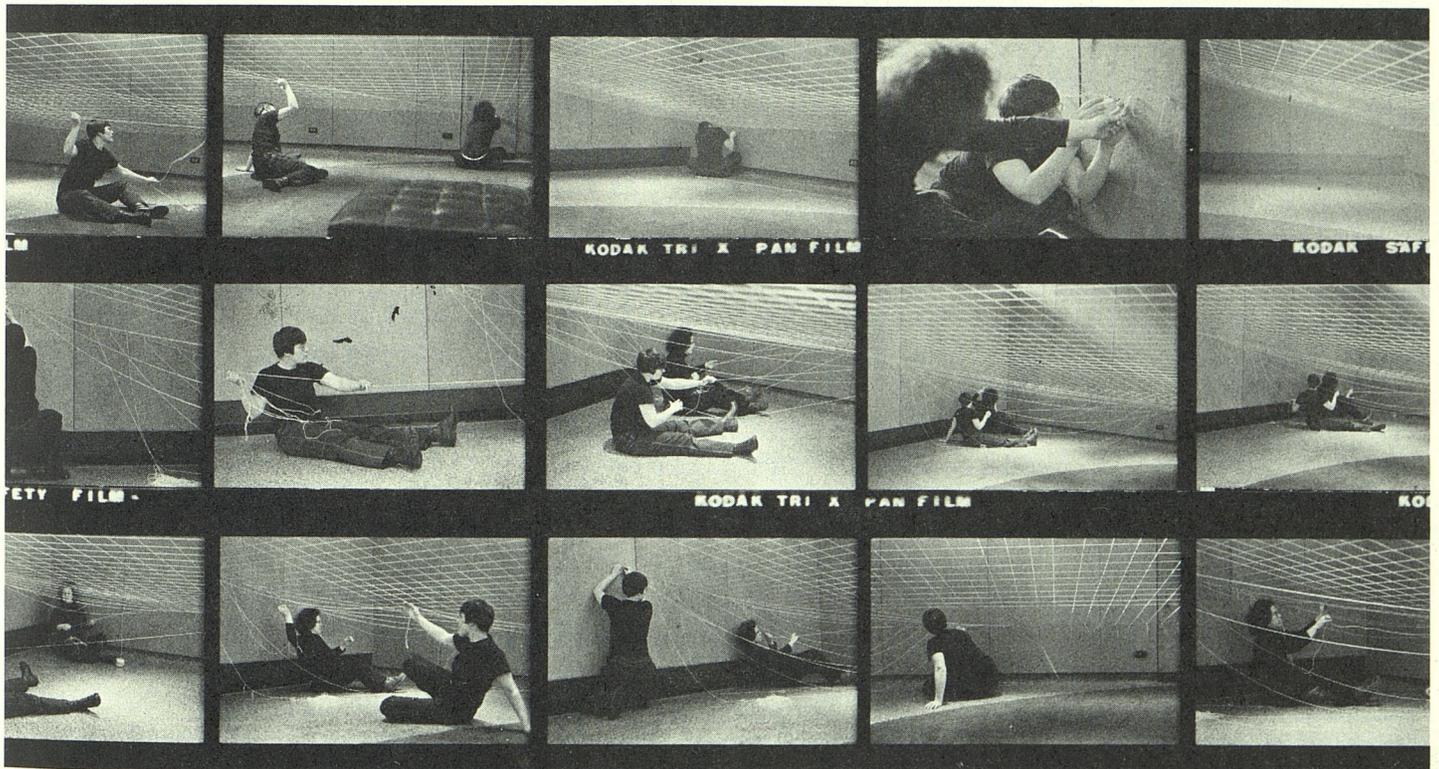
I understand now that any woman who associates with me must somehow deal with what my lesbianism means to her. For a lesbian who dares not be exposed, associating with a "known" lesbian is extraordinarily risky. For those who are not even "guilty," association can feel risky. A married faculty woman with whom I have worked closely confessed this year that she was afraid to be seen sitting with me in faculty meetings. It was not a feeling she was proud of, but she was afraid. Students who are unsure of their own sexuality are threatened: I am a role model who says it's okay to be a lesbian, implying a permission that can be liberating or terrifying. Students who are lesbian but have not come out publicly feel pushed to do so by my example, creating fear and tension. Originally, of course, I had expected only support from those

who seemed logically to be my closest friends and community.

I don't think my example is a harmful one. Far from it. Even when it causes fear and tension, I believe that stress can create an opportunity for growth that didn't exist so clearly before. Difference needs to be recognized and allowed to exist. But I have no prognosis for my own success or failure, which in a college teaching career is measured by continued contracts and tenure. My work, much of which has a feminist or lesbian feminist perspective, will be judged by an institution which is by its very nature patriarchal and heterosexist. My open presence as a lesbian challenges many of the assumptions on which such an institution is based. And I will never know whether my work as a writer and teacher is being judged, or my lifestyle. One of my colleagues has told me that my work with gay studies is

looked on benignly: "I hope we're all open-minded here," he said. Another specifically said my perspective as a lesbian feminist was "too narrow for this department." The teaching half of my professional life depends upon the continued support of an institution.

As the "only lesbian professor" on campus, my visibility creates isolation. Within my department and college, I have no peers—no one who shares my personal or political view of the world. Dealing with the alienation produced by such a situation is consuming and exhausting, but the alienation of living a hidden life was far more debilitating to me. I don't really want to go back into the closet. It's too late. And too crowded. Living life in the open has been personally liberating and has felt enormously healthy. Not simple. Not without risk and challenge. But healthy.



In January, 1974, Barbara Bradley and Maryann King constructed a room-sized string grid in the Ward Gallery at the University of Illinois, Chicago. The piece was called Barrier-Grid. It went through five transformations during a week-long exhibition. We decided to work on a project when we found we had similar ideas about the use

of gallery space. We exchanged a lot of ideas and tape recorded some funny but impractical projects. Finally, we agreed on a piece that satisfied both of us in terms of concept and materials.

—Maryann King

Barbara Bradley, a painter, currently lives and works in Italy. Maryann King is a painter who lives in New York City.



**Waitressing.** Hardly an occupation many of us would admit aspiring to. Nevertheless, it is a traditional occupation for women who work outside the home. It was never something I wanted to do. But at the age of nineteen, naive, unskilled and female, I quickly learned that it was one of the few options I had if I wanted to bring home the bacon.

Each of my first two waitressing jobs lasted one night. The hassles with drunks and gropers and non-tippers exceeded even my most sordid imaginings, and I soon concluded that it wasn't for me. But after three years, much traveling and a dozen or so low-paying jobs, I began to reconsider. I figured that I was older and wiser and for the money and hours I could handle the hassles. So I became a waitress again. I put up with unpleasantness, from "Why don't you smile? Things couldn't be that bad," to being chased by a crazed and shouting lawyer who threatened to sue because he wasn't pleased with the service—and I wasn't even his waitress. I watched

while male musicians at work treated women with contempt both on and off the stage. After two years, I could no longer overcome or ignore all this; I had reached the end of my transcendental tether.

There followed a year and a half of collecting—my wits and my unemployment benefits—a time of thinking, reassessing and concluding that the first change I wanted to make when I reentered the "work force" was to eliminate men, as much as possible, from my workplace. I didn't expect waitressing to become a glorious occupation. I just didn't want to spend my energy on hassles with men all the time. Had I come to this conclusion four years earlier, I would have remained frustrated and very hungry. Finding a workplace without men was not easy. But I was in luck. Of all the restaurants in New York City (one can eat in a different one every night for forty-two years without repetition) there was only one owned and run by and for women: Mother Courage. One feminist restaurant and one hope for my future.

In September, 1971, Jill Ward and Delores Alexander signed a lease for what would become the first feminist restaurant anywhere, ever. They had had enough of the problem all

women live with: not having enough space, woman-space, which could support them both psychically and financially. Jill Ward has said, "I wanted to mesh the reality of my economic situation with my inner reality." Her deep dissatisfaction with economic dependence on the patriarchy and a strong feminist commitment to women helped Mother Courage to open on borrowed money the next May. Because Ward and Alexander believed that in 1972 a feminist business could not realistically exist by the matronage of women only, they named their restaurant for the character in the Bertolt Brecht play who sold to both sides during the Thirty Years War.

I became a member of the Mother Courage staff in September, 1975. From the moment I entered those banging wooden doors, I was in another world. This was a place of freedom and mutual support, with a unique way of working and a robust social atmosphere. The women who worked there ranged in age from twenty-two to mid-forties. We were artists, carpenters, dancers, writers, singer-songwriters, filmmakers and undecideds. Our sexual persuasions varied, from lesbian to heterosexual to celibate to undecided. Our

Dorothy Rogers is a writer who lives in Westchester County, New York.

# “OH, MISS!”

Dorothy Rogers

New York Public Library Picture Collection



politics ranged from radical-lesbian-feminist-separatist to undecided. We were all white and middle-class.

Freedom of expression was the first reward I found at Mother Courage. My suspicion that the work environment would be better with men absent was immediately confirmed. It didn't take long to learn that most of the Mother Courage women shared my view.

Mother Courage fostered an unencumbered woman-space, encouraged a developing support system, created a vital and wide-reaching network of women. We\* supported and encouraged each other in innumerable ways. We promoted each other's outside activities by rearranging schedules. We saw the filmmaker's film, the dancer's dance, the singer's club appearance. We traded furniture and clothes and knowledge. But mostly we talked. Sex and sexual fantasies were hot topics for a number of months as some of us were finally finding the partners and the pluck to act out things we'd only imagined or read. Our conversations more often than not centered around personal situa-

tions—what to do about a lover you no longer loved, health problems, creative problems or achievements, work-related problems, family situations. One big issue was: can lesbian feminists incorporate and/or reconcile submission and dominance in their relationships without contradicting feminist politics? The answer was a qualified yes.

Of course feminism imbued all our lives, but in different degrees, and occasionally the variations brought discord. One member of the staff chose to get married and a thorny dilemma resulted for those of us who didn't accept the concept of marriage of any kind. Should we attend the wedding to support our friend and betray our political beliefs, or stay away because of political beliefs and risk alienating a friend? Nothing seemed too serious or too personal to discuss. One of us realized with anguish that she could no longer take care of her two children; it became everyone's concern. Our lives were shaken up, sorted out and put back together—all while making feta cheese pies or peeling garlic. Communication was a cornerstone of our support system; it not only made work easier, it made my life richer.

Despite all our talking, we did manage to work thirty-five or forty hours a week, and we worked well together. The work assignments at Mother Courage were as remarkable as our compatibility. We not only waitressed, but cooked, assisted the cook and eventually rotated in all three capacities. Everyone had to do all the jobs to work there and learned right away if she could handle it. I trained as cook's assistant immediately. This job included prepping for the cook as well as washing dishes, sometimes more dishes in a night than I could use in a month. This was a hot, wet, back-breaking introduction to the work at Mother Courage. The training for waitressing coincided with that for cook's assistant. Cook's training, however, was approached circumspectly—at least by me. It was a fast-paced, high-pressure job requiring confidence, organization, timing, concentration and diligence. Training for cook came when one felt ready for it, and often months passed before some of us did. Once learned, however, the job boosted one's sense of accomplishment and was a welcome change from dishwashing, a job with only one benefit—it provided ample time to daydream.

\*“We” refers mainly to the staff. The owners remained peripherally involved in what the rest of us did.

Job rotation was an evolutionary, if not revolutionary, work method. Originally, Mother Courage was structured like an ordinary restaurant: it had an owner, a cook, an assistant cook, a dishwasher and waitresses, separate people locked into separate functions. Although it may have been unique in concept and intent, Mother Courage was not unique in its work structure. The first change combined the jobs (and salaries) of dishwasher and assistant cook, so that one person could work a given amount of hours for twice the pay. Then a separate managerial position was created and filled by someone other than the owners. And when the inequities between kitchen work (ten hours for \$40, taxes withheld) and waitressing (eight hours for \$35 to \$80 in tips, nothing withheld) were unavoidable, the concept of job rotation evolved, based on economic and work-load equity.

At Mother Courage the emphasis was as much on working together as it was on the work itself, and apart from economic and work-load equity, job rotation was a great equalizer of pressures and responsibilities, and tended to mute what little competitiveness existed. Since no one had a rank, no one had rank to pull. When one of us had spent ten hours on her feet in the kitchen one night, either cooking ninety dinners or washing an endless stream of dirty dishes, she could count on a respite waitressing the next night. And sometimes working in the kitchen was a welcome change from waitressing.

Some women were better at certain tasks than others, more conscientious or just faster, but we didn't compete against each other. Conflicts, when they did arise, were usually over scheduling or whose job it was to do what. They were settled among ourselves or through the manager, whose diplomacy was as valued as a treasured working

burner on the front of the stove.\*\* Women were fired at Mother Courage, but not often and not without a great deal of deliberation between the employee and the manager. It took a lot to get fired. You had to be chronically late, and then spill the Mornay sauce on the walk-in floor a few times, neglect to freeze the meatballs and leave them next to the basement door... it took a lot to get fired.

We worked well together, but we played together even better. We were friends. We enjoyed each other's company. I felt a sense of destiny around us. It was as if we had been sailing down our separate streams and had converged at a crossing known as Mother Courage, where we paused under some shade trees, and, protected from the glare of the patriarchal eye, got to know and care for one another. It was like being in love with six other women and yourself at once. This might have occurred in any situation attributable to the planets, to chemistry, to similar beliefs or interests, but our feelings were clearly heightened by the environment Mother Courage provided.

Regular customers, many of whom became friends and lovers, talked about their joy on entering this crowded restaurant filled with women, of having women's eyes on them, hearing women's voices and women's laughter.\*\*\* Going there for dinner was just an excuse. It was

\*\*Just about everything in the kitchen was secondhand or needed repair, from the used oven next to the used counters, containing a used broken electric mixer with only one beater (a real challenge when whipping cream), to a donated clock-radio that sat on the used wine refrigerator with its collapsing shelf, to the main refrigerator, which needed defrosting every week and which had a plug that refused to stay in its socket despite tape and invectives.

\*\*\*Men did eat at Mother Courage: several were even regulars, and a man actually worked there once, quitting after two weeks. But for the most part their presence was incidental.

a refuge for the customers as well as for ourselves. It was the center of a social life, with play that often began at work and went on into the night, nights off and holidays. Whether we were at a birthday party dressed up in white aprons and carrying ladles as we danced the L.A. Bus Stop in formation, or spending Christmas Eve day on Long Island, cooking, dancing and pursuing romance, or walking to the subway after work, we enjoyed ourselves.

Two years afterwards, the bonds of friendship and support still exist. I knew at the beginning that many of the Mother Courage women would remain my friends long after Mother Courage was gone. Although that certainty made my decision to quit less difficult, it was still not easy. In fourteen months, I had reached my limits with restaurant work, and not even the glories of working in a woman-space with close friends could change that. I simply could not do that kind of work any more. More important, I was getting a clearer picture of what I *did* want to do and how I would go about doing it, and I felt an urgent need to get on with it. Working with women had been my psychic rejuvenation, and at last I felt ready to live my life the way I wanted to.

I quit in December, 1976. One year later, Mother Courage closed for Christmas and never reopened. It did not close for lack of support, nor did it close because of obsolescence. Both Jill Ward and Delores Alexander knew when they started the business that they would not want to



devote their lives to it; they expected a time would come when they, too, could not or would not continue. Changes in their lives coupled with the need to return to other projects and interests determined the closing of Mother Courage. "In 1971," said Ward after the restaurant closed, "no one seemed interested in a collective, and I wasn't sure it would work anyway. But I learned that there is just no way to mesh capitalism with feminist politics. You end up somewhere between a hard place and a brick wall. If a woman who is making \$4.00 an hour deserves \$5.00 an hour and the only place where that dollar can come from is my salary, then there is a conflict." The options were: charge the customers (other women) for it by raising prices, take it from your own salary, or deny the worker the raise she deserves. Not much room for maneuverability. Any solution through capitalism was only a partial solution and created a political problem in the process.

The successes and failures of Mother Courage could be argued for hours. Some women thought it wasn't radical enough, others believed you brought your politics with you. Some thought it too noisy, others enjoyed the clamor. Some thought it too small, others enjoyed the coziness. Some found the prices too high, others found them more reasonable than anywhere else in the area. Some thought it too out of the way, some preferred its obscure location. And on and on. If Mother Courage had a failing, I would say it was a reluctance of her owners to try any way other than the tried and true, a resistance to change and growth.

And yet all flaws and failings are diminished because she existed. Existed and thrived and was there for us for five years. She was the first, and the mother of many others like her.



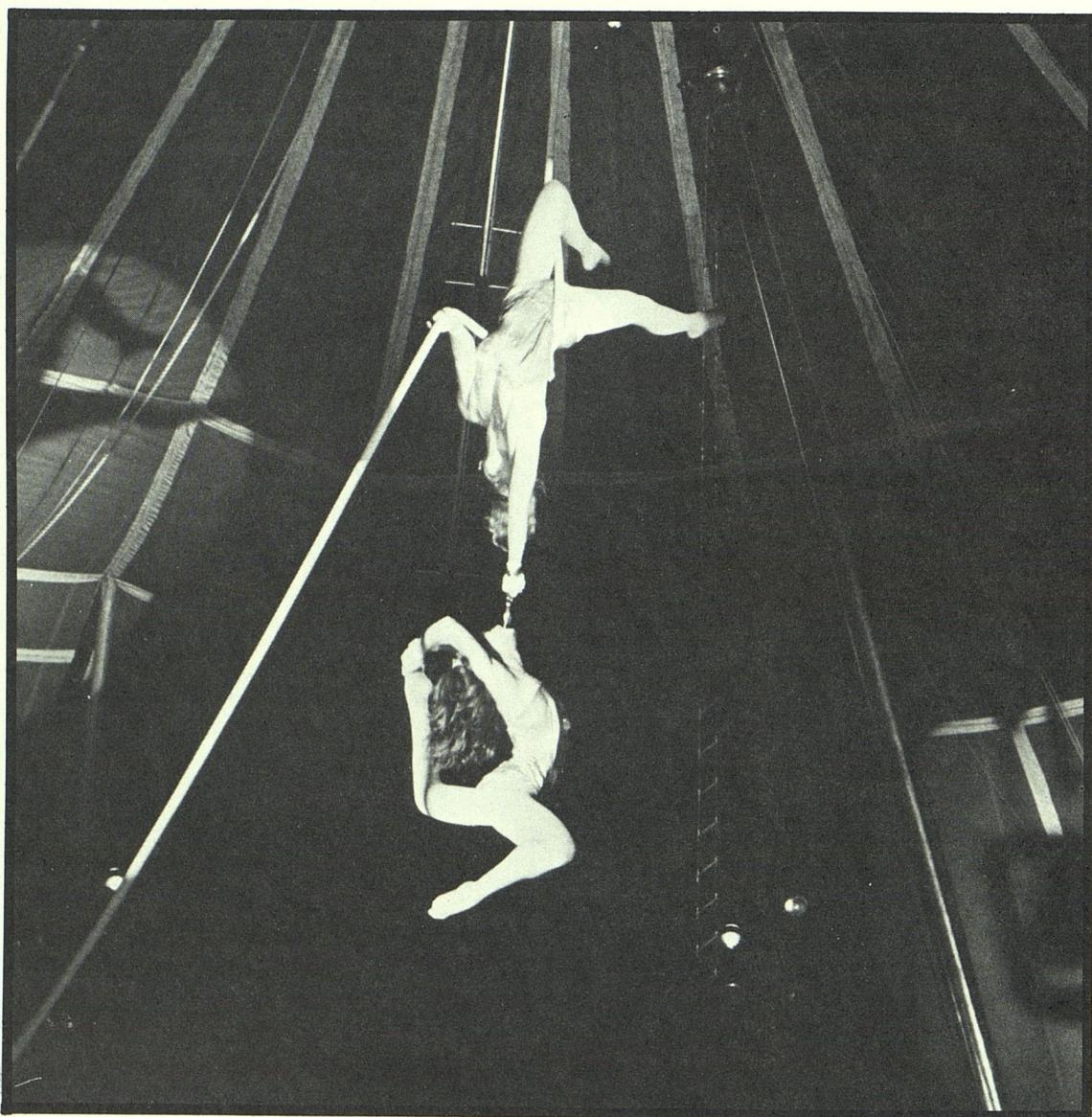
World War II WACs during gas mask drill.

New York Public Library Picture Collection

# **HANGING TOGETHER**

## **An Interview with Aerialists Donna Farina and Mia Wolff**

Jole Carliner, Jane Kaufman  
and Abby Robinson



Mia Wolff holds Donna Farina in an “iron-jaw descent down the web.”

Interviewing the aerialists was Jane's idea. A painter who makes her paintings out of bugle beads, she thought they would glitter too. Tough, glamorous show-biz types—that's what she was looking for. Although Abby didn't know what to expect, the aerialists were the final leg of the Moroccan journey she and Jane had just completed. I hadn't thought about the circus ever since I was told as a child that circuses were boring.

Jane had tracked the aerialists from the Big Apple Circus to their agent from whom she'd wrangled their home phone numbers, and then had faltered. As Abby's friend and Jane's co-editorialist, I was corraled into setting up the interview.

The Saturday of the interview, we meet at Abby's loft, at her round wooden table covered in pooltable-green felt. Abby issues her troops their final orders.

To Jane's surprise, Mia Wolff lives in a loft around the corner from Abby's. To my pleasure, the entrance to her building is in a wall stenciled: INTENSE/INTENTS/IN TENTS.

Except for the hanging trapezes, one longer than the other, we are on familiar territory, visually anyway. It looks like another artist's loft in a neighborhood of artists' lofts. Donna and Mia seat us at their (this time dark) round table. The paintings on the walls are of circuses and circus performers. Seated at the table, they are no more, no less glamorous than we are. But from a distance of thirty feet "upstairs," they can truck life's details for the focused moment. We search hard to find it, and it makes us—all five of us—very serious, and a little awkward.—J.C.

Jole Carliner worked in book publishing until a doomed union organizing drive ended her publishing love affair. She lives in New York City.

Jane Kaufman is an artist who works and lives in New York City.

Abby Robinson is a photographer who lives in New York City.

*How did you decide to become aerialists?*

Donna. It was decided pretty much for me. I had lived in Paris for three years, and over there I was doing some sculpture and dance—that was my schooling. Then, when I came back to New York, I really wanted to go into the dance world. I checked out different schools, little companies, and experimental theatres here. And I wasn't happy with anything. I just couldn't find my real place. Finally, I met up with the Mummenschanz people. They were doing acrobatics. I was trying cartwheels and stuff. And they said, "Wow! Your body is good for acrobatics; you should go into it."

When I wanted to find some acrobatic training, I was referred to Nina and Gregory, our trainers. When they saw me, they asked me right off, "Are you afraid of heights? Are you ready for hard work?" They spot you, they look at you, see how you're made, and right away, the first day, boom! They have you placed in a category because they have an extensive background in circus. They spent all their training, twenty years, in the Moscow State Circus. At first, Mia and I did some work together on the ground with Mia supporting me. That was last spring. We worked together only for a few weeks. We didn't know then we would be together because Mia had another woman partner.

It was turning into summer. I had worked with different partners, and I had fallen a few times. I already had bad knees from dancing, so my knee (suddenly) just went kaput. I thought, Oh well, it's all over. Good-bye to the circus and everything else. Afterward, when I came back to visit the circus—I was walking with a cane then—Nina saw me and said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "My knee is bad." And she said, "What about the rest of your

body?" I said, "It's fine." Nina said, "Okay, come tomorrow morning to practice." I just said, "Oh God."

The next morning I went to practice. Nina took me to this little trapeze hanging under the bandstand in the tent, put my cane down, and lifted me onto the trapeze. She told me to do a few movements. Afterward, she lowered me, gave me my cane back and said, "Okay, you start training with us; we have a new act for you."

So that's what I did. And then, one day Mia came walking in...

Mia. So now you have to know what happened before I came walking in. For me, it all started three years before. I knew Nina and Gregory socially before I ever worked with them.

One day, Gregory called me up and said, "We will teach you, you and Elaine" (my other partner). And I said, "Oh yeah?" He said, "Yes. We will teach you. Come." I'd never done any circus acrobatics. I'd done some mime, some clowning kind of acrobatics—falling, some handstands, handsprings, things like that. I'd tried to do some dance, but that was a failure.

So me and Elaine show up. They stuck her on my shoulders and she wobbled around, almost fell over. They started to train us to do an adagio act for the Big Apple Circus last year, but Elaine and Gregory didn't get along. The whole thing fell apart. And then that's when I met Donna.

Nina and Gregory wanted me to work with Donna, but I didn't want to drop Elaine. I tried to work with both of them, and that didn't work. You can't have two, not when you're working that hard. I didn't speak to Nina and Gregory for all of last summer. I worked on the street with Elaine. We used to do hand-to-hand work: she would do handstands, stand on my head and other things



Abby Robinson

like that. We worked in parks, passed the hat, and we even got good enough to work on the sidewalk. Finally, that dissolved.

Then, for about three months, I was going to give up the circus and be a painter. To hell with clowning, I'm going back to canvas. And I went back to it. Then, all of a sudden, I really missed the circus. I knew Nina and Gregory were teaching at Carmine Street, so I got up all my nerve. To face Gregory after you've not spoken to him and had a big fight with him took a lot of nerve for me. I went back and I walked in, looked around, saw Donna up on the trapeze and people at work. I went up to Gregory and said, "I want to learn trapeze." He said, "You will never have solo act, you must have partner." He looked at Donna and back to me and said, "Maybe Donna." So I went home and called Donna up

and said, "You want to work together?" I didn't tell Gregory. Then later Gregory called up and said, "I have an act for you, come in."

And we started working together. It was about the beginning of January. Next thing we knew, we were up thirty feet in the air, performing.

*Did you always have a love for the circus?*

*Mia.* Oh, yeah. I did acrobatics and some gymnastics in high school, and I used to climb a lot of trees when I was a kid. I was a tomboy. I never performed, but I wanted to. In high school I was too afraid, so I became a hippy instead.

The minute I got out of college, though, I decided I was going to be a dancer, and I went off to Utah for a six-week summer dance thing. I ended up in a comedy routine there, instead of a dance piece. It was the

one funny dance piece, right? Where I came out on roller skates, screamed, banged cymbals and threw zucchini across the stage. I could see that dance wasn't for me. I did acrobatics, sort of, and I painted. And then Nina and Gregory showed up and fulfilled all the things that hadn't been fulfilled.

*Nina and Gregory taught both of you how to work together in a trapeze act?*

*Mia.* They taught us everything.

*You speak about trapeze work so casually, as if the question, "Do you want to go up on a trapeze?" were an everyday one.*

*Mia.* I wasn't afraid until we went up high, and then I was petrified.

*How high is high?*

*Mia.* In the circus this summer, we worked at thirty feet. At the Brooklyn Academy of Music, we looked down on the top row.

*You work with nets, I assume.*

*Donna.* No.

*NO? Did you learn on the ground first?*

*Mia.* You start on a little trapeze. Then we suddenly went up to about twenty-four feet.

*Donna.* At the Cathedral, we'd have one trapeze at, say, thirteen, fifteen feet, and the other around twenty-seven feet. We would have a mat underneath us at the low one and would practice new tricks on that, so if I fell, I'd just go onto the mat and there'd be no problem. Then when we felt we were strong enough down below, we'd take it "upstairs." Nina and Gregory say "upstairs." That's because they're Russian. Instead of saying, "Go up on the high one," they just say, "Okay, upstairs now..." So we'd go upstairs and take the tricks up there. And that's how it would be.

What does the catcher do, specifically?

Mia. I hang by my knees and I hold onto Donna.

That's making it sound very simple. You do more than that.

Mia. Well, just literally, that's what I do. The act has basically three and a half parts.

Donna. We open with both of us hanging from the double trapeze by one knee, touching our feet to the back of our heads. Then we do some splits in the air.

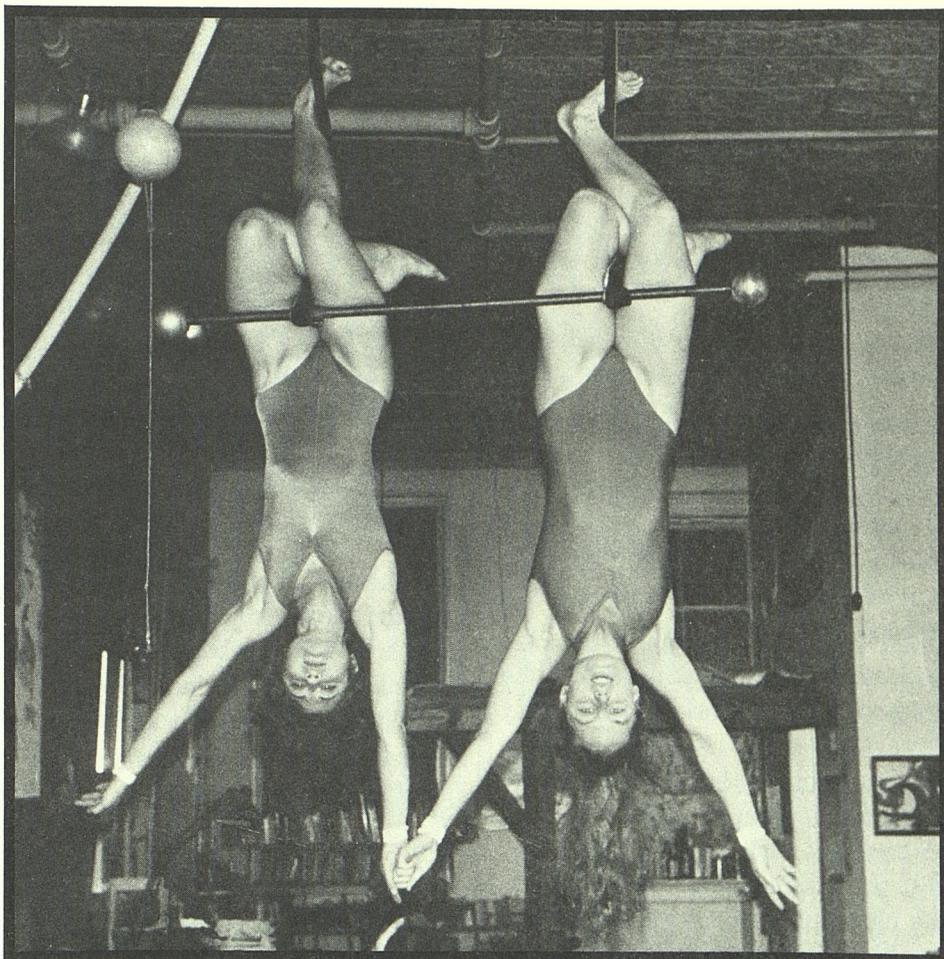
Mia. We do a thing where I'm hanging by my knees, and Donna lowers her legs to me. She lets go of the rope and we swing out. Then, we do something called corbetts, which are hand-foot exchanges. We do a series of these, and then we do something called The Angel. Then, we do the one-arm. The third part of the act, Donna climbs up, and we use the ring. She does a heelcatch and hangs by her heels. After the ring comes the finale, which is a spin. We're locked together, arms around each other's pelvis, spinning around.

Why were you chosen to do the holding? Is it your musculature? Your arms? What?

Mia. I got really strong last summer doing adagio. Then I worked ring crew, hammering stakes in with a sledgehammer. My upper body got very strong. The thing I had to train most was not my arms, but my legs, because your hamstrings have to be strong so you don't fall off the bar. You're holding not only yourself, but somebody else—a total of about 220 pounds.

So there's a great deal of stress and weight right down onto your calves. Behind the knees, right?

Mia. Yes. My calves used to bleed. It was awful for a while, but they finally healed over and got strong.



Abby Robinson

How much do you weigh?

Mia. I don't know, somewhere between 120 and 125.

Donna. A hundred, but sometimes I'm a little up and sometimes, a little down. Right now, I'm probably a little up.

Mia. She's just the right weight.

How old are you?

Mia. Twenty-seven.

Donna. Twenty-four.

How much did you have to practice to learn to do this?

Mia. Oh, we worked five days a week—some days two hours, some days four or five.

Donna. We would do this in the morning, then run to our jobs.

What kind of jobs did you have?

Mia. I worked in a bakery, rolling

croissants on Grand Street.

Donna. And I was in a hat-check room in an Italian restaurant.

Mia. Anything I could get.

Donna. I did some modeling. I did all sorts of things.

Are you close friends, outside of working together?

Mia and Donna. Now we are!

Mia. I didn't know anything about Donna until we started working together.

Donna. We had good feelings, but we never went out together. We just would see each other in passing on the street.

When you started working together, did your relationship change?

Donna. We were working together every day. She would drop me and say, "I'm sorry." I would kick her in

the face and apologize. I was aching so badly in the beginning, my hands would rip open, I'd be dying! Afterward, we would go home and each go our own way. Still, when you're with someone so long... Finally, when we started getting a good grip on things, we had more time to just be with each other.

*Mia.* When you're up thirty feet in the air, you get to know someone!

*Donna.* Even before we were really good friends, I had a lot of trust in Mia. I just put an enormous amount of confidence in you—even more than you had in yourself. Because that one time we fell, I was sure we weren't going to fall.

*Mia.* She went up thirty feet in the air and wasn't afraid at all. Every day when I got up, I'd want to throw up, because I knew I had to go to practice. It was terrible. It didn't matter what trick I learned, I was still scared. You can teach anyone the physical stuff, but you've got to be able to be right there if something goes wrong. Like the times when we've been performing, and I only grabbed one of her hands instead of both.

*Donna.* That's the thing. She keeps her mind up there.

*Mia.* You have to not freak out. You have to say, "Okay, now we'll just keep going." The other day, the corbett didn't work. I whispered to Donna, "Do it again."

*Donna.* That's another reason why we fit our parts well. She's up there, she's together, she has control. But I'm pretty much carefree. Gregory can tell me to do just about anything. He might say, "Okay, jump backward, stand on your head." I'd just try it without thinking. It makes a good team because you have a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

*Mia.* If a mistake happens, she can't compensate for it. I have to, because



Abby Robinson

I'm the one that's on the bar. She manipulates her body, but I manipulate her in the air. I have to go with her tempo, and if something doesn't go right, I have to use muscle to compensate for it.

*So, you're responsible for both of you.*

*Mia.* In a sense Donna is, too. If she does something completely ridiculous, it's a real bummer. It works both ways.

*Have you ever lost your grip?*

*Mia.* Once we fell off. When we're performing, we use a cable belt for the hand-to-hand and the ring, but my instinct is not to let go of her, even if I fell off the bar.

*Donna.* In the beginning, we would just practice one section, then another section, but we never ever put the whole thing together. All of a sudden, we had some benefit to do and our trainers said, "Okay, girls, let's try it in front of a crowd." It was our first performance.

*Mia.* It's different to do these things in front of a crowd, because the strain builds up.

*Donna.* The adrenalin builds up too, and it wastes your energy.

*Mia.* We were in the ring part of the act, and I fell off.

*Donna.* I did the heelcatch; it was almost over.

*Mia.* And we just fell off! She had a black eye! I wasn't even afraid of falling; I was just worried it was going to mess up the act.

*Donna.* After that, our trainer came up to us and said, "No blood, no blood. Okay, climb the ladder and finish." So we did, and we were stunned. Got up, climbed the ladder, and did that thing where we spin around.

*Mia.* We spun around so many times, Gregory kept saying, "You can stop now, you can stop now!"

*Do you check your rigging yourselves?*

*Mia.* Every day, every place we go. After the spin, Donna does the iron jaw where she hangs by her teeth.

*What's the strap? Leather?*

*Mia.* Yeah, leather. It's made to fit her mouth.

*Donna.* People always say, "Your teeth!" but it's not your teeth, it's your neck. That's the only place I've ever had pain, really. My fillings are falling out of my teeth now. My God, my mother! She doesn't know about this. When I was a kid, I had orthodontic work, and if she knew I was hanging by my teeth, she would just see thousands of dollars going down the drain. In fact, my fillings are just falling out, so I have to go to the dentist, but I'm afraid to tell him I do this.

*Mia.* Why don't you go to a different dentist? I have one around the corner. Maybe he can make something for you like a brace that you wear just to keep your teeth in a certain position while you're hanging, but then you couldn't smile.

*Traditionally, I believe, there's usually a man in trapeze acts, as a catcher. Could you talk about what's*

involved in the differences of working with women—just the two of you together—as opposed to working with a man?

*Mia.* I think it's pretty unique. Usually, it's a man and a woman. The man does what I do.

*Donna.* I have never seen a man doing double trapeze. I've seen men in cradles, I've seen men on perches, but I haven't seen any men doing what we're doing.

*Mia.* I saw one picture of a woman hanging by her knees holding a guy, but I never saw a woman holding a woman like we do.

*What's unique about working with another woman?*

*Donna.* Audiences, and people in general, believe that a woman would never be strong enough to hold another woman.

*Mia.* I don't think it's strange, because I'm doing it. I'm in the middle of it, and I think, "This is what I do." I like working with women. I've never worked with a man in the circus. I never had a male partner, so I don't know what that's like, but when you work with someone, you work with them. It's what you do. What's weird is the way people react. It's like when I drove a truck for U.P.S. I worked for the circus recently driving a truck. People react very strangely. "Hey, baby, can you handle it?" Even the women freak out, and that, to me, is what's strange. There are lots of strong women—all the women in the circus are strong. That's just the way it is.

*Do you work at all with the element of femaleness?*

*Mia.* The whole act is feminine. The opening is all splits and things you're not going to get a guy to go up there and do. It's an image: you wear lots of makeup and glitter; you wear costumes that are cut way up in the

back. To me, it's very sexy. I don't mind it. On a very crass level, the circus is about sex and death: "Are they going to fall? How scary is it going to get?" And it's also about being attractive. I don't mind being real "traditional female." I'm doing something which I always thought was amazing. I always wanted to be really strong. I didn't like the idea of being female and being weak. It's nice, you're both things. You don't lose your sex by doing this.

*Who does your costumes?*

*Mia.* We designed them and made them ourselves.

*Donna.* We got into it little by little. At first Mia didn't wear any earrings because I used to kick them out every so often. Gradually we started adding on. The earrings got bigger, the eye makeup got more dramatic. By the end of the season, we were full-fledged circus women.

*Mia.* I always had this desire when I was a kid to wear things that glittered, but it was gauche. You didn't do it. And now, in the circus, it's legitimate. As a matter of fact, you're supposed to do it. So I feel I'm allowed to do what I always wanted to do, which is not only to be strong, but to get dressed up: makeup, sparkling earrings, rhinestones.

*Donna.* Another thing that happened with all the women in the circus—we would all change in one trolley car—all of us would get our periods around the same time, within days of each other every woman involved in the show would have her period.

*Where have you performed?*

*Mia.* We performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music last Easter with the Big Apple Circus. We gave some benefit performances, always with the Big Apple Circus because Nina and Gregory were affiliated with it.

*Donna.* The circus season ended, but

now the director might find some things for us to do, or make up little package deals. But we're pretty much on our own now to find work for the coming year.

*Mia.* We want to go back into training. There are more things to learn. The act isn't really finished.

*Do you have an agent?*

*Mia.* Not yet.

*Donna.* That's what we need next. We're working on that, getting together pictures and a brochure.

*How much did you perform?*

*Mia.* Ten shows a week.

*Donna.* Two shows a day. Exhausting, especially during the hot spell. The top of the tent is always ten degrees hotter than down below. When we climbed the ladder, every rung would be steaming hot. The ring was so hot, Mia's hands got burned from holding it.

*How does your personal relationship affect the act? And how does your working relationship affect you socially?*

*Donna.* If ever one of us is really down and bummed out, it always works out that the other one pulls her through. We hold each other together. For the most part, we sense each other's moods so well, so far.

*So you're emotionally very supportive of each other?*

*Mia.* We have to be.

*Donna.* Once, we both went up there feeling down. It was terrible, but we did a good show. In spite of it, we did a great show.

*So, in a sense, your work allows you to forget a lot of the problems of your life?*

*Mia.* You have to leave it behind.

*Donna.* You have to leave your troubles behind the curtains.

# FRANCE

## Nancy Safford

From January, 1976 to April, 1977, I lived on a farm in the Limousin region of France, photographing whatever traces might be left of peasant life. While I lived on the farm, I found traces of the past in the lives of the old farmers who had stayed behind when the younger generation went off to work in the cities. They remain, working the same land in much the same manner as their ancestors.

*Me? I've always worked the land. I've never been happy just sitting in front of the fire; there's always something to do, digging up the torpinambours or bringing in the bedding for the cows. I stay in front of the fire only when it snows. In the summer, we have to bring in the hay or cut the wheat. I've always liked doing that.*

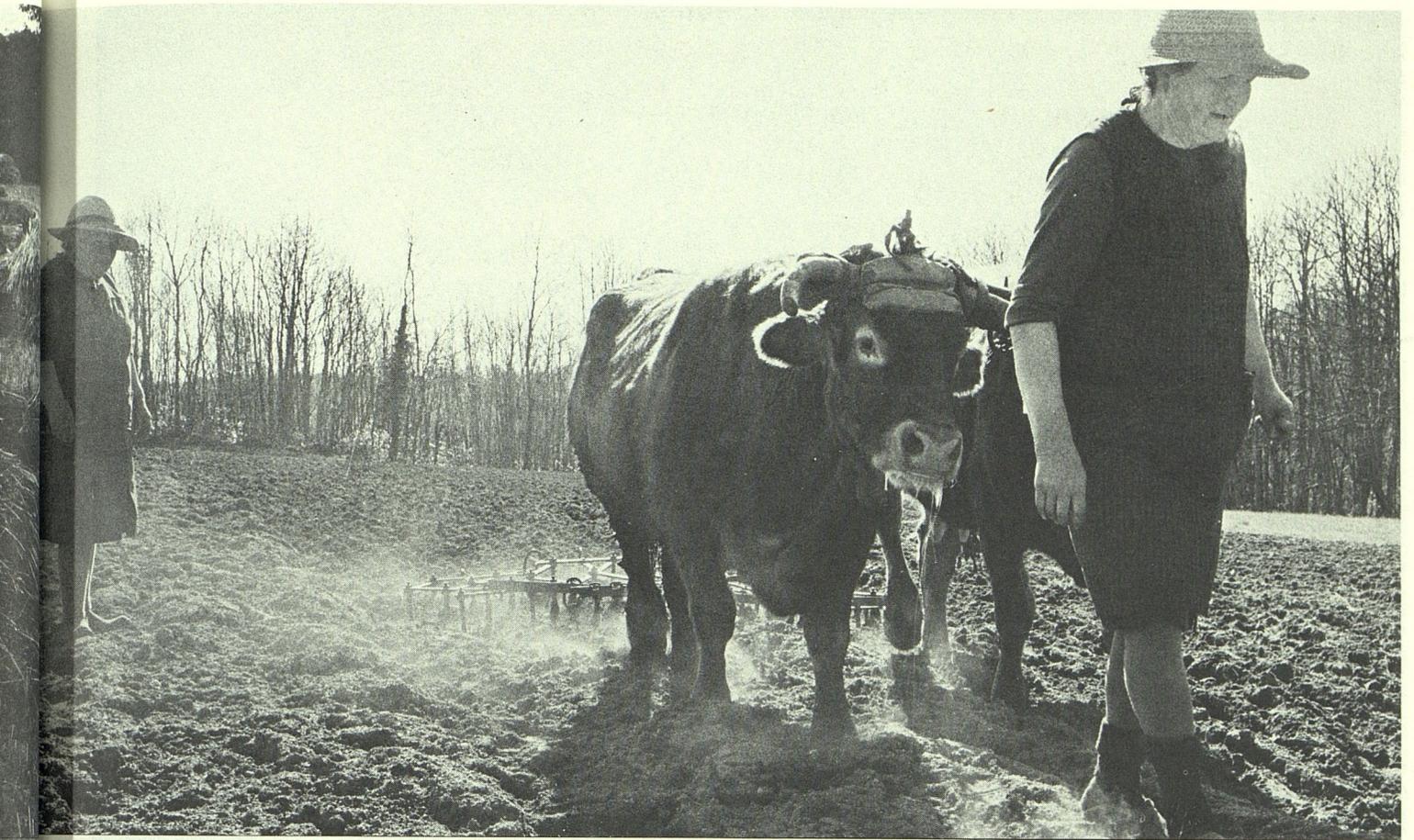
—An 86-year-old peasant woman.  
Women have always been very important on the land because they can do the same work as the men. If there is something to be done and one is busy, the other just does it; there is no importance as to who does what.

—A peasant man.

There were two sisters, neither of whom ever married. They had lived their entire lives together in the same house, situated at the outskirts of a tiny village. They worked their land together; one tended the cows, the other the sheep. They could usually be found in a pasture, knitting as they watched their flocks. In the spring, they ploughed the fields with a team of oxen; one sister guided while the other followed behind with the plow. Their lives were regulated by the cycles of the land and the demanding work of each season.

Nancy Safford has taught photography at the Children's Art Carnival in Harlem for two years. The photographs here are from a book that will be published in Spring, 1980.





Nancy Safford

## OPPOSITES THAT BLEED ONE INTO THE OTHER OR COLLIDE

Karen Brodine

gee this looks like a nice place to work  
it's a pleasant office  
bright, with plants hanging  
relaxed, with radios all over  
there's a coffee machine for everyone  
a Christmas bonus  
high ceilings, big windows,

in which she does overtime  
in which she is considered a bitch  
in which we conspire, whispering  
a sign reads, "use only four scoops"  
some of us have to ask for raises  
no fans to cool us

sometimes there's free booze on Friday afternoons

he said, this is a big opportunity, Iris, you could go far in the basement  
he said, what's the matter with \$2.75 an hour  
he said, I just can't afford a dental plan

the boss is cooking dinner for us all, grinning thru his good white teeth  
when I turn around, a spoiled chicken carcass falls on my head  
at lunch I sit with other office workers sunning on a small scrap  
of sidewalk

it's so nice to work in the arts  
it's so laid-back we don't have to dress up  
& they don't even mind gays working here  
her supervisor said she was only half a woman

sometimes the boss is gone on Fridays to his mountain place in Tahoe  
sometimes I am gone on Fridays to my place on 29th, lying down, head throbbing

the boss worked his way up  
one of those family operations  
he treats his daughters like workers and his son like a son.  
he said what he really loves is to work at the drawing board  
but "someone has to do boring administrative work."

I depend on the most everyday exchanges of  
tenderness—the shawl a woman pulls around her friend's shoulders  
as they rush back to work—the clerk who raises his eyebrows  
and says, "nice day out, huh. if you're out."

and leaning out the window, I watch the small fist of a three-month strike  
up the street flowering into bright turning signs and shouting people, circling, circling

and staring up the street, I see hundreds of green streetcars stopped now backed  
up stock-still unbudging for blocks, a disruption in service, a stoppage, a dis-  
order. a breakdown.

and people streaming out of the cars like water—

we could shut this city down.

Karen Brodine lives in San Francisco.



Domestic Workers Association, May 19-22, 1938. Chicago. Miss Robinson and group of workers.

Karen Leicher

# Minimum

**W**hen you buy a new sweater and you get it home and you take it out of its little plastic bag, do you see how neatly it is folded, how precisely enclosed in its casing? If you stop to think, do you imagine that some marvelous noisy machine folds sweater after sweater, shirt after shirt, thrusting them into the waiting bags; or that sheets of plastic come hurtling out of the equipment, flying about and encircling the garments, rolls of plastic cut off and heat-sealed, as neatly as sausages in a packing plant?

If you've thought about this, if you have imagined such a machine, then you have guessed wrong. Women fold each shirt and sweater and carefully slip them into plastic bags and seal them. All day long.

The work is boring, mindless and surprisingly tiring. Eight hours a day you take a sweater, lay it face down on a flat surface, position a piece of cardboard the same size as the plastic bag on the shoulders of the sweater, fold the sides and sleeves onto the cardboard, bring the bottom of the sweater up to meet the shoulders, slip out the cardboard without disturbing the arrangement and carefully slide the folded sweater into

the plastic bag. It is easy at first. After about two hours, the muscles of your shoulder and upper arm begin to ache, on your right side if you are right-handed.

You don't think about having to do it all day. In the morning, you think about doing it until lunchtime, and after lunch, you do it until it is time to go home. If you're lucky, you can listen to the radio while you work. At home that night, your back aches and you are too tired to do anything.

This is unskilled labor. Your back and shoulders and arms earn the minimum wage, two dollars and sixty-five cents an hour. From nine to six with an hour for lunch, that's a hundred and six dollars a week, before deductions.

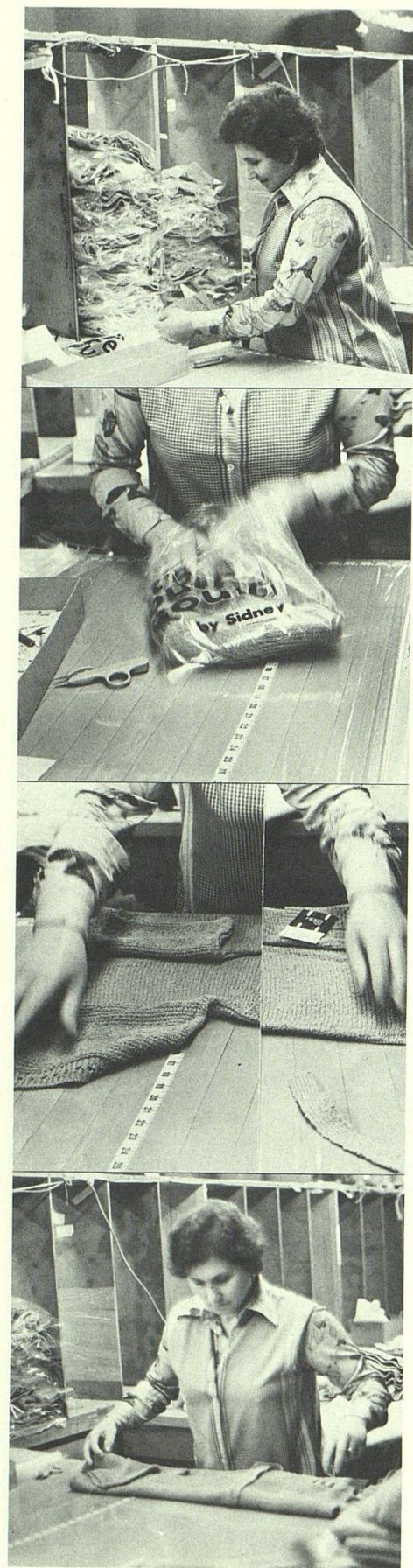
A chimpanzee could do this job, but you can't get a chimp to do anything so boring for more than a few minutes. She would start clowning, throwing the sweaters around. Human beings are not so petulant.

\* \* \*

It is the middle of July, a heat wave, but the fall-winter orders must be filled. The company has put me on for a couple of weeks. The front offices are air-conditioned: the computer cannot work in the heat. But in the back we can and we do.

The plastic bags stick to our hands. For some reason, when you are in a hot room and you put your hand into a plastic bag, it is difficult

Karen Leicher is a cost control analyst for an architectural interior design firm in New York City. Her mother makes all of her sweaters.



# Snapshot: Wage

to breathe until you take your hand out. I don't know why. We surreptitiously wipe our hands on the dark sweaters and try to keep the light ones clean. When you buy a dark sweater, it is a good bet that someone has wiped her hands on it.

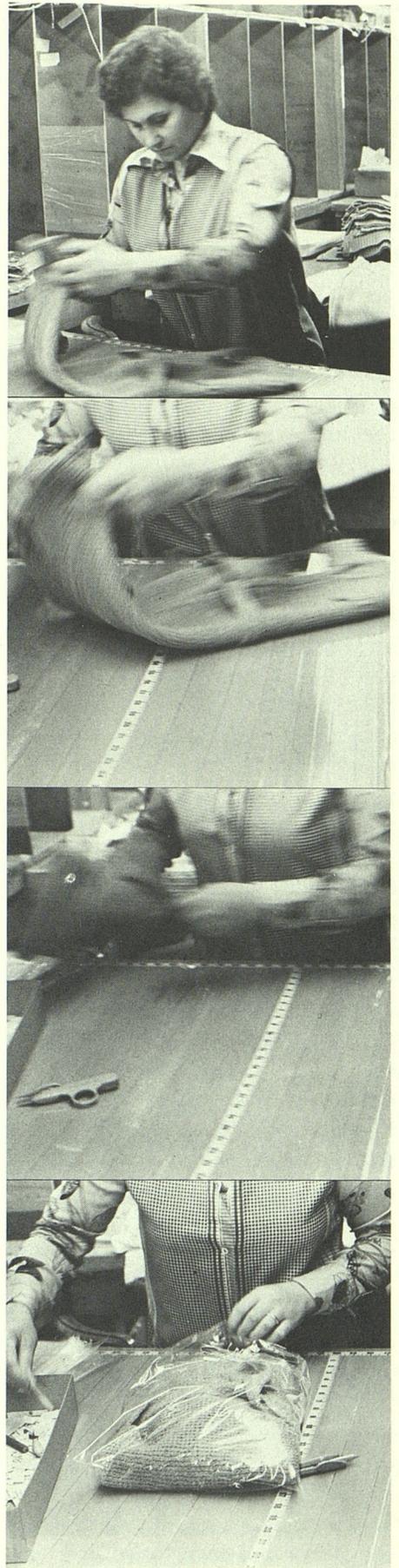
This is New York, and the women who work here in the back room are Spanish. Of the eight, one is Puerto Rican and the rest are from Central and South America. Most of them have grown children, and when the pay phone rings, it is often a grandchild needing instruction in some household task. The women are not supposed to talk on the telephone unless it is lunchtime or coffee break (fifteen minutes in the morning and in the afternoon). If one of the bosses is in the back when the pay phone rings, no one answers it. The women keep working, casting anxious glances toward the telephone. If the boss is in a good mood, he will ignore the ringing. If he is in a bad mood, he will answer the phone, tell the person not to call again, and scold the worker whom the call is for. Sometimes the pay phone is busy throughout the break, and if one of the women has to make a call, she tries to sneak it in afterward. The other women act as lookouts during this theft of company time.

The owner's father started the company fifty years ago and has turned it over to him. Since both

father and son are called "Mister," the women distinguish between them by referring to the father as "the Old Man." They feel sorry for him because his son does not show him more respect. The Old Man likes to come into the back; the women are nervous when he is there. Of the four bosses, the meanest are the owner's wife and his stepmother, the Old Man's wife. They will not speak a word of Spanish and seem uncomfortable and resentful around the women in the back.

I speak Spanish and English with the women—only one of them cannot speak English at all—and they are amused by my fractured idioms. During the breaks they teach me new words, and cross-examine me in Spanish about my life and family. I tell them, truthfully, that although this is a temporary job, I am not going to college in the fall. I do not tell them that I have already graduated.

The "break room" is the size of a walk-in closet. There are three chairs, battered cast-offs from the front office, and a hot plate. Carmen makes coffee every morning and afternoon. She is from Venezuela and she makes the coffee strong and delicious. The women chip in to buy cans of coffee; the office supplies disposable cups. There is also a vending machine for soda, which the women pronounce, softly, "so-thah," but it is thirty-five cents a can. When



the women want a cold drink, they go to the water fountain.

The women take turns bringing in homemade pastries for the morning break. They eat enormously, ladling sugar into their coffee. When I think it is my turn, I shamefacedly come in with a package of store-bought cookies. The women say they are delicious, but a third of the bag is left at the end of the afternoon, and Carmen insists that I take it home. There is no place to leave it overnight that is secure from the cockroaches.

The people who work in the back are divided by age, gender, marital status and race. The stockboys who work in the shipping department are young and single and black, except for Rafael, a young Puerto Rican who is married and has two small children. He works very fast and hard. The other stockboys make fun of him and tell him that he shouldn't knock himself out because he'll never get promoted anyway. I think they are right.

Except for Rafael, none of the stockboys socializes with the women. During the breaks, everyone leans against the walls in the tiny break room and drinks coffee, but the men and the women remain courteous and uninterested in each other. All the men except Rafael go out for lunch; the women bring lunch from home and eat it in the break room. I go outside during lunchtime and walk around the hot streets to clear my head. I tell the women I am eating out so that they won't share their lunches with me. They think it is a terribly expensive habit, but that a young woman with no family to support can afford it.

The workers and the bosses are suspicious of each other. Neither group thinks the other works very hard. More than they resent the bosses, the people in the back resent the clerks and secretaries and com-

puter operators who work in the air-conditioned office. The mysterious paperwork looks like much less work to them than lifting heavy cartons, and the women in the back think that working a switchboard would be a pleasant enough job—if one could write and spell and speak English without a thick accent. If they knew that certain foreign accents are well thought of in the New York marketplace, they would be very surprised.

The women's regular job is not folding and bagging sweaters. This is a special rush job for an important and irate customer, and when it is finished, when five thousand sweaters have been bagged and boxed and are ready to ship, I will be let go. The sweaters were returned to the com-



Lyn Blumenthal & Kate Horsfield

pany because they had been sloppily folded by their manufacturer, and the customer will accept them, albeit late, if they are neatly re-folded and delivered by the first week of August. This company does not manufacture anything—it orders sweaters and shirts from many different factories, most of them foreign, and distributes the garments from its New York office.

The garments are often ordered before the company knows which customer will buy them, for you have to allow plenty of delivery time if you want things made cheaply by foreign labor. The women who work in the back have been hired to sew store labels into the garments. There is an entire metal bookcase filled with boxes of store labels, some of them

very classy, and the women sit and sew the coveted silken labels into the sweaters and shirts. Half of them are doing this while the others refold the disputed sweaters. It takes about half a minute to sew each label on. They open each plastic bag, sneak their hands into it, pull out the inside of the back of the neck opening and secure the precious label with a few tiny stitches. Some garments have been returned because they were sized incorrectly. For these, they must carefully snip out the old size label and sew in the right one. It is painstaking handwork, hard on the eyes. The women are not young. Many of them wear eyeglasses when they do this work, old-fashioned eyeglasses that make them look satirically intellectual as they hunch over the garments.

When damaged garments are returned by the stores, the women are permitted to buy them for two dollars apiece. They are allowed to look through the damaged garments during the breaks and during lunchtime. They give the money, in cash, to the Old Man.

The owner's wife tells me that it is unusually nice of the company to let its employees buy these damaged goods, and that she is sure the women sell them to their neighbors at a much higher price. One of the clerks in the front office tells me that when the company has to sell them to a jobber, the jobber pays much less. I have no way of knowing who is telling the truth.

We do different things for money, most of us, and folding sweaters is not the most unpleasant thing I have done. It is not the hardest work I have done, nor the loneliest.

I would never want to do it again, though, and at every summer's end, when I see the new sweaters stacked in the department stores, I think of the women in the back, and I wish them well.



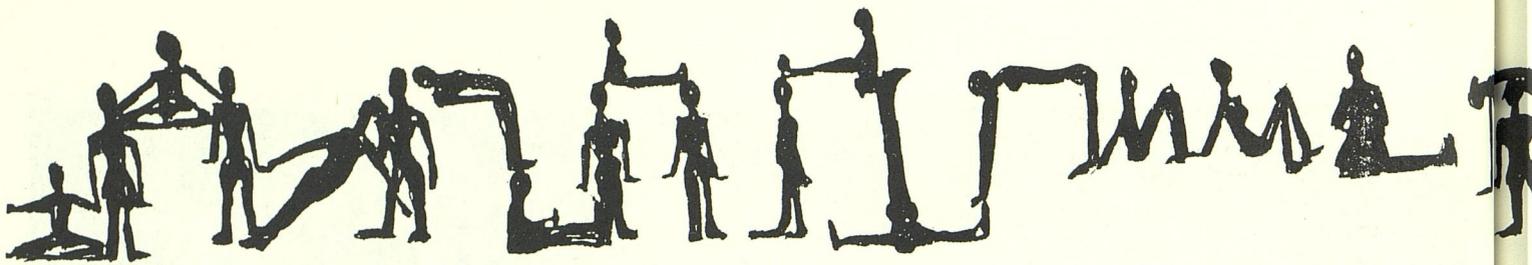
Farm Labor Union, Galena Unit No. 26. Galena, Kansas.

New York Public Library Picture Collection



New York Public Library Picture Collection

Quebec feminists demonstrate for "Abortion in Sanitary Conditions" and ask, "If Trudeau were pregnant, would he accept charlatans?"



# WOMEN WORKING WITH WOMEN

Carol Ascher

Women working with women. The idea calls up pleasure, a sense of expectation . . . and anxiety. Right now more anxiety. Also rage, sadness, a feeling of impotence. I have recently resigned as co-ordinator of a women's studies program.

Twice in my year and a half at the job, I used my scant earnings to see a psychotherapist, I was so confused and miserable. At one point, I was paralyzed for several weeks with kidney stones, whose excruciating pain I always related to the job. I have gone, off and on, to a chiropractor to seek relief from tension in my neck and shoulders and a feeling that someone has driven a nail beneath my left shoulder blade. The pain is mental and physical both, a sign, I suppose, of some perverse form of integration.

And yet I found pleasure and satisfaction in the job, at times more of both than I have ever before experienced in any paid work. I remember a friend one day watching me surrounded by women students. "You were so in your element," she said afterwards, almost wistfully. "You seemed to have made such a place for yourself." It was more than that I had made myself a place: at moments I really felt I had found it at last. I, who had felt uncomfortable and alienated in a variety of jobs. And there were moments, days, when I liked—yes loved—each of the

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Carol Ascher has written until now under the name Carol Lopate. She earns her living as a freelance writer in New York.

women teachers and students I worked with. Moments and days, too, when I felt they loved me. What then threw me into anguish from my kidneys to my neck and brain?

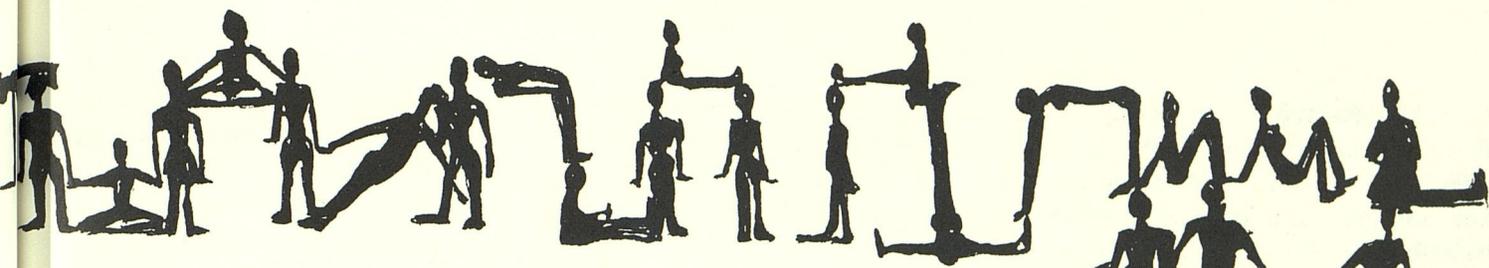
To begin at the beginning, although trained to be a college teacher, I had decided not to teach when I took this job. At the time, I had committed myself to writing. This meant more than writing as an adjunct to the intense intellectual commitment it takes to teach well. I had done that, and it didn't work. I wanted my evenings to read, think and write what I wished.

But taking an organizing/administrating job was not merely the result of a wish to write. I had always been ambivalent about a life in the university. I had returned to graduate school in the late '60s, after six years of scraping together a living as a freelance editor and writer. With the universities a battleground of revolutionaries, I had a more than healthy sense of the ignobility of my project. I remember telling people that, with all the chaos in my life and around me, I needed to put myself in an institution: a university seemed a safer alternative than a mental hospital. One could get out more easily. Perhaps because of the period in which I returned to graduate school, I avoided learning most of the initiating professional instruction that is available to students. Instead, I formed a little enclave with other graduate students in which we guarded our old lifestyles, our rad-

ical critiques and our naïveté about the ways of the university.

One experience from the period must have influenced my sense of academia. However, it did not serve as a conscious warning when I took the women's studies job.

*MEMORY: A number of women in anthropology, my discipline, meet to talk about ourselves and our work. It is 1971, the early period of feminism. We are using the consciousness-raising format. The women in the group include graduate students, women with recent Ph.D.'s working part-time as adjuncts and women with full-time positions in various schools around the city. (Some of the graduate students actually work under the women with full-time positions.) The meetings are powerful. We say out loud words like "Marxism" and "feminism" and "class," that we have never said out loud before. Remember, this is 1971. And yet, over the weeks I begin to notice a pattern. The graduate students shy away from bringing up certain problems which would reflect their difficulties with their women teachers. They tell us these problems as we stand outside in twos and threes in the cold wintery nights after the meetings. On the other side, the full-time teachers pass when we go around the circle speaking about our private lives. They do not allow whatever pain or happiness they live through at home to become part of the common experience. Their decorum reminds us of their higher status.*



# IN THE UNIVERSITY

Between this experience and my women's studies job, I had had several years of teaching in colleges all over New York City. But because of my ambivalence, I had never wanted or gotten a full-time academic job. When I heard about the job opening for a co-ordinator of women's studies, I felt almost euphoric about the prospect of integrating my feminism and my need to earn money. I must admit, I didn't clearly think out how I would work out my particular brand of socialist/anarchist/feminist ideals in a college setting. I had no scheme of priorities for making compromises, no anticipation of how I would be called upon to give here and there, and when that happened, where I would choose to give, and where not. If I had been asked, I would have said that I hoped the job would give me a chance to be in the university, but not of it. That, in fact, turned out to be how it was, only not in the way I had hoped. And it was often quite painful.

The co-ordinator of women's studies in the college where I worked was a three-day-a-week job. I was in charge of planning discussions, study groups, films, workshops and conferences. Much of my time was spent with students, much with teachers both in and outside of women's studies. There was a good deal of paper work too: writing to interested students, to teachers in other colleges trying to set up their own programs, to women all over seeking advice. A part of my func-

tion could be seen as promotional: creating a good impression of women's studies and feminism among those who might not be convinced. A part might be viewed as cohesive: providing the personal and political energy to make faculty and students, who might otherwise go their own various ways, come together.

One element of the university I had never seriously considered is its exaggerated reproduction of capitalist society's division between mental and physical labor. Faculty are mental workers—in fact, workers is not a word most would comfortably apply to themselves. Anyone who does not teach—administrators, secretaries, cafeteria help, buildings and grounds people—becomes cast out of the heavens of mental pursuit. It matters not an iota what one does in one's free time. And it matters only a little with what creativity and intelligence one accomplishes one's job. A person who answers correspondence, plans activities, talks to people, keeps the wheels of a program greased—such was the content of my job—is in this context a physical laborer.

On the surface, women faculty, feminists included, were no different than their male colleagues: they lamented with pleasure their ineptitude for administration. The realm of "ideas" was so far abstracted from the concrete details of everyday life that, outside of their grudging participation in various decision-making committees on campus, any

routine needed to keep a program flowing was regarded with suspicion. The college, of course, reinforced this Talmudic shame in doing any tasks of daily life. Yet the women may have had a slightly different motivation than the men. Perhaps they saw a connection between the mental and physical division of labor in the work world and the productive-reproductive division between men and women in the traditional nuclear family. Perhaps any service or maintenance function is too close to the home life that, as feminists, they had learned to stiffen themselves against. I think now that it was this very fear among women faculty of involving themselves in administrative details that initially led to the creation of a job of women's studies co-ordinator, unconnected to any academic post.

A PETTY GRIEVANCE: Recently at a meeting having nothing to do with women's studies, a teacher in our program told me that another teacher in women's studies was seriously



Ink drawing by Nancy Azara

AZARA  
1988

ill. She suggested we collect money to send flowers, which I thought a nice idea. But then she dipped into her handbag and handed me her contribution. I was aghast. I had come to the meeting as an equal—I thought. Was I being overly sensitive? Surely, I wanted the flowers sent. I berated myself that I was too quick to define something as a service function and then became aggravated at having to do it. Yet again and again in the year and a half, I had had the sense of being the housewife for the program. Despite my working with an all-female group, the fact that certain tasks were often either forgotten by faculty members or obviously shunned made me feel that I was servicing a number of husbands.

I do not mean to imply that no one else ever collected money for flowers, brewed coffee, or sat at the typewriter. Women often asked me if I needed help carrying food to our women's studies events. And I was always grateful. Yet the very question, "Do you need help?" reproduced the male-female roles of the nuclear family.

Nor do I mean to imply that all women faculty in the program were equal and I was the only one with an inferior status. In fact, there was a clear hierarchy within the faculty itself. And I had a secretary to whom I could assign all tasks beneath my dignity. How exquisite a system!

But the differences in status among the women teachers, the power some women had over others as senior faculty members, able to influence appointments, became a source of great pain and conflict for me. This hierarchy contributed to perpetual obfuscations of honesty, underground alliances and convoluted agendas among women who, overtly, were trying to work together in an egalitarian feminist manner. Group decisions based on mutual

honesty seemed the hardest thing in the world to achieve. Open confrontations, nearly impossible.

*MEMORY: A woman is on a one-year contract. I become friendly with her. We talk about her past jobs, her teaching, my work, our lives at home. Suddenly, like the crackling of leaves in the woods, come sounds of dissatisfaction. It seems that some students and faculty, including some in women's studies, are critical, and her contract will not be renewed. Yet nothing is articulated, nothing identified, nothing said directly to her. Her fate has been decided. It will now only take the mechanics of university bureaucracy for that fate to manifest itself. I feel a deep bond with this woman. I do not know whether or not the judgments of her are fair (I am not even sure what they are), but I feel it is awful that she does not know what is going on. A couple of days go by; my shoulders and neck tense each time she comes into my room. I try to tell her the little I know. Then I feel I am betraying the other side; I worry I will be caught.*

The story is actually a composite. Approximately the same thing occurred three years in a row, each year with a different faculty member. One would think we could have learned enough to alter the script. And yet the problems of hierarchy and status differences seemed to work against finding a more humane, if not feminist, way to express dissatisfaction with a teacher.

Let me replay the story of hierarchy and status from the students' point of view. A number of students in women's studies courses had come to the college specifically to study the subject—in a feminist environment. They were largely self-supporting, and the school was expensive. They appreciated being allowed to call their teachers by first names and to hang out with them in

quasi-social situations. But they were always aware that they were paying, while their teachers were being paid to be there. When classes were study groups with little leadership beyond a bibliography from the teacher, they felt cheated. Worse, their awareness that the teacher stepped out of her role as "one of the women" to give them grades at the end of each term, made them anxious about confronting her directly. Instead, they whispered among themselves, talked to other faculty behind closed doors and complained to me in my office.

Most of the time, I admit, I felt as angry about these maneuvers by the students as I did at the counterparts taking place among faculty. Excuses! Excuses! Students couldn't be straight because grades were held over their heads; faculty couldn't be straight because access to jobs and promotions loomed over theirs. Certainly the objective structures of the university enforced women's unliberated fear of open confrontation.

*MEMORY: A woman, a senior faculty member with tenure, is on a number of important faculty committees and has for years communicated directly with the dean and president of the school. She attends dinner parties to which no one else in women's studies is invited. She has access to, in the words of old male politicking, locker-room deals. After a meeting of the women's studies faculty, I assume that as a group we have decided on a particular course of action in order to promote our program. But then this woman returns from a little party, excited at having executed an entirely different strategy. Some of us talk in twos, among ourselves. I am angry, but when no one shares my rage, or wishes to confront the woman, I hold back. Since I had thrown myself into supporting the other plan, I may be reacting too personally. The others*

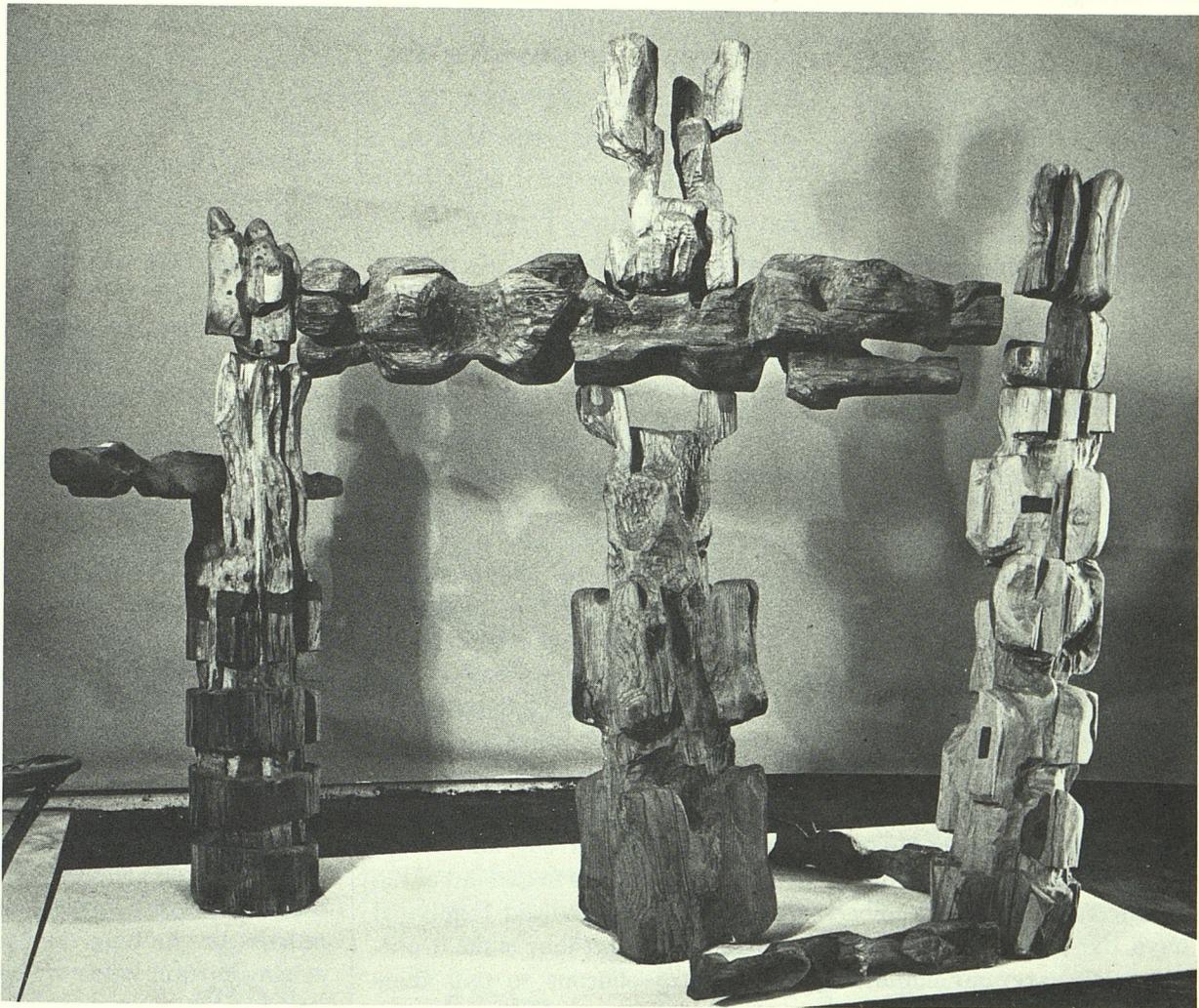
are not pleased to have our plan tramped upon; but they have a vague sense that our powerlessness is unavoidable. Several even say, optimistically, that at least there seems to have been progress.

*MEMORY:* A woman has decided to teach a course on the sociology of women. We are all excited about it. Then, during the summer, she is called upon by the dean to teach another course which will not directly service the program. She telephones me for help in her decision, and I am clear that she must stick to her earlier commitment. Without that course,

the program will have a gaping hole in it. But after several phone conversations with her, I feel her slipping away from my side of the corral. She has gotten other advice from women's studies faculty who understand the nuances of college politics better than I. If she is to secure her appointment at the college, she must teach what the college believes it needs to have taught. I am left with the impotent rage of someone whose betrayal is inevitable. How can I be responsible for building a program when the women in it have opposing pulls? Is it not, perhaps, in the

group's interests that faculty secure their jobs so that we do not have a continual revolving door of new women teachers?

So much of the time, no matter what I did I felt like a failure. This feeling was exaggerated by the college continually rethinking my job and deciding that they weren't at all sure it needed to be done. After all, there was nothing else comparable to it in the college. And whenever they attacked the position, the program tried to redefine it in such a way as to create a new line of defense: I would spend more time with



Nancy Azara. *The Group (A-Mandala)*. 1971. 8' x 8'.

*The Group* is a sculpture about my women's group. It is painted, oiled and carved from ten different pieces of oak, ash, fir, birch and cherry. I studied our collective identity and our individual roles. I felt the group had become larger than ourselves. We behaved differently in the group than we behaved in our separate lives. I was interested in describing the quality of this activity.

—Nancy Azara

Nancy Azara, a New York City artist, is co-founder of the Feminist Art Institute there.

students, less time with students, more time on outreach, more time on educating other faculty. People said, "Oh, you can't take it all upon yourself." But with a job that slid and skidded, where even when I was sure what I had to do, I couldn't do it, how could I not feel like a failure? People said, "The college doesn't support women's studies properly, and we take it out on each other." This analysis seemed to contain a good deal of wisdom! But structurally, the woman at the center of the crunch was most often me. Some days were particularly bad, my neck and shoulders became rigid concrete bricks, and I could scarcely turn my head from side to side. I told myself that this was just a sign of being boxed in. And I told myself that it wasn't necessary to re-create my external world in my poor body. But there it was, I couldn't move.

What would this job have been like if I had been surrounded by men? Would I have battered my mind and body so badly? One aspect of women working with women that we are only now just beginning to understand is the intensity of female relationships. We both love each other and hate each other more than we probably can love or hate men. Or perhaps I am better off not to generalize: I know that I get caught up in loving and being loved by women, in being angry at and having a woman angry at me, in a way that I simply am not moved when the person is a man. Dorothy Dinnerstein says the cause is our mothers, or rather the asymmetry of our child-rearing arrangements in which only women have the power of life and death over us. We carry our mothers with us in our heads and hand them over to other women to be re-created at a moment's notice. Dinnerstein says, optimistically, that the women's movement has dealt with the love women have for other women,

but it has not dealt with the hate and anger.

I grew up with a mother who stayed at home and two sisters, both younger than I. My father worked away from home during the day and in his home office most evenings. My childhood may have made me particularly vulnerable to complicated, intense relationships with women, but I don't think it has made me unique. A women's studies program is a collection of mothers and sisters. It is a composite of intimacies, rivalries, jealously regarded privacies, petty

One element of the university I had never seriously considered is its exaggerated reproduction of capitalist society's division between mental and physical labor. Faculty are mental workers . . . Anyone who does not teach . . . becomes cast out of the heavens of mental pursuit.

spites. There are rebellions against the Mother, then guilt for the wish to overthrow the Mother, then failures of nerve because of guilt. In voluntary groups, where one woman's economic life is not tied to another's, it may be possible to work out these internalized family patterns—although I have been in groups where it hasn't happened, and I know how difficult it is even there. But at work in the university, the rigidities and insecurities of hierarchy and status weave their threads in and out of the warp of the internalized family, at the same time that they make it particularly treacherous to pull them out for inspection.

I know that some days I felt like the Mother: the Good Mother, even. And it was a pleasure. Other days, when women teachers went off to meetings from which I was exclud-

ed, I felt like the Stepsister. The family picture kept changing, although structural aspects of the university made certain configurations reappear. Older women often had power not only because of their symbolic role as mothers, but also because of status differences created by the university. This led to passivity among the younger women, an infantilization strange among avowed feminists. So often women seemed to end up in intimacies of twos and threes: two sisters, gossiping idly about a third; three sisters, allying themselves against a mother.

I have a friend who speaks of "women seizing power with a quivering chin." Women in this era have two scripts for getting what we want. The first is to take care of, with the hope of being taken care of in return. The second is to be direct and take what we want. The first is familiar; the second, unfamiliar and frightening. Unfortunately, the first script has been crazily overlaid with the script of socialist feminism, which says to look out for people weaker than you, which condemns competitiveness, and which calls hierarchy and status differences evil. When women seize power with a quivering chin, it is because they do not want to give up the first script. But it is also, particularly among women who see themselves as socialist-feminists, often because they do not want to be condemned for wanting power and position—in a rotten system to boot.

The problem with the university, as with any rigid hierarchy, is that it does not leave many pleasant alternatives to climbing the ladder and seizing certain kinds of social goods and powers. To be marginal, on the fringes, at the bottom rung, powerless, in a university is an unpleasant and degrading fate. Although feminist, and particularly socialist-feminist, ideology aims to create an

egalitarian environment wherever women are, including the university, this is nearly an impossible task. The space of equality is small, cramped, often no wider than the space of three women chatting.

Many days I walked about in the muck of my own private stew. Women were teaching about women, doing research that rediscovered lost lives and works of art, working out theories to understand and help describe present structures of gender and sexuality. Wasn't that enough? Why couldn't I accept that? Was my injured pride as a dropout, but potential, academic making me too sensitive to the situation? Why couldn't I acknowledge that all of our interests were not the same, that we each inhabited different, hierarchically ordered, spaces, but that we shared a concern to keep the study of women and gender alive? The mess of everyday life was surely a mess, but wasn't it worth it, because of what was going on in the realm of ideas?

I have talked at length about anger, competition and hate—and fear of confronting them. Yet the soft spot in the women's studies program, the spot that symbolized the separation between women's studies as an academic discipline and feminism as living reality, leading where it might, was the issue of lesbianism. Women, both faculty and students, spent most, if not all, of their time with other women. Intense relationships developed, particularly among students who had few resources outside the college. In fact, after a time in the program, students seemed

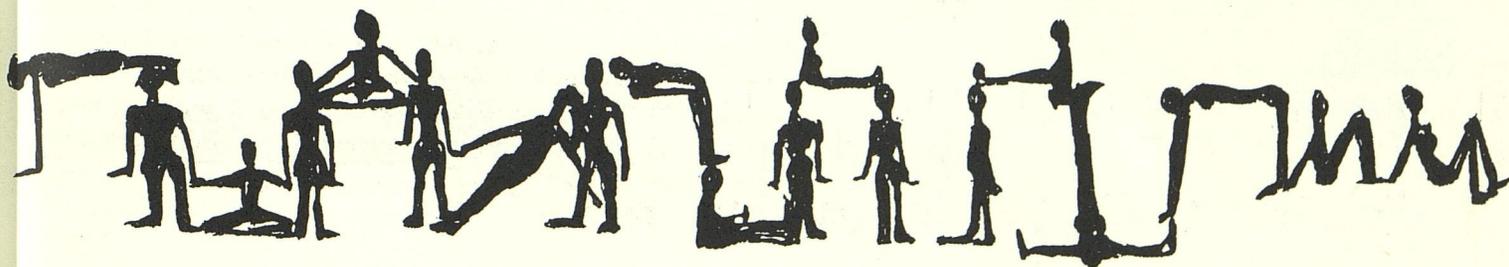
always to come in twos. And whether the women in these couples were heterosexual or gay, the attractions that had drawn them to each other were probably erotic as well as intellectual and political. The same, of course, holds true for relationships among women faculty—although these were diffused and disguised. Academic constraints made it essential for faculty to circulate and develop ties outside the program, particularly and visibly with men. (I remember a lovely picnic on the grass with two other women which suddenly grew tense as they discussed how we were jeopardizing our jobs by going off together rather than spending the time talking to other professors in the lunchroom.)

There was nothing so extraordinary about the varieties of relationships among women. It was extraordinary that they took place in a sphere of suspicion, fear and silence. Courses only rarely dealt openly with lesbianism; papers on the topic were discouraged, and outside speakers rarely mentioned the issue. A number of gay women never came out in the program, sensing quite rightly that they would only cause themselves pain. Fear of the erotic between women, in fact, was so great that women's relationships in general were rarely discussed. Once again, all this could easily be justified by the university's homophobia, and thus the women's studies faculty could say they were protecting the program by going underground on the issue. Yet most faculty were themselves afraid of homosexuality indeed, they had been

chosen at times because of that fear. On this issue, at least, they did not serve the university against their own interests.

There is a paradox in the university giving women the space to study and learn about women while making it nearly impossible for women to change their feelings and behavior in any of the ways that this learning would make natural. I often had the feeling that women in our program, as well as throughout the college, adopted behavior that was a combination of (1) conscious but unexamined male patterns and (2) unconscious female patterns. This combination fit in nicely with the purposes of the university, but it was not particularly liberating. And it did not have any relationship to the wonderfully exciting insights that these same women were having in their intellectual work.

The disjunction between the realm of ideas and the grubby and compromising concreteness of everyday life is not new. What is relatively new is the widespread admission that all knowledge is value-laden and political, and that it all is connected to being in the world—whether this means keeping the world as it is or changing it. And what is new is the willingness of many feminists to openly stand by this scary position in their intellectual work. I don't know what this means for the way women will behave within the university in the future. But I believe the problem of this behavior ought to be one of the central intellectual concerns of women's studies programs.



**BLOODROOT:**Four Views of  
One Women's  
BusinessBetsey Beavan  
Selma Miriam  
Pat Shea  
Samn Stockwell

Dear Heresies,

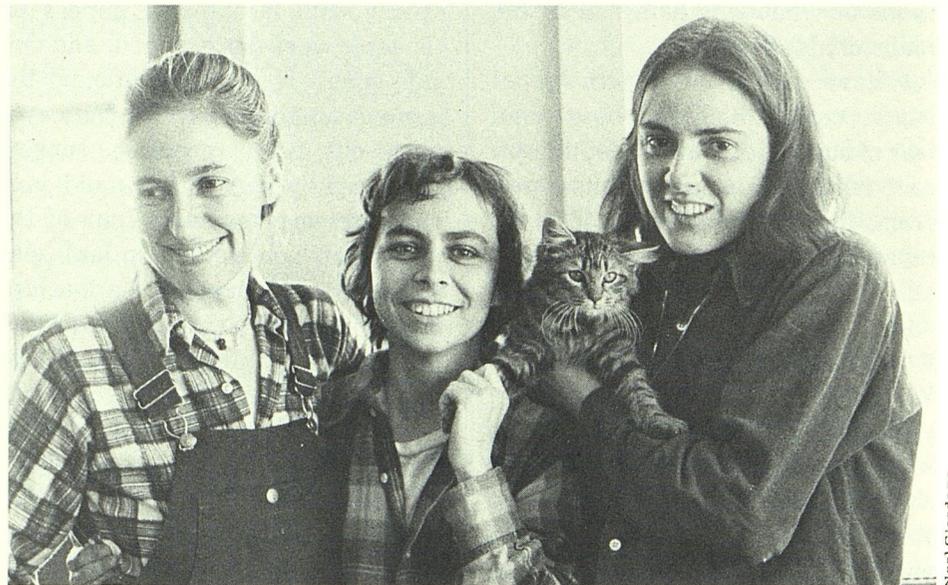
We have all been thinking about this upcoming *Heresies* issue on work and want very much to contribute to it, yet we are having great difficulty expressing what we want to say about Bloodroot and how we feel about working together.

We are a collective. For a year and a half there were three of us, now there are four. I am 43, ex-housewife and landscape designer. Betsey is in her late twenties, Samn about 25, and Pat, our most recent member, is 37. I feel enriched by our different ages (although I don't think Samn agrees). We renovated a building and created a restaurant where there was none. (It took some \$25,000.) We did not want to buy someone else's crap. Our intention is to make a woman's place; our motivating force is feminism.

We are vegetarian because we see a commonality in the oppression of women and the oppression of animals. We don't wish to contribute to the latter, just as we wish men didn't contribute to the former. Only collective members decide policy. We have part-time staff who are paid minimum wage. We definitely do not believe in any form of volunteerism within the collective, nor do we believe *quality* food can be produced without recompense and recognition. So collective members must get paid and be appreciated and be in a decision-making position to function at their best!

We have decided to write you separately. We have different feelings about our work in Bloodroot and we think you will find these differences interesting. Use whatever (if anything) is useful.

Good Luck! Selma



Selma, Samn, Betsey

## Selma

Thinking about work for us at Bloodroot is thinking about our daily lives —partly because a restaurant demands such long hours, and very much because we dream/believe we are working for a woman's space, a place that is/will be the expression of our and other women's dreams. So what we

Bloodroot bookstore and restaurant in Bridgeport, Conn., has been in business since March, 1977. Noel Giordano is now a member of the collective; Samn left the group last January.

are doing seems larger than the creation of a feminist business.

We daily make presumptions that determine our decisions. Other feminists may make other presumptions, as valid or more so than ours, but these are ours. We feel uncertain and incomplete about them. They are "working" propositions.

We believe that designing a restaurant-bookstore, the way the space was laid out (by two feminist architects), the kind of furniture we chose and refinished ourselves, the site we picked (secluded, on the water, land for an herb garden), the women's music we play as background, all are expressions of our beliefs and will, subliminally at least, affect everyone who comes in. Our self-service policy came out of a desire to use our energy (and payroll) for cooking and the necessary cleaning up rather than providing servants, with the concomitant demeaning feelings that accompany that relationship on both sides.

We call ourselves a collective, which for us does not mean equal monetary investment but does mean equal time and energy in Bloodroot. We don't depend on volunteers, funding or grants. We don't want a large part-time collective in which members' time and energy goes elsewhere and in which responsibility and power are too diffuse. Our hours and commitment are, and have to be (we believe), total.

Of course, this means we give up our "personal" lives to put full time (and more) into our venture. We have been scared and sometimes resentful, as when we had to miss a conference or concert. But in this process of creating our own space we have also been surprised by our own responses. One is that what precious little time off we have we want to spend at Bloodroot—weeding, eating, visiting. There seems no other world we are nourished in, or even feel at ease in. Secondly, our commitment to this place, this idea, grows all the time. Our lives are intense. We work physically very hard, long hours; we laugh and sometimes even wrestle (for fun) in full view of the customers. We quarrel; we are lovers; there are jealousies. But I think we all feel passionately that Bloodroot is our lover, our creation, larger than ourselves. We discover how precious it is to us and we believe that what we are doing is of value to other women.

We started as three; when it became evident that one part-time worker's commitment was growing as large as ours, it became an organic necessity to add a fourth, even though we were hesitant about this enlargement. A whole new chemistry took place with the changed status of the new collective member, which was unexpected—as unexpected as egg yolks, lemon juice and oil producing mayonnaise! It is likely that future collective members will similarly make themselves evident as time goes by, but a small ultimate size still seems desirable.

Nevertheless, we need to know how to give recognition in shades of gray, to acknowledge the women other than collective members whose love of working with us and efficiency in so doing help make Bloodroot possible. One woman who works with us Sundays only has been fully with us from the start. She says we restore her for her political fights in her straight job during the week, and she certainly feeds us and what we do through her skills and her efforts. Another woman works for us five days a week (28 hours), even paying baby sitters for the privilege of earning minimum wage. We wish we could pay day care for her! A feminist structure should, but we simply don't have the funds. She is spending extra time at home trying to reorganize our bookstore records, and yet we don't know how to name her

role or account appropriately for what she does.

Hardest to deal with is why it doesn't work out with all women who come in as staff; some, who obviously want to be with us, just don't do things right. I can't understand why in a political way. It seems like a failure of will on their part, or of priorities. Maybe they can't take their own work seriously; it is casual, like play. Maybe doing work for a woman's space feels no more important than volunteer work—but all this seems inadequate as an explanation.

And then we are faced with the need to fire someone, a woman like us, to damage her pride perhaps more than the outside world has. We have done it well maybe once, and we don't feel that we know how to do it properly. We try to remember that women have been social service agencies to others all our lives, and that we will not survive as a business or as individuals unless we demand adequate performance from those we work with, rather than having to cover for their errors. But still, it is most agonizing to us.

We have other problems. We don't know where to get expert help. Our feminist lawyers and accountants, trained in the outside world, often give advice that is useless or wrong. For example, we were incorporated, a legal structure that we are unsure how to use to reflect what is more like a partnership. Our accountant recommends advertising and marketing techniques that seem inappropriate to our kind of business. We trust these women, but they don't seem to know how to apply their world knowledge to our feminist-political business.

We don't really know good feminist management techniques—where to save money and where to spend it, how to assess financial growth, how to project future needs. Our most useful advice in these directions was free: Jill Ward of Mother Courage urged us to experiment in our own ways, yet was very specific about what she had found useful; a customer/friend/tax attorney helped us daydream/brainstorm about our future.

We have in the past had trouble dealing with "friendly" criticism, that is, criticism from our supposed friends who would never make comments in straight places over similar issues (prices, what brands of beer we carry, what kinds of pots we use). We have developed a thicker skin and have redefined who our friends are as a result; it can be argued that this means we will not hear "appropriate" criticism. Right, we won't! We can't, and survive.

Our biggest problem right now is bringing in enough money to survive, knowing what books or foods will sell, how to learn what we need to know—how to find time to learn! But we do, we are. We've developed our own bookkeeping techniques, invented our own recipes, figured our own ways of dividing work. It's just that much much more needs doing, needs learning, as we try many new modes and share what we learn. . . .

Samn

I work in a feminist restaurant/bookstore. I get up around 8:30, shower, dress, and read or write before I go to work around 10. We, the collective, go over and organize the day's work. We prepare food all day, serve from 6 or 7 until 11 P.M., then clean up and go home. Tuesdays and Sundays are partial days, and Mondays everyone rests. During the working day we take breaks for eating, smoking or resting as we need them and as they are possible. Everyone, I think, inwardly measures her own amount of work and judges everyone else's.

We all work very hard. For me it is not innately pleasurable, nor do I feel

particularly talented at it. After a year and a half I have acquired a very modest competence. It does not feel very rewarding most of the time. I feel connected, but not close to, the women I work with, who comprise my entire family/community. I choose to stay for a number of reasons, some silly and some serious. One is certainly the food and books; another is the limited security of a nice quiet place to live and \$300 a month (the zenith of my material wealth). The main reason, I think, is my lack of boredom in learning about food and plants. I also need to live in the world of women, however piecemeal that world might be, however ill-equipped I am for it.

The conditions that are most difficult for me are:

1) The optimism and resultant depression of the women I work with. There is no reason to think we will not be killed, die young or suck each other dry in our gasping for breath. If we could all begin now consciously to recognize our marginal status, something other than the failed fantastic could be accomplished. Our reluctance to associate with the real inescapable world is a continuation of private fantasies of our unique character and indomitable will; we are not accessible to the fate of the millions we are trying to change. (I keep thinking of the tragic wasted life of Simone Weil, who fought everyone's war but her own because she couldn't *remember* herself as a woman or a Jew. Cut off from any personal memory of class pain, she tried to brutalize herself into feeling by starvation and overwork. It's the irony of her inability to take, or receive, life from her own origins that she starved to death.)

2) My lack of intellectual or emotional intimacy with the lesbian/feminist community. It's partially, and very consciously, self-imposed. I have lived and worked in other lesbian/feminist communities and have not, on the whole, found my deeper concerns too well regarded. Quite the contrary. I tend to save my intellectual and emotional energy for writing and reading, which is fairly consistently rewarding. I have an acute loneliness, which is accentuated by being physically surrounded by a close community of which I partake little. I must, however, trust my reluctance for self-exposure.

3) The general passion women seem to have for collectives (surely the least distinctive of anything that might be useful in leftist thought). With no demand for definition inherent in the collective structure, there is an almost tidal pull toward obscuring whatever functions do go on. We must name the kinds of work involved in our operations and have structures that make our processes clear. While it is certainly our private resources that determine our public functioning, the great danger in collectives is that there is no mechanism for the allocation of our private resources. I think this leads to more homogeneous associations of women, which I feel are less valuable. There are so many possibilities between collectives and hierarchies that I don't understand why women are so dogged about clinging to one or the other.

I hope this is useful as a rather feeble beginning to thinking about work. It has certainly been valuable for me to think about.

Betsey

My relationship to Bloodroot was born out of a feminist vision necessary to survive in a world not mine. My dependency on lesbian relationships—and the intense love/pain emotions they created—did not provide the kind of sustenance I needed. Caught in the futile and familiar abyss of a three-way lesbian relationship, I slowly and agonizingly realized that I needed some kind of work—creative work—to claim my own strengths and put ex-

hausted weaknesses into perspective. An emerging feminist consciousness and a political/spiritual self-examination of myself as a lesbian in an alien male world brought me to realize that creating a woman's space was the most important imperative for my life.

The particular form the woman's space took was a restaurant and a bookstore. I began with no knowledge of cooking, running a bookstore or "business management," but with the seeds of a feminist dream which in time germinated into reality! As I had no access to money, my contribution to Bloodroot was time and determined energy. I moved from living alone in the city to the suburban house where two other Bloodroot women were living.

I had strong anxieties about living with them and having no money (I had left a \$90-a-week isolated child-care job from which I had saved no money). But my determination to work and create Bloodroot was stronger, and it sustained me during both the early transition and the later problems of living together. There were times of emotional jealousies among the three of us, and acute arguments about "collectivity" and "spirituality." Our differences in age (23, 25, 41), class (one lower, two middle) and "past" religions (two Protestants, one Jew) seemed at times to be tremendous obstacles. Certainly I was sometimes overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness over our unequal experience. Each of us had her own ways of using or misusing anger, and the pressure/exhaustion of running a full-time restaurant allowed no vacation from each other and very little space to avoid clashes. Yet our common ground was (and is) a commitment to an emerging lesbian/feminist politics and the building of a woman's space. We agreed to keep our group small, play only women's music with feminist content, implement self-service, share an equal salary and try to survive economically. These areas of agreement at the beginning enabled Bloodroot to grow, and eventually to absorb a fourth member with a similar political commitment.

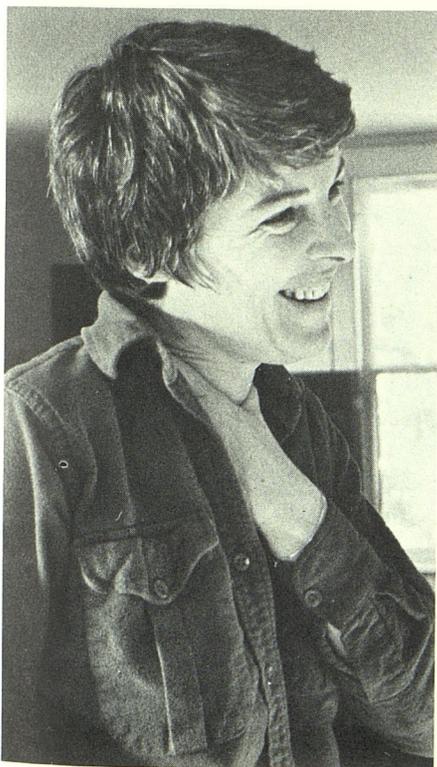
Working at Bloodroot includes a familiar and painful "problem," inescapable (in whatever lesbian/feminist world exists) and terribly confusing: lesbian love relationships. The heartbeat of women working together can be violently disrupted by the deadlocking pattern of these relationships. In a patriarchal world, lesbian (sexual) relationships have developed according to the tradition available from an oppressed lesbian history: possessiveness, and the acute terror of losing one's dependent mirror. Women/lesbians, their psyches constantly raped and exposed to male power/sexuality, have learned to survive with emotional economy. We are only beginning to move experimentally out of monogamous sexuality. It takes time, living and working time that has not often been ours to use.

This knowledge, and a determination to use what precious Bloodroot time I have (full-time work with lesbian women), help me in my own struggle with sexual and emotional jealousies. Lesbian-owned time has allowed the gradual erosion of boundaries at Bloodroot. Working here for 12 to 16 hours a day is like taking a woman-only space voyage where "altered" time permits, and survival demands, that sexual power hierarchies be constantly evaluated. I have lived through and witnessed strong emotional jealousies which demanded transformation. During a particularly difficult period, I often withdrew exhausted late at night and sought perspective through the use of the tarot (a spiritual instrument and mirror which I have found useful in spite of the immense inadequacies and limitations of the patriarchal decks).

The complexities of women's working/loving relationships need to be

## Pat

37 years old  
Teaching (6 years)  
Manager of a grocery  
Factory  
A.T.&T. (4 years)  
Unemployment (2 years)  
Bloodroot  
Also: lifeguard  
secretary  
maker of onion rings  
drugstore clerk  
camp counselor  
painter  
movie theatre ticket seller  
house-cleaning business



Pat Shea

Noel Giordano

explored much more. Bloodroot is a feminist experiment; our morality is evolving and none of us escapes painful self-examination. For those of us (four full-time, three part-time) committed to Bloodroot and its internal government, we have no choice but to face each other daily, making decisions which will affect our time and lives. Many "answers" still lie beyond us, but the daily weaving and rhythm of our working together helps me to seek a woman's justice in a world where it does not yet exist.

To find myself in control of my life, my self, finally. After all the searching and longing. To finally see that I have, along with all women, been an unknowing victim of the despicable destroyers of life. All it took for me to know this was to have distance. Bloodroot is a woman's place/space from which I can see what is happening out there to women, what happened to me—why I hated myself. There was and is nothing out there designed to validate my life, to make me feel alive.

I was born a woman, knowing and wise. By the time I could talk I knew things were wrong, absolutely upside down. Everything told me I was worthless in myself, evil, selfish, abnormal. All I have ever had to go by, the only truth I've ever known, is some deep, deep place inside me. After trying to conform, I knew I had to get out. Being a lesbian was not enough; if I was still playing it their way, accepting their jobs and keeping quiet about the rest, I was not living with dignity. Of course not; I was fitting into a system designed to destroy me, destroy women, destroy life—as it will continue to do until women realize what is happening. Each of us, on her own, must know what is happening and not be a part of it anymore.

As an old dyke, when the women's movement took hold, I thought it was just a bunch of privileged straight women who had nothing better to do. I never felt they could or would make any difference to my life. I was even embarrassed by them. As a dyke, I wanted to stay inconspicuous, so I couldn't get involved anyway. When the straight women became lesbians I was sure it was for "political" reasons. I was repelled by them. They could not possibly understand a "real lesbian" like me. They hadn't suffered like me. They had been accepted and acceptable all their lives. They didn't live a lie, with the fear and self-loathing I had. Their lesbianism must be a gimmick.

From where I am now I see that they discovered as adults something which I had known as a child: as women in this world, we are next to worthless. Somehow I knew this and chose to be a lesbian early. I was not conscious of the reasons for my decision until now, until being taught by these "political" lesbians. So much is clear to me now, living and working with women only—brave women, proud women, women of my dreams here in my waking life. Our paths have converged and we recognize each other. I was always afraid out there, without being conscious of the reasons why, not understanding the violence around me in that man's world. I was afraid to be, because I didn't fit. Although my lovers were all women, we based our relationships on male models—two people mutually dependent and exclusive. Why didn't they work? Why didn't they last? Living with women, making love with more than one woman, I am no longer afraid of losing myself in another woman; the unifying force is something other than the relationship itself. Yet I have not sacrificed the closeness and intimacy I need with other women. There is no line drawn between any of the aspects of our lives: politics, spirituality, work, play, living are all one.

NAVY  
YEOMAN

U.S. NAVY

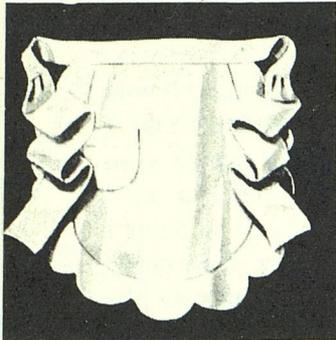
UNIFORMS

REG. U.S.

PAT. OFF.



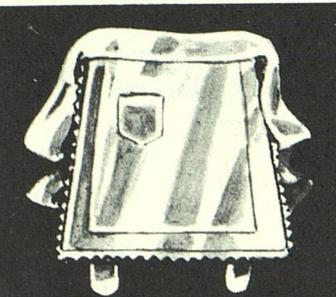
Scalloped Apron



Style 147  
Wide Gored Apron



Style 136  
Ric-Rac Border Apron



OVERSEAS CAP



SENIOR UNIFORM

LEGIONNAIRE CAP

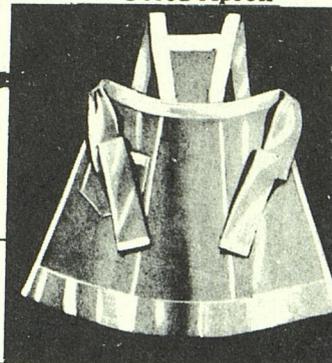


SMOCK

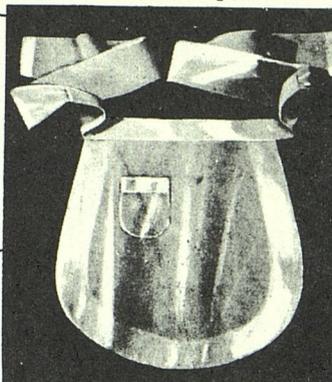


NURSE'S WINTER  
UNIFORM AND HAT

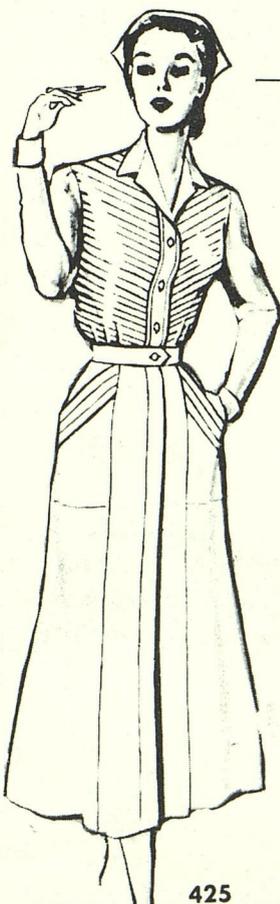
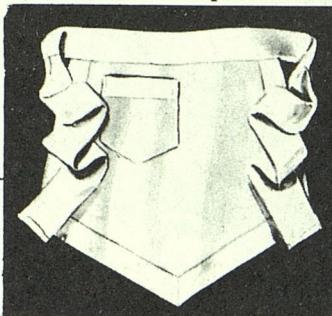
Gored Apron



Waitress Apron



Style 148  
Waitress Apron

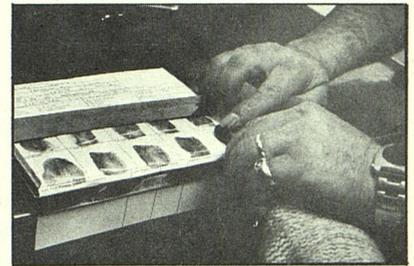
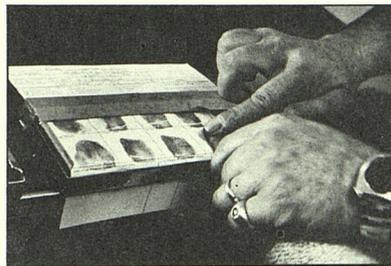
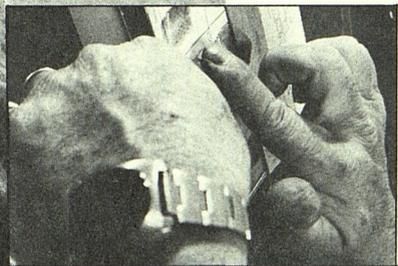




# Rocking the Docks

Women on the Waterfront

Constance Pohl



**T**wo women, one black, one white, hold small hooks in both their gloved hands as they face each other over a 140-pound burlap bag of coffee. They bend down, spear the burlap with the hooks and, in a single rhythmic motion, swing the bag onto a pile of cargo.

Across the way, two other women knock over a 700-pound drum and roll it across the floor. "Don't let that heavy drum fall on your feet," advises a longshoreman behind them. "You'll snap your toes off. Remember, if you can't do something, ask for help. There's always somebody down in the hold. And don't do anything until you first see it done by somebody else."

Women—black, white and Hispanic—are preparing to begin work on shipping docks in February. More than sixty of them have registered for work with the New York-New Jersey Waterfront Commission. For the

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Constance Pohl has taught English in the U.S. and France, and in labor union programs. A freelance writer who often writes about women and children, she lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. with her three-year-old daughter.

first time, women have been accepted as dock workers in the area.

Why do these women want such strenuous work? "The money is fabulous," answers Gwen Wells, who has been a Teamster and holds a college degree. "I need the dough," says Mary Baffi, who is divorced and has three children. A high school graduate, Mary had been making \$2.90 an hour at the phone company. No special skills or education are required to be a longshoreman, a job that guarantees an annual income from \$18,000 to \$22,000. The sole requirement for a job as cargo checker, which pays \$24,000 a year, is to be able to read, write and count well enough to record the amount of cargo that goes on and off ships. These are salaries few—if any—unskilled women ever hoped to earn.

"If they make it onto the docks, they should keep on meeting together," suggests Tom Webb, a black longshoreman who has been a shop steward for eight years. "Otherwise the women will be systematically weeded out. I know. They're doing it to the black longshoremen."

"Sticking together is what won these jobs in the first place," adds Mary Baffi. "Women from all walks of life are getting together so they can make a living."

This effort began when, for the first time in nine years, there were openings last spring for two hundred cargo checkers, and a group of women tried to apply for the jobs. Although shipping companies employ the cargo checkers, the New York-New Jersey Waterfront Commission, which acts as watchdog on the waterfront, must first approve the applicants. Filling out the Commission's registry papers is the essential first step to applying for a job. On August 15, 1978, six women applied for registry papers at the Commission's office in downtown

Manhattan. Three of the women were black, one was Hispanic and two were white. Accompanying the women applicants were three representatives of the National Organization for Women.

"We want to apply for the jobs of cargo checkers."

"There are no applications available for any jobs," said Al Miller, a clerk at the Waterfront Commission. "The only jobs open are pier guard and warehouseman, but you will need a letter from the companies that are going to hire you."

"We understand jobs for cargo checkers are going to be available."

"No. All they are doing is transferring longshoremen internally to the jobs of cargo checkers."

"What are the requirements for cargo checkers?" asked one of the women.

"You must be able to read and write and pass a proficiency exam," Miller answered.

"What companies are hiring pier guards and warehousemen?"

"I can't give you their names, but they're in Jersey."

As the women were leaving, a male employee called out, "Hey, Al, you should have asked one of them for a date!"

On leaving the Commission office, the group went directly to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and filed discrimination charges. "It was clear that the Commission was not interested in having women working on the docks in any capacity," explains Jane Silver, Job Developer for N.O.W., through whom the action originated. The Commission had effectively barred women from the docks by reserving the cargo checker jobs for longshoremen only, since zero percent of longshoremen are women according to Executive Director of the Commission, Leonard Newman.

At day's end the women sat to-

gether over coffee discussing their situation: How could they win the jobs, and how could they deal with the problems that would arise once they were actually working on the docks? A lawsuit against the Waterfront Commission would have to be initiated, claiming civil rights violations. The women's lawyers would seek an injunction to prevent the Commission from assigning any more of these jobs. One hundred sixty-five longshoremen had already been transferred "internally" to cargo checker, and there were more than forty women who wanted to apply for the remaining thirty-five positions.

These women see themselves as a collective breaking into an all-male world; they agree that they must support each other totally once they are on the docks, and they must let no excuse be used against them which might cost them those jobs. "That afternoon we talked with the other women about getting those jobs," recalls Debra Brown, who is presently working at N.O.W. as a legal assistant under a CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) project grant. "We know we're going to be harassed. We decided we are going to organize ourselves as a women's cargo-checking collective to guarantee our own protection."

"Say we should luck up and get these positions," adds Celeste Collier, who works under a CETA grant at N.O.W. as a community organizer. "We would be frightened. Most of us have children. We will have to work in fear because we know the men don't want us there. They will threaten you with physical harm."

"Still, I'm ready to take that job!" interrupts Debra.

"We know we're going to have to stick together and support each other," continues Celeste. "We need a cargo checkers' women's collec-

tive to guarantee that we're treated fairly on the job and not harassed and that we are treated with respect just as in any other workplace. Many of us will not be able to work in the same place. They are going to make it hard for us."

"I don't care, as long as they pay me," interjects Debra, who doesn't want anything to stop her from getting that job. "I'm not there to make friends; I'm there to make money."

Celeste agrees. "All I want is a decent day's pay for a decent day's work."

Jackie O'Shaughnessy, another of the women who has filed discrimination charges against the Waterfront Commission, counsels women working in or trying to get into the trades. She finds the spirit of the women applying for cargo-checking jobs similar to that shown by women in other nontraditional work. "There is a high level of women trying to support each other and help each other with their problems," she reports. "The unity of the women lies in trying to figure out approaches to the problems of harassment and discrimination and such."

The group first came together through Jane Silver of N.O.W., which receives federal funds for job development through CETA. "The purpose of the program," she explains, "is to assist women in obtaining entry-level blue-collar jobs which have been traditionally reserved for men." On first hearing about the openings for cargo checkers, Jane telephoned women who had previously come to the program in search of employment. Debra Brown was already working at the N.O.W. offices. Jackie O'Shaughnessy was a CETA worker on the "Blue-Collar Woman" project, sponsored by Women in the Trades. The other four original applicants for cargo checker jobs were on welfare and anxious to find work.

Since August 15, when the six women first applied, nearly one hundred women have joined the group. Many were brought in by N.O.W.'s public service announcements on radio, TV and in the press. "There has been a tremendous response from women interested in apprenticeships and jobs such as assembly line work, guarding property, repairing machines, unloading cargo at warehouses and other nontraditional work," says Jane Silver.

Many women who seek help from the Job Development Program have no clerical skills or degrees. The project was specifically designed for such women. "Since they are unable to obtain professional or clerical positions, the only remaining jobs for these women are in sales, waitressing or hospital work," explains Jane Silver. "Many of these jobs pay only the minimum wage. Only through blue-collar jobs do semiskilled or unskilled women have any hope of rising above the poverty level." One third of the women heard about the Job Development Program at welfare offices. Of the one hundred women hoping to become cargo checkers, thirty-five are on welfare, seventeen have a yearly family income under \$5,000, and seventeen have a family income under \$10,000.

"If women could get those jobs, there would be much less need for welfare assistance," points out Celeste Collier. "It's often said that we minority women are lazy and don't want jobs. Offer women jobs like this for \$24,000 and they'll take them!"

"Ordinarily, women who are domestic workers have to hit four or five houses in a day," adds Debra Brown. "Why should women work for \$4,000 a year and leave their children unsupervised? You can't pull yourself out of the hole like that."

Particularly significant is this

group's composition. Black, white and Hispanic, the women work together and support each other. Jackie O'Shaughnessy, a white woman, is optimistic about the bonds among women of different races as they try to break into nontraditional jobs. "This effort provides an economic basis for black and white women to work together, which we have not seen in a whole lot of years."

Debra Brown, who is black, agrees. "This is the kind of opportunity that working-class women need to bring them together. There are a lot of obstacles that keep us apart, and the more things that bring us together, the more unified we will be. We all work, and we're all discriminated against as women. We must see that we're all women despite our color. Hey, we all want a better chance, and we're not going to get it any other way."

In November, pressured by the women's court action, the New York Shipping Association (representing the shipping companies) and the International Longshoremen's Association jointly distributed job applications. On one day's notice, one hundred nine women were mobilized by All-Craft and N.O.W.

After the women received the applications, they had to be registered by the Waterfront Commission and have a physical examination. On January 22, 1979, the Commission issued temporary registrations to women as longshore workers, and it was official. By early February, women would be loading and unloading cargo in the holds of the ships. Meanwhile, the suit concerning the cargo checkers is still in court. Will the International Longshoremen's Association have to change its name now? "That is the least of our problems," replies Jane Silver. These women worked together, and they won. At least the first round.

# GET THEE TO THE MOTHER HOUSE

Or,  
The Meaning & Significance  
of the Presence of Real Bread  
in the Mass



By an Unknown Woman as Told to  
Hester Brown in the Year of Our  
Lady\* 9978\*\*

St. Vail's Gate, New York, not far from Storm Queen Mountain and the Hudson River, stands the Convent of St. Helena, a modern monastic religious community of the Episcopal Church. On this very site, the empty-handed father of our country, wanting to distinguish a soldier for valor, was supplied with a purple heart (the very first Purple Heart), cleverly snipped by a lady (a Mother of Invention) from one of her own many petticoats. And there, on that very site also, nearly twenty years ago, the unknown woman spent thirteen months of her life doing what is called *trying one's vocation*.

Now, from outside, as she looks again with love upon a way of life she chose once with all her heart, the unknown woman finds a great deal to be learned there about women living in community. She sees that the changes she and her sisters out here "in the world" and the changes her sisters within the walls are independently accomplishing bring us almost near enough to touch. Her first inkling that the sisters are zooming in on their realities as women is that the little loaf of real

Hester Brown now lives and works in New York City. This is her first published piece.

bread they make is being used in the Mass, replacing the pure white wafer made from bleached flour which, although it looked and tasted like fishfood, would not have nurtured a newt. The next sign of promise is the sight of two young sisters lovingly tending a very old sister who has spent her life generously in the sisterhood. The Sisters of St. Helena had all been young and able-bodied when the unknown woman was novice Sister Irene.

No longer are the sisters educa-

\*Lady, from the Old English, means Maker of the Loaf.

\*\*By Merlin Stone's reckoning.

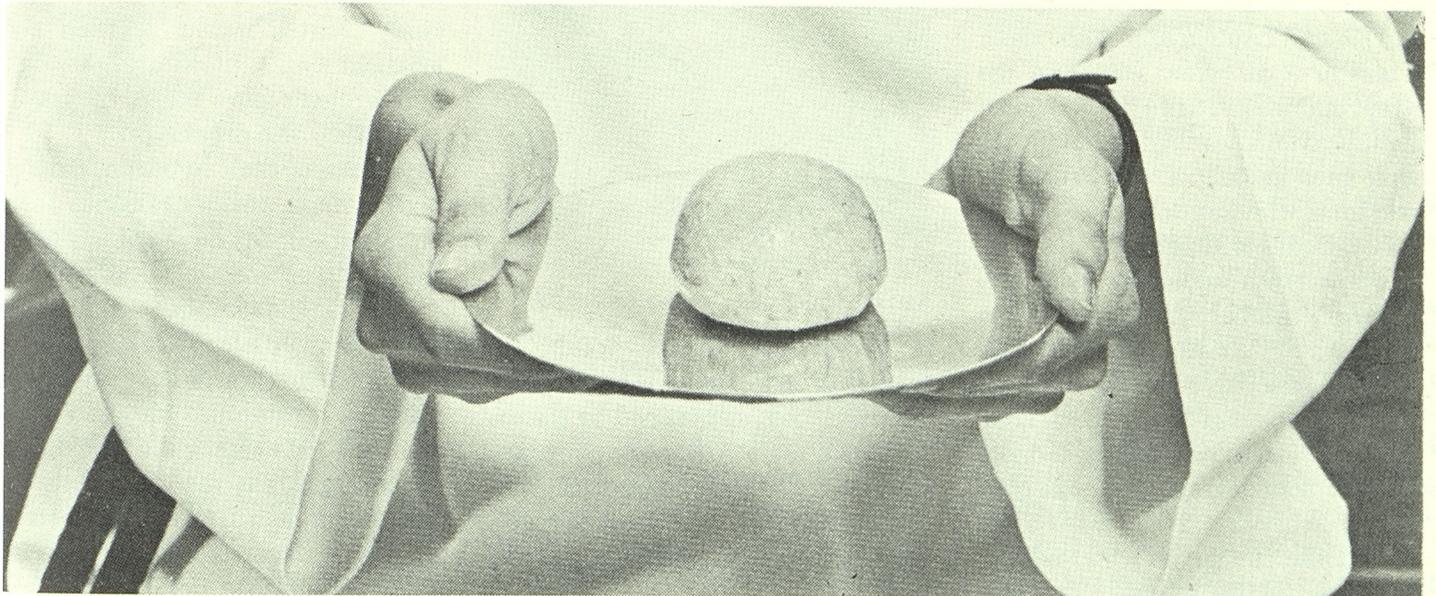
ting the daughters of the privileged. Instead, they are going out to serve the needs of people everywhere—in the city slums, in Latin America and Africa. No longer is there a Father Superior of Holy Cross Monastery bossing the convent, with a woman lieutenant holding the ancillary title of Assistant Superior. Indeed! The sisters' kinswoman St. Hilda of Whitby must now surely be glad: she who ruled over men and women as a seventh-century mitred abbess would smile upon sisters who elect a woman Superior, are autonomous, have only a casual relationship with the "brother" order, and no longer follow the Holy Cross Rule, written by a man for an order of men. And now hear this, O Hilda of Whitby, and try not to drop your crosier: the Sisters of St. Helena have three of their own women priests of the Church.

The Order of St. Helena has been heading in this direction for a long time, moving toward a nonhierarchical concept of obedience and ordering their lives in womanly ways. From their beginnings, the Sisters of St. Helena have vigorously expressed timeless monastic values with a contemporary voice. The traditional three vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, they em-

brace, as they say, in the context of community. Obedience they describe as openness and listening to the Divine Will as it is perceived not only in ourselves but in other persons and particularly as it is expressed through the common mind of our community and its officers. Worship and prayer, in common and alone, form their life's center, from which they radiate outwards. As so well said by St. Helena's Novice Mistress, in discussing the symbolism of a nun taking the veil as becoming the bride of Christ: *Really, when you make the three vows, you are marrying the whole community.*

never have to worry where your next meal is coming from, seldom do you have the pleasure of deciding what's for supper. And there is no "creative" cooking to wreck a sister's digestion; Holy Obedience means that when it's your turn to cook, you follow the convent recipes—*religiously!* What isn't given or grown is bought with careful economy, the most nutrition for the money which means nothing is wasted and very little meat is eaten. Nothing is wasted: Not a moment, not a person, not a scrap of food. Sister Irene found out about another aspect of Poverty when she sent the expensive socks

**H**OLY CHASTITY meant Sister Irene's giving up for Lent the company of Sister Joan, and then having to put up with Joan's gentle teasing. She knew, of course. Holy Chastity is the practice of detachment from emotional as well as physical compensations, so that the soul may be free to unite with the Divine Being. In convents, emotional liaisons (whether or not physically expressed), besides being hindrances to spiritual growth, are considered disruptive to community life. Showing preference for one sister shortchanges the rest of the group. Prac-



The bread of the Mother House, Order of St. Helena.

The Order of St. Helena

Working, eating, fasting, talking, keeping silence comfortably together—how do these nuns strike such a remarkable balance of individual growth and mutual achievement and well-being?

**H**OLY POVERTY really amounts to a giving up of personal and private property in exchange for collective security. Making this commitment frees a woman from the limitations of either extreme—luxury or destitution. It eliminates such little nagging agonies as, "What shall I wear today?" But although you

from her convent dowry to the convent laundry the first time. Ever after, those socks were worn by other feet and the socks Irene always seemed to be issued had shot elastic and fell down all the time; cussing was not allowed. Sister Irene may have left her heart in San Someplace, but certainly she lost her socks at St. Helena's. Not even to keep the best for yourself in little things—that's Poverty. Yet Poverty chosen and practiced in common bestows benefits impossible to poverty unchosen, which destroys the spirit with deprivation, anxiety and illness.

ticing Chastity meant "guarding the eyes" and reading a lot of books on "PFs" ("Particular Friendships"), but primarily involved a strenuous act of will. So Sister Irene deliberately set about to throw herself into the company of sisters she was not naturally drawn to, until one day she realized she had come to love all the sisters, even though some were still special. Although such denial may seem harsh to those outside, much common good came from it, believe it or not. Although we outside do not choose this extreme, we may allow that celibacy is a valid way of

life no woman should be thought peculiar to choose. A little more discretion in our intimacies might keep our energies directed more usefully, and spare us a lot of the pain that makes casualties of us before we ever get to the battlefield (we die on maneuvers, as it were). Disordered, uncentered "loving" deflects energy and postpones the Revolution more drastically than little men in Congress dallying with an ERA extension could ever hope to do.

**H**OLY OBEDIENCE to a set rule serves religious sisters in their spiritual travels much as do signal lights and road signs for traffic. Stop and Go and Caution and Walk mean a hell of a lot when you're in the street and when you're living in community. Even anarchists would want some such guidelines understood by everyone, whether or not codified in law. Order is intelligent, that's all. Order is not a mindless yielding to arbitrary authority. Obedience to order fosters a harmonious running of the household. Keeping some basic rules ensures that trivial decisions don't have to be made, individually or collectively, over and over again. Everyone knows what's expected and can get on with the business at hand (the pursuit of holiness in this case).

**S**ILENCE. Monastic practice in all religions has found Silence essential to spiritual growth; it traces back to ancient desert spirituality. As in most Catholic, Orthodox and Episcopal convents, the daily schedule at St. Helena's includes periods of silence. Breakfast is always taken in silence and, except for Sundays and feast days, other meals are eaten in silence. Many parts of each day are set aside for silence, leaving conversation for after meals, afternoon tea, and the evening recreation hour. Individual privacy and space is thus

built in to the day, allowing each sister to find quiet and inner repose in the midst of community living. And, every year, the entire community embarks together upon a ten-day journey into Silence. *Long Retreat*, as it is called, is one of the most astonishing and sublime experiences of convent life. Silence bestows gifts upon the individual and the community, and strengthens both. Perhaps we feminists can learn here, too. We talk a great deal; we needed to for awhile, even to talk too much.



Marlis Schwieger

Sister Josephine, a maker of the loaf. . .

Now perhaps Silence would increase us in wisdom. (The value of Silence is best understood by the experience; there are many convents, including St. Helena's, which welcome any woman of whatever persuasion to share in the experience of Silence.)

Living in religious community, it was Sister Irene's experience that in the family of women there was always room to be human, to be an individual, to laugh when things were absurd (as often they were). The quaintly Victorian monastic compendium that then served as the Rule of the Order of St. Helena admonished the religious in the practice of humility: *treasure up instances where your assured judgment is proved wrong*. When Sister Paula goofed up the dessert, Holy Poverty required us to eat it anyhow; we were truly faced with eating humble pie. What a penance! But we

treasured it up because it was served to us labeled simply, "An Instance." Our sister's sense of humor more than made amends for her lapse of culinary wit. We loved the dessert.

**F**or centuries, women of dissimilar temperaments, tastes, gifts, circumstances, ages—and, in recent years, of diverse languages, races and cultures—have come together to live out their lives under a common roof, sharing bread and work while serving a common purpose. They have run hospices, hospitals, schools, orphanages; illuminated manuscripts and mankind; created music, learned and mystical works, literature, theology; and wrought more things by prayer than this world dreams of.

In spite of their apparent fixation on the "next world," religious women in sisterhoods have not neglected the needs of this world. Remember, it is on their doorsteps that unwanted babies get left. By taking care of the manmade casualties they have done a substantial job—and more than we—in keeping the world from becoming totally disfigured into the likeness of man. Throughout history, monastic communities of women have mobilized a holding action at the front lines, although they have not been so clear as we just who the enemy is.

In some ages, the only real choice open to a woman (this is not to say "except" marriage, for marriage was and is seldom a choice) was to enter a convent or a beguine, the only place for a woman who wished to escape the crewel and unusual punishment of wedlock and to live her life in a wider sphere than being some man's chattel permitted. Nuns have been healers and reformers, although as radical as some of them have been, they have not changed the world the way we mean to do.

Well, neither have we. And I think they will be with us when we do.

We must not be so shortsighted as to fault women for living or having lived within their respective cultural or historical milieus. Not to read Theresa of Avila simply because she was a Catholic would impoverish us. St. Theresa is not the property of Catholicism merely because the Church mistook her for its daughter, canonized her, and called her Doctor of the Church (a distinction bestowed on no other woman). The great reformer of Carmel was such an enigma to her peers that the Spanish Inquisition might just as readily have burned her as a heretic as acclaimed her piety. As can be seen in her autobiography, Theresa's ecstatic raptures did not diminish her practicality. She had a penchant for taking the upper hand with high prelates and princes of the Church, and handily chopped through all their bulls and bullshit to get what she needed, leaving them scratching their heads under their mitres and scarlet hats. See who she is, not just what particular historical costume she traipses about in. As Victoria Woodhull said, "I do not apologize for any of my life. At the time it was the best I knew." Theresa did the best she knew and it was glorious. (The unknown woman is just as sorry as you are, however, that by accident of history Theresa of Avila was born a sixteenth-century Spanish nun and not slipped into the pages of time as a twentieth-century lesbian feminist, because Heaven knows we need her now. She was hell on wheels. Probably still is.)

So let us not bypass the fact that in spite of being within the bounds of male-dominated, male-invented, hierarchical religion and still following the man called Christ, still owing much to that nabob tradition that plundered and destroyed an older one (murdering the egalitarian ma-

triarchal society with her worship of the Great Mother)—in spite of all this, the religious communities of women of our day are not in any way static or moribund. Our sisters in community are alive, albeit surrounded by the Darth Vaders of Ecclesia. They form vital communities in which lives are splendidly fulfilled. Therefore, they must have something to say, some revelation, some wisdom, some secret, some aqua vitae to impart to us, their sisters in the world, about their suc-



Marlis Schwieger

... and Sister Irene, who used to eat the bread.

cess as women working and living together (for sure they have some great bread recipes!). For these sisters flourish with self-imposed restrictions while we, unself-restricted, free, merely survive. And, as we too must function breathing the bad breath (the cure for which is beyond the Scope of man's invention) of the same Darth Vaders—not only of the Church, but of business, the professions and government—let us go and see for ourselves how our sisters live and work together in such peace and harmony. *Maybe we can go barter our consciousness-raising for Bread and Silence at the Mother House.*

We know from our own history that our vision is not enough—for all its power, not a magic wand we can wave to make things go, so we can get on with our work to change the world. These nuns like us are women of vision, but they make a more thorough commitment to their cause

and to each other than we have set our wills to make. Clearly, it takes more than a great cause to bond women together in community. A collection of women organized solely to keep three sacred vows (or three sacred cows or pigs, or three anything) would not suffice to keep the roof overhead; it would not create community.

Can we not try to do what other women have already shown us is possible? How much easier should it be for us whose cause is not Other, whose cause is ourselves and all women. For us who are making Revolution, the final destination is not reward in heaven, the beatific vision. Our destination is one and the same with our journey. With that in mind we're not fixing to deny ourselves the pleasures of this life to enjoy them in the next. Martyrdom in any degree is not consonant with a Revolution that seeks to liberate all women from martyrdom. Nevertheless, the evidence absolutely does not show that self-denial on the part of each woman is essentially what makes community life work in a convent—or anywhere, and as profound a sense of humor as of sisterly love. Without laughter our living together or working together will be just another chapter in *The Adventures of S & M* entitled: Torture and Failure. Enough of that at enemy hands.

The joy to be found in religious community life is thus far rare in the feminist community. Having fun is very political. Our sisters in the convents are having a jollier time than we (maybe living apart from men has more than a little to do with that). Don't believe they aren't doing something pretty daring, in choosing that life and keeping on choosing to choose it. Choosing community and sisterhood every day, day after day. *Get thee to a nunnery, go: Learn. Laugh. Love.*

# MAKING A.I.R.

Barbara Zucker



Past and present A.I.R. members, from left. First row: Howardena Pindell, Daria Dorosh, Maude Boltz, Rosemary Mayer; second row: Mary Grigoriadis, Agnes Denes, Louise Kramer, Loretta Dunkelman; third row: Patsy Norvell, Sari Dienes, Judith Bernstein, Dottie Attie; standing: Barbara Zucker, Laurace James, Anne Healy; on ladder: Nancy Spero, Pat Lasch. Current A.I.R. members not shown: Rachel bas-Cohain, Donna Byars, Sarah Draney, Mary Beth Edelson, Kazuko, Ana Mendieta, Clover Vail.

**I**t's been a little over six years since A.I.R. opened on Wooster Street; seven years since it was first an idea. Policies have shifted, membership has changed, but A.I.R. is an institution: it has survived. Looking at it now from the outside (I left in 1974), it seems that we were incredibly naïve. Thank God. Naïveté is often the quality that gets people into inextricable situations. From there we struggle to cope and follow through.

Working together? It was much more like fighting together. The thing about consciousness-raising is that after you cry, you go home. You don't have to turn up the next day to put sheetrock on the walls or spend tedious hours writing grant applications. At A.I.R., our awareness grew as the place was built.

I remember Patsy Norvell and Laurie James knew about carpentry so we lined up and were taught to build walls and lay floors. Someone else learned basic electrical work and a few members worked on that. It was a good time, with all those bodies and minds building one loft. Imagine how wonderful it was to be able to share that amount of work with twenty people! And imagine how terrible—no decisions could ever be your own.

Given the number of hungry egos collectively assembled it's amazing how much we accomplished. I think we were able to do it because the climate was right (it was the peak of the Women's Movement] and because of an enormous need—the need to show. The thing that differentiated A.I.R. from other women's collectives at that moment is that it was never intended to be a support group. It was a professional organization, and the point was quality,

Barbara Zucker—sculptor, mother, teacher—lives in New York City. She is also an editorial associate on *Art News* magazine.

not quantity. Though not all of us would acknowledge standing behind the work of each of the twenty original members (can you name twenty living artists whose work you really like?), there was enough respect and commitment to enable us to work together. We wanted to demonstrate that there were at least twenty women artists producing innovative, professional work in 1971. Although this has been documented before, it bears reiterating: to blithely state then that there were so many good women artists working was met with many an arched eyebrow. If one were to say it now, it would be met with ridicule for its obviousness.

We reached the pinnacles of pettiness that boggle my mind even now. That first year, to provide that we all could show within the twelve-month period, we built a dividing wall. This provided space for two simultaneous one-person shows. Somehow the front space was considered "better" than the back. Did we think we got better publicity if we could look out at the street? I don't know, but it seemed magical, more visible. The artists paired together to show drew straws to determine who got which space. I remember Blythe Bohnen got the front and I got the back. I sulked for two days. Then, incredibly, Blythe sacrificed her space. She gave it to me! What a victory! I accepted, and basked in her donation. After all, I had started the whole thing, hadn't I? Such was my ego, and such was my sad attempt to try to corner a little piece of the action. This was not an isolated incident; other people behaved crazily, too. When you're starved, you certainly lose perspective. And we lost it all the time. The nit-picking over that wall extended to the number of inches forward or back it would be on the floor. I remember that Sue Williams and I went in to do

battle one day, armed with a roll of masking tape. (We were going to mark down where that wall belonged before anyone else did, by God) I don't know if the other women brought tape or not, but there we were, waging a totally idiotic war over the control of the wall! It was demolished after only one season, because it really cut up the space.

Now, the only corollary I can find for this distorted behavior is that of most artists prior to a show. Classically, we fight with our mates, we don't eat, or we eat too much. We cry and are moody, hate having sex, or can't get enough. In other words, there is a tremendous amount of explosive, aberrant behavior in those months when the pressure is on to finish up—to get the work out there. I think now it hadn't to do with our being women but with our being artists. In 1971-72, not many of us had much experience in bargaining or negotiation for what we wanted. So many of us had been ignored or cloistered that there hadn't been anything to bargain for. Thus we were exceptionally raw, anxious and sometimes desperate.

Another aspect of A.I.R. was the way we grouped ourselves. We split into factions like members of a primitive tribe who change the positions of their doorways each week to show which member of the family they are arguing with.

It was Howardena Pindell who named us—"Jane Eyre," she said. Then, "Air, A.I.R., Artists-In-Residence." How wonderful! It was one of the few moments when we all agreed. We helped each other in the beginning. We had to, to help ourselves. Later, people withheld information. No one knew who was in town, what collector was seeing what work, what shows were in the offing; yet to do this, too, ultimately was asking too much of one another. We did succumb in many ways to

the pressures of the art world and its competitiveness, while telling each other that we never would, that A.I.R. was the real alternative. Being generous was almost impossible.

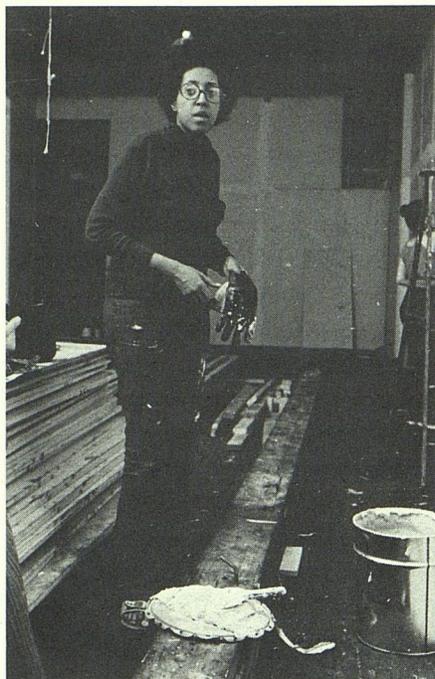
I was impatient. I expended too much energy too fast and wanted recompense. I think this was true for Sue Williams (the other co-founder), too. Having started A.I.R., it was very difficult to relinquish our initial roles. We were seen unavoidably as authority figures, and there was considerable hostility against us from various quarters. At meetings there were those of us with short fuses who screamed and stormed. Others, quieter and more devious, acted calmly, planned strategically and talked behind members' backs. But this was all a question of style and not of our femaleness.

I used to think it was just women: men, or men and women could never, ever get into mean, ridiculous discussions like ours. Then I talked to friends who went to monthly meetings of their co-op buildings, and I attended faculty meetings at the schools where I began to teach. I realized that basically all groups are pretty much the same: some people are jockeying for power, others are along for the ride and others are simply obnoxious. But most tedious are those who are fanatically fair. Total democracy made it impossible to make any decisions about anything in less than three hours.

My feelings about A.I.R. now are bittersweet; it's a lot like being able to let go of a child. If you've raised an offspring well, then he or she has a unique, internal rhythm; the child develops in his or her own way, and not according to the way you might have chosen. My hopes for A.I.R. were based on my control, on shaping my own idea. Rationally, I recognize quite clearly that that's not the way things work. When I walk into the gallery these days to see a show,

often no one there knows who I am, and even fewer people know I started it. I am selfish; I wish they all knew and would bow down and thank me. On the other hand, I am glad the gallery is autonomous, that it is its own baby now.

Lacking perhaps, was an absence of largesse, an ability to be reflective. In my opinion, this shortsightedness prevented our using A.I.R. as a platform for something much larger—something on the scale, say, of The Institute for Art and Urban Resources. However, that is an organization essentially controlled by



Howardena Pindell

one individual. A.I.R. responsibility wasn't freely allocated in any area. People were too often called to account and questioned about their decisions, major and minor. This lack of trust, and general paranoia, contributed most to the dilution of A.I.R.'s strengths. But again, this kind of behavior is a disease of the Western World and is not to be confused with our being women.

Because people were so loathe to delegate power and to realize that we were not the adversary (the real

beast was the male art establishment), we lost sight of the goal (to make our position equal) and instead fought with one another. Many people may not believe this, may think things are substantially different now. They're not. As far as women showing more, yes, but one has only to teach in one of the many art institutions scattered across this country to see how successfully the status quo is maintained. Despite affirmative action, despite lobbying in Washington, despite new governmental rulings, the system remains frighteningly the same.

In trying to bring my thoughts about A.I.R. together, I find I had and have tremendous admiration for many members. I often felt it a privilege to be able to suddenly enter the lives of twenty women artists and to experience the impact of their personalities and their work. A.I.R. was a sorority of women who, under any other set of circumstances, would never have joined one. I have made friends through A.I.R. whom I hope I will always know. My contact with several members has fostered a vital dialogue about work that is invaluable. But the best part of a co-op gallery is that you show what you want when you want how you want—you don't have to convince anyone of anything. If your work changes drastically, you don't have to worry about whether your dealer will still want to show it; you are your dealer. And you don't have to be polite. But you do have to pay, and meet, and sit, and ship and mail and do your own p.r. So in the end, it's a trade-off.

Finally, all of us were strengthened by pushing the gallery's existence. In giving it credibility, we were building a foundation from which to support ourselves as individuals. A.I.R. functioned as The Great Mother herself—both the carnivore and the protectress.

# WORKING TOGETHER GROWING TOGETHER

## A Brief History of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective\*

Wendy Coppedge Sanford



**T**his spring it will be ten years since our group first got together to work on women's health issues and talk about our lives. We want to present some of our ten-year history as a collective—partly because we like telling our story, and partly because we think our experience may offer some understanding of the dy-

Wendy Coppedge Sanford is a Quaker, feminist, writer and editor, mother to ten-year-old Matthew, and is finishing up a masters degree in theological studies.

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namics and possibilities of a women's work and personal-sharing group. Much of our story has been our evolution, through numerous ups and downs, toward a way of being and working together that fits our sense of gathering as women, as equals, to explore common ground and exchange what we know in an effort to make personal and social changes that seem important to us.

### Our Beginnings

We started out as a small discus-

sion group on health at one of the first women's liberation conferences in Boston, in 1969. About ten women gathered that day to talk about some of the hottest health issues of the time—abortion (which was illegal)

\*Authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (New England Free Press, 1971; Simon and Schuster, 1973, revised edition 1976) and *Ourselves and Our Children* (Random House, 1978). Members of the collective are Ruth Bell, Pamela Berger, Vilunya Diskin, Joan Ditzion, Paula Doress, Nancy Hawley, Judy Norsigian, Jane Pincus, Esther Rome, Wendy Sanford and Norma Swenson.

Thanks also to Ed Pincus for his comments and suggestions.

and prepared childbirth. Many of us had just had babies, some were friends already, a few had full- or part-time jobs, most were currently home with children, and some worked without pay in community organizing and the antiwar movement. Realizing that we didn't know enough about our bodies even to evaluate the health care we were getting, the group decided to meet through the summer, with each woman researching and writing on a topic especially important to her personal experience—menstruation, pregnancy, abortion, postpartum depression, sexuality, birth control. Each area of investigation was one that affected both how we felt about ourselves as women and how free we were to make important choices about our lives. At that point, many of us had to learn how to do medical research, and we had to stretch ourselves to write clearly, as most of us hadn't thought of ourselves as writers. We needed and got crucial support from each other.

We quickly discovered that the factual information we brought to the group took on a new usefulness when we talked among ourselves about our experiences and feelings around the subjects. The honesty was unfamiliar and awkward at first, but it was catching:

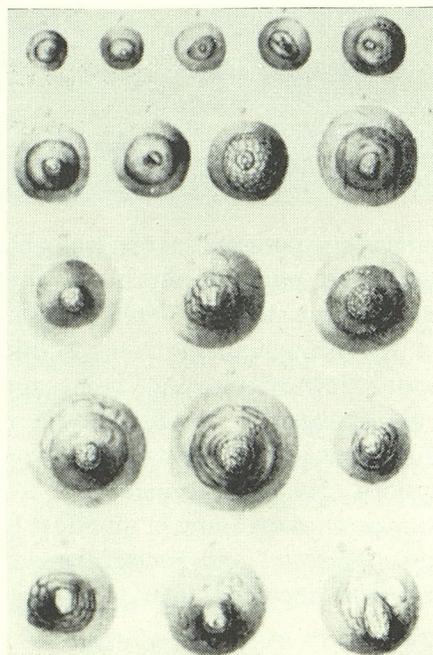
*The first time I dared to admit that my pregnancy sometimes felt like a monster growing inside me, I thought the roof would fall in. Instead, the mothers in the group started talking: they knew the frightening sense of being taken over by a foreign being, of being overwhelmed, of losing control over their bodies as pregnancy advanced. What a relief! I felt like I could be my whole self again, with all my yes-and-no feelings about my pregnancy. And I started reading whatever I could get my hands on about the physical changes happening inside me.*

*I had heard "the facts" about the menstrual cycle before, in a cartoon shown to the sixth-grade girls. But I*

*didn't remember much and it was still just "the curse." In the Bodies group we relearned the amazing details of the cycle while talking about ourselves—telling about when we got our period for the first time, affirming for each other that cramps and premenstrual tension are not "all in a woman's mind" as some books and doctors had told us, and helping each other past long-time feelings of menstrual uncleanness.*

It was exciting to discover that our personal discussions enabled us to develop a critique of the information we read and the health care we were getting.

By the next winter, we were eager to share our information and this new way of including it in our lives. We gave an informal evening course in Cambridge called "Women and Their Bodies" for about fifty friends and their friends. As we saw each other teaching the course, and continued meeting to plan and exchange feedback, bonds developed among us. Each of us, through her involvement in the project, learned more about herself as an educator, discussion leader, researcher, writer, parent, lover, friend—and often it



From *The Anatomy and Diseases of the Breast*, 1845, Sir Astley Paston Cooper, British anatomist and surgeon.

was the encouragement of others in the group that spurred our growth. We gave the course twice again over the next year to women who had heard of it from friends. At the end of each course, anyone from the group who wanted to go elsewhere and run a similar program did so, using mimeographed copies of the original papers. A few new women joined those who stayed in the core group, to help research and write up more information. And so the course spread and the group gained in diversity and strength.

Those two years of fluid membership probably have a lot to do with how stable we have been since. In a purely consciousness-raising group, this fluidity would have been problematical, for when personal discussion is the main focus, continuity in attendance is crucial. Since research and teaching brought us together, our personal relationships had time to grow in depth and substance as we shared the work. By November 1971, a core group of twelve had been working together more and more steadily and was coming to know and care about each other in ways that develop only with time. When we became a legal corporation, we were required to list the names of everyone in the group, and decided not to take in any more new members. We have remained a closed group ever since.

Another thing that contributed to our longevity as a group, particularly in those early years, is that our work consistently met our personal needs. The subject matter touched all of our lives, and the personal discussion at the center of our learning process filled our need to come out of isolation and talk with other women. This striking interplay of task, subject matter and personal growth released energy to many areas of our lives, and kept us going when there was much work to do.

Today, as our projects and responsibilities are burgeoning, we sometimes feel nostalgic for the times when our health education work, a deepening understanding of ourselves, and our friendships with each other felt so simply like one and the same thing.

**From Teaching to Publishing:  
Roles, Decision Making, and  
Issues of Power  
and Dominance in the Group**

The summer of 1970, a few people in the group worked to pull our many papers together into a newsprint book that was published later that year by a local nonprofit press (the New England Free Press). Over the next two years, more than 200,000 copies of the book were sold, mostly through women's centers and by word-of-mouth. We were able to lower the price from 75¢ to 45¢ to 30¢; and the title, *Women and Their Bodies*, was changed to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, reflecting our personal changes. It was an exciting and fertile time.

By this point, we were developing some characteristic ways of getting things done. At that early time in the women's movement, when non-

hierarchical women's groups were emerging, we did not set up a formal structure with assigned roles. During the first year, according to one of us:

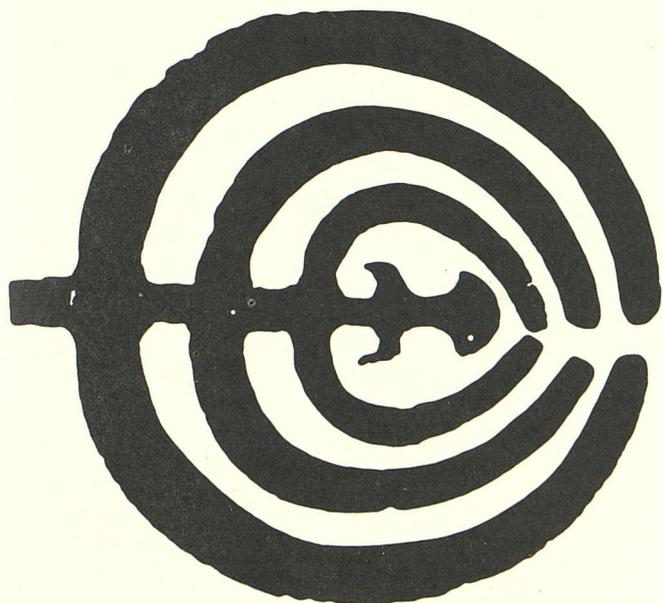
*Each person or small group was responsible for a topic—researching, writing, getting it ready to present. We never even had a discussion about leadership. Two of us did a lot of phone calling about where the meetings would be. But if I said, "I'm too busy and I can't make the calls," then someone else would.*

Thus we established a fairly easy-going pattern, in which one or two people would take on the administrative work as they had energy and time for it, and others would initiate and follow through on our parts of the project. Each of us has emerged over the years to play different roles—in administration, writing, outreach. This has been an invaluable experience in learning our individual strengths and sharpening our abilities. Our fluid and unprogrammed way of organizing work, however, has not always been adequate for our needs. As early as the original publishing project, some people ended up carrying too much of the workload, and over the years we have struggled with the problem of

allocating work.

From the beginning, we made our decisions by consensus. Giving the "Women and Their Bodies" course the first time helped shape our sense of decision making in a nonhierarchical group. Originally, our idea of structuring the course came from our own schooling: we took an hour or so to present the research and our responses to it, then opened up the meeting for discussion. But the material, our kind of personal interaction with it and the informal sit-around-in-a-circle setting moved the "students" to speak up long before we were done "presenting." It was difficult for some of us to give up our attachment to uninterrupted presentation time, but as the "leaders," we moved with the consensus of the "students" in switching to a small group discussion format where everyone got a full chance to speak and be heard. So the course format was not imposed by a leadership group: it was based on an emerging consensus of the core group and the new people. And it proved to be an excellent vehicle for the kind of learning and growth we wanted.

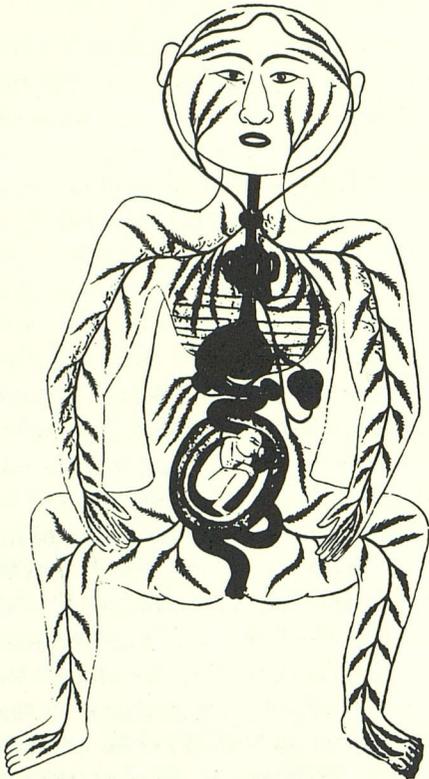
Within these new discussion groups, our model of operation took



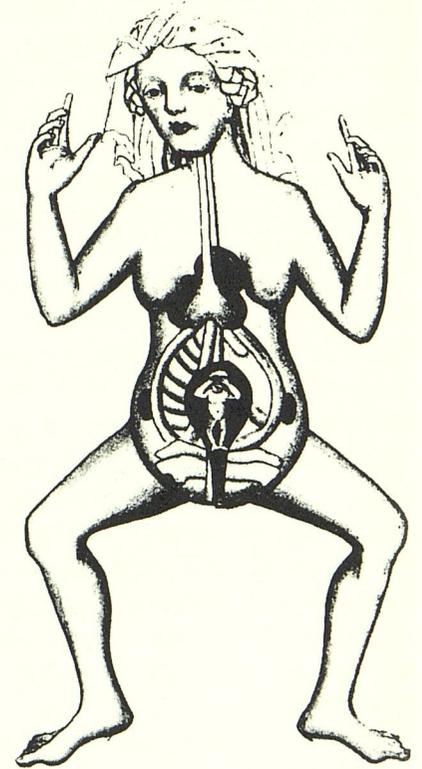
*Left, bronze fertility amulet represents fetus in utero. Eighth to seventh century BC.*



*Right, terra cotta ex-voto represents the vulva. Museo di Villa Giulia, Rome.*



Left: from Oriental prototype of Fünfbilder series. Depicts arterial system of the pregnant woman.



Right: miniature of pregnant woman pictured with no external genitalia, flask-shaped uterus. Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek.

further shape. Teaching (or leading) was essentially sharing—making information available and exploring how it interacted with our own lives so others could do the same. By participating in a discussion rather than lecturing, we, as leaders, learned new information and gained new insights each time we gave the course.

Our experiences in giving the course reinforced the group's growing sense that we operated with the most energy, effectiveness and authenticity when our decisions were based on the shared ideas of every member. This conviction has become stronger over the years. We know that a powerful creative energy flows when each of us holds responsibility for the way the group or project goes. To release that energy, each of us has to know that she can air any ideas, disagreements or uneasiness. Our experience together has reaffirmed something that women have perhaps always known: our feelings about a given subject are as important as

the factual information about it, and any project or decision that leaves out feelings is not whole. We are still learning. Sometimes after months of being stuck on a problem, we finally take the time we need to speak about our feelings, and to work through the difficult ones like anger, jealousy, exclusion, sadness. This process takes a lot of time:

*Unlike almost every other group I know, if we make a firm decision one week and then three weeks later one or two members have strong, serious and sincere reasons why they think that decision should be changed, we almost always make time to listen to them, and even to act on their ideas. It's impossibly frustrating sometimes, but it's also one of the reasons why we've survived and still love each other.*

Personal confrontation and careful listening often make the process of coming to a consensus as meaningful as the decision itself.

*I've noticed that I often don't mind if a consensus decision is different from what I would like if I were deciding alone, provided I feel every-*

*one has really listened to what I have to say.*

Time is teaching us flexibility: with deadline pressures and the need for quick and final choices, we try to streamline our system, so that not everyone speaks on every point. If we do want to say something we will be heard, and that comes from the trust we have created with one another. As one of us said, "I think our decision-making process is at the very core of how and why we continue to exist."

Learning to function as a nonhierarchical group has presented us with some painful issues involving power. In the political groups (usually run by men) where many of us had been active, we had seen how all women and the less powerful men had very little say in what went on. In not wanting to repeat that misuse of power, we took on an unspoken ideal of leaderlessness. Yet we have learned that every group has leaders: the important thing is how they lead. In retrospect, we can see that our early idea of leader-

lessness just pushed power conflicts underground. For example, one of us was particularly active in the first publishing project and in fact did many hours of work singlehandedly. At that point in her life, taking a leadership role felt natural to her and met personal needs. The group, in turn, needed her energy and perseverance for the book to come out well. Yet over the months she held an increasing influence in all aspects of our work. She was, for instance, better able than anyone else to sway the group's decisions, or to come in after a decision had been made and turn it around. Without consciously intending to, because of her engaging personality and assertiveness, she became the consistently dominant figure in the group.

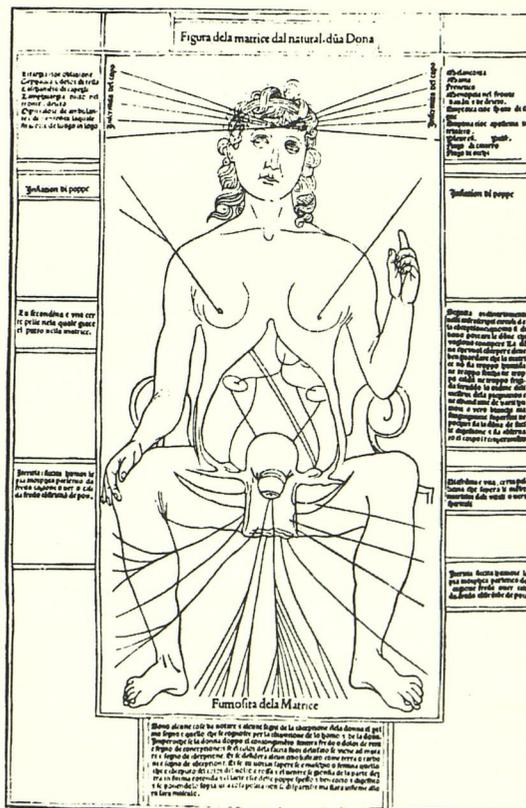
Tensions arose but it was a long time before they were expressed. Then our dissatisfaction took the form of intense individual conflicts between this woman and other, more self-confident members of the group who felt their own roles cramped by her influence. But it was really a whole-group issue: although the more timid of us did not clash with her, we resented her. As is so often the case, we resented her because we doubted our own worth in the group: "She is listened to more than I am, so I must be less important." Our self-doubts and feelings of inadequacy made us give her more power than she perhaps even wanted. After many months of building tension, all of us finally were able to talk about our anger toward her, and why we tended to invest her with power. Our honesty freed her to examine why she had moved into that position, and to explore her growing desire to pull back from it. "I feel," she said, "that whenever things get rough you put me into the big sister role, and I don't want to play it any more." It means a lot to us that our support for her to leave

that role came as much from our caring for her as it did from our need to be rid of her domination. As she said recently, "After all those years in men's political groups, I knew I didn't want to do it their way, but I still wanted some of what they had, and that was power. I had to learn that you can have power without dominating."

Gradually, a stronger sense of self-respect and equality has developed among us, and we find ourselves with a changed notion of what power means for our group. In our society, power usually operates as "power over," being able to make people do what you want them to do. One of the things we wrestled with in the dynamic just described was our expectation that one member's influence necessarily diminished the others'. As we emerged from that struggle with our group intact and our friendships deepened, we realized that there can be power without dominance, that power can be sharing, or "power with." Different

members of the group will have power or exercise leadership at different times, in the form of expertise or initiative, energy or personal dynamism or some special responsibility, but standing as they do on our base of mutuality and self-respect, they exercise power with, not over, all of us.

We come up against the power issue in subtler forms all the time. One person may be able to command group attention when the rest of us feel we wouldn't be listened to as readily. Someone may feel freer than the others in a series of meetings to press the group for support on a personal matter, taking up group time when the rest of us hold back either to concentrate on the agenda or because our own problems don't seem so important. We've had to help each other sharpen a sense of entitlement so that we can speak up and ask for what we want. But we've learned that there is a natural fluctuation between moving with the needs of the group and



Woodcut from Ketham's *Fasciculus medicinae*, Venice, 1491. For the first time in a printed book, the uterus is authentically drawn, apparently from the object. "Ketham" — pen name for Johannes von Kircheim, a Swabian physician—wrote text of popular Latin medical tracts regarded as the first illustrated medical work. His figures are the first didactic medical woodcuts.

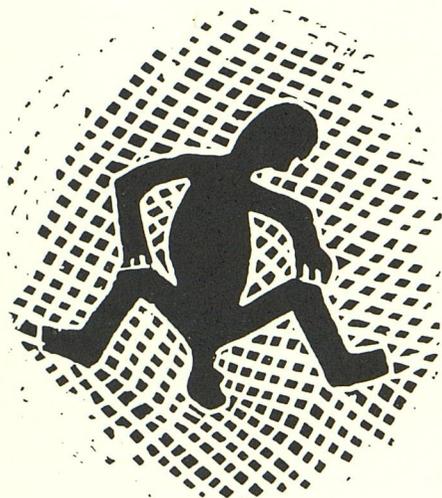
making individual desires known, just as there is a fluctuation as to which of us at any one time steps forward or back. The situation becomes destructive only when the pattern becomes fixed.

### Going Public: The Commercial Press Edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

In the summer and fall of 1971, we were approached by a number of publishing houses, who, attracted by our book's success as an unadvertised underground publication, wanted to publish a revised edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The decision to use a commercial publisher was perhaps the most difficult one we have made. Briefly, a large publishing house offered us advance money to pay for graphics and administrative work, wide experience with editing and layout, and, most important to us, publicity and distribution networks which would get our book quickly to hundreds of thousands of women who had not been reached by the women's health movement. Yet a small, nonprofit press offered us the deep satisfaction of strengthening an alternative institution and of continuing to provide an inexpensive, nonprofit book, as well as the chance to be more directly in control of our final product. At that time, seven years ago, we couldn't find a nonprofit publisher or women's press big enough to tackle the kind of distribution we thought was important. It was a major problem.

When we laid aside our revision work for months of meetings to consider these alternatives responsibly, a part of each of us wanted to ditch our sense of public responsibility and get back to the bodies work, the intimacy, the wonderful integration of subject matter with personal growth which was a source of energy for us. But we soon found that these

"business matters" were of intense personal relevance if we approached them with an eye to feelings and process. For example, after we had all the information we could get and were still locked into weeks of wrestling with the nonprofit vs. commercial press dilemma, someone finally remarked, "This decision is so blocked that there must be a lot of feelings we aren't in touch with at all. Let's go around the circle for as long as it takes to talk about what the whole question means to each of us."



Clay drawing of woman giving birth; baby's head is visible. Gold Coast, Africa, 1899 AD. Staaliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich.

So we each got a chance to explore our gut reactions to the idea of a nonprofit or a capitalist alternative, and to feel out our special sensitivity to the charges of "selling out" that were being fired at us by some of the radical, leftist women and men who were proud of our book as part of the movement. We examined our fears of an establishment press: "They'll take advantage of us." "We'll lose control and feel powerless." "We'll become too public and won't be just us any more." "The profit they make off our book will make us feel lousy." More personally, we spoke about what money signified in terms of the families we

grew up in and the lives we were living. And again, power: "How do I feel about the power this publication might bring to us in both money and influence?" Gradually we realized that our deepest resistance to deciding either way came from our ambivalence about "growing up," about shouldering responsibility, about moving out into the world in an active, conscious, assertive way—which we would be doing whichever way we chose to become public. Having aired all this, we could decide.

We opted for the wide distribution potential of a large publisher, with two crucial stipulations: our royalty money from book sales would be used to support women's health education projects—ours and others; and we would have a tough, lawyer-negotiated contract which specified a ceiling on the book's price and gave us control over layout, advertising, editorial decisions, jacket cover, as well as a 70% discount for clinics and other organizations providing health counseling services. We have been satisfied with this decision, and have been thankful innumerable times for the comprehensiveness of our contract and for the foresight and persistence of the woman who has been our lawyer for seven years.<sup>1</sup>

As we prepared the book for commercial publication, our chapters grew by a process characteristic of our group. One or two of us would write a first draft and read it to the group for their feedback. A draft incorporating everyone's comments was given to outside people: nurses and doctors to check medical accuracy, women of various ages and backgrounds, our husbands or male friends. It was sometimes excruciat-

1. A copy of our contract is available to anyone who sends a self-addressed 8½" x 11" manila envelope with 55¢ in stamps to OBOS, Box 192, West Somerville, Mass. 02144.

ing to share control over what we wrote.

I couldn't bear to have anyone change my chapter. It was a wrench to have to shorten it—I couldn't let go of a single word, so I had to let someone else in the group cut it. I did trust that she would do it well, and she did.

At the same time, we were excited to discover the cooperation that was possible.

*It was amazing, after the initial resistance, to feel myself so open to people's comments, and to find them so open to mine. When I had done the best I could, I trusted that someone in the group would push or lead me a little further. It's both my chapter and ours.*

This kind of writing, like our decision making, takes time. In the two revisions (1973 and 1976) we worked in constant conflict between two voices. One said, "If meeting this deadline means we are going to race through stuff that's important to us, then I'm for pushing up the deadline." The other said, "If we don't meet it, our book won't get out soon enough to all the people we want to get it to." Resolving these differences didn't come easily.

As we tried during this period to do a job that required increased communication with people and organizations outside our circle, we ran into difficulties as a nonhierarchical group of twelve people trying to act as a unit. For example:

*When we decided to solicit a chapter on women and weight for the revised edition, I agreed to contact two women who we thought would do a good job. In all the calling, consulting, reading over their first drafts, etc., I got to know them pretty well, and liked their chapter a lot. When they brought us what they'd written, the group, after weeks of arduous debate over the pressing space limitations for all the chapters, decided there just wasn't room. It had to be left out entirely. I was furious. I*

*somehow felt completely responsible for how disappointed and angry those two women felt. Here they'd had such clear and energetic communication with me and suddenly it became clear that they hadn't been dealing with the whole group. It was a lousy situation.*

Over the years, this kind of thing has happened several times—with writers, translators, photographers, publishers, people who want us to do workshops, and so on. We need to try to judge better when individuals can speak for the group and when we should wait for a group decision or push for a clear group sense of intention. Whoever is acting as our representative must be sure that she is saying what the whole group wants or will abide by. Until we can do this better, there will probably be times when others, outside the group, will find it confusing to work with us.

#### **Expanding Our Outreach: Work and Money**

Since 1973, when the first Simon and Schuster edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was published, our workload has mushroomed. Among the responsibilities we have taken on (many of which are made possible by our royalty money) are: answering more and more mail each month and sending out thousands of dollars' worth of literature every year; working out joint projects with women's health groups in this country and in Europe;<sup>2</sup> putting together a bimonthly health packet of Xeroxed articles to send to about five hundred women's health groups; negotiating about foreign editions (French, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, British, Spanish, Swedish, German, Israeli); coordinating, printing and distributing a United States Spanish-language edition of *Our Bodies, Our*

2. Our tax status as a private operating foundation prohibits our giving outright grants, so we can support only as many groups as we have the womanpower to do joint projects

*selves* (Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas);<sup>3</sup> overhauling *OBOS* for the revised 1976 edition; writing *Our-selves and Our Children* (Random House, 1978), a book by and for parents; and meeting requests to do workshops on women's health care and sexuality. How do we handle the sheer volume of work?

We have had to revise our earlier, more flexible approach to getting work done. We have struggled (with only partial success) to develop a clearer and more rigorous way of determining who does which work, particularly the administrative work of answering letters, fielding speaking requests, preparing a budget, communicating with the publisher, and so on. For several years a different "coordinator" acted for a few months at a time, taking charge of administrative work, but as a group we tended not to cooperate enough with her—getting things in late or failing to use our meeting times to get through the decisions she knew we needed to make—putting her in the uncomfortable position of having to push us and then being resented for it. These thoughts come from women who were coordinators in 1972 and 1974:

*Talking with our editor [at the publisher's], I would build up a sense of urgency about something getting finished or some decision getting made. At the meeting, people would have their own agendas; we wouldn't do what I felt we needed to, unless I acted bossy and even then sometimes people resisted. I was resented for reminding people of deadlines we had all agreed on! I felt the group put me in a "bad parent" role, but I rarely took time to express my frustrations because I felt so urgent about the business. When I finally did, I didn't feel like I was being heard.*

3. *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas* may be purchased directly from the collective. (See fn. 1 for address.) Single orders, \$2 per copy; ten or more copies, \$1.20 each. Groups with limited funds may request several free copies.

After working hours on collecting financial data, working with IRS requirements, etc., I would lose sight of the importance of our process, of our interacting and dealing with our complex ideas and feelings. I'd just want to get the decision made. In times such as these, what helped me deal with my impatience more than anything else was being able to look inside myself and reconnect with deeper feelings of caring, love and respect for the women in the group.

After months of some angry resentment, these women let the rest of us know how lonely and frustrating it is to be the chief time-conscious, task-oriented person in a group that has a slower pace than outside pressures allow. They were, in a sense, bearing the brunt of our group's underlying unresolved conflicts between task time and personal-sharing time. At this point, we divided the coordinator's role into several jobs and, with more evenly shared responsibility, the work seems to get done with less stress. (And now that nearly all of us have been coordinator at least once, we are more cooperative!) Recently, many of us have become busy with other work, and one person in the group has started to work full-time for us, so we have to be watchful again for the old dynamic.

As our workload and our royalty income grew, we made the important decision in 1974 to pay ourselves for health education work—giving workshops, researching and writing, and administration. Initially, some of us resisted this. Never having been paid for our OBOS teaching and writing (most of us were at least partially supported by husbands at that time), some of us were attached to the idea that no money should pass hands for women's movement work. But if we were supporting other health education groups, why not pay ourselves? So we did. Receiving pay became a

mark of taking ourselves and our work—women's selves and women's work—seriously. It meant that we didn't have to find other jobs, but could expand the group's outreach. And personally it made a big difference: said one of our group, "I feel tremendous excitement at the chance to earn money for doing the work that I love to do and I think is important."

Over the next years, some of us left, or didn't seek, other jobs to work part-time for the collective. As more of us began to depend on the collective for work and a salary, we wondered how this new overlap between the group and our lives would affect our policies and decisions. Some of us were apprehensive. Would we become more conservative? What did that mean? In 1977, some members pressed for a raise, for paid vacation and maternity leave, arguing that we should give ourselves the same fair wages and benefits we'd seek from another employer. In the heated debate that led to acceptance of these policies, we finally recognized a fundamental shift in our identity: we are an employer, an ongoing business concern as well as a women's group. In the words of one woman who was slowest to accept the changes:

*I think my resistance came from my nostalgic fantasy about us as a grass-roots, informal, unmaterialistic, idealistic women's collective who gave away whatever money they got. But the fact is that it makes sense to pay ourselves a decent wage. I can see now that the employment policies we work out are an important part of the evolution of women working together. But I also want to say that it's crucial to me, and to all of us, that our money be used not only to pay us for our health education work, but also to support joint projects with other women.*

Questions remain. What is the proper ratio between money allocated for in-group projects and money

we channel into joint projects with outside groups? Is it fair to those of us who want to branch out into non-health education work that royalty money goes only to those who choose to work for the collective? How can we be better employers to the three "non-group" women, the part-time workers who do accounting, administrative work and typing?

### Work and Intimacy

The oldest and most persistent conflict in the group is between work time and personal time in our weekly evening meetings. Long past are the days when our work, body education, was the central stuff of our personal sharing. Yet when we let work pressures squeeze out time for the personal discussion where we find so much of our energy and cohesion, we lose our centeredness as a group and are good neither for each other nor for our work.

During one particularly hectic and uncentered period, one of our group had a sterilization operation. Several times, during her decision-making process and after the operation, she quietly indicated to us that she needed our attention. In that year of busyness we kept letting other priorities crowd out her request for group time, and few of us even responded as individuals. In retrospect we can see that her choice to be sterilized was threatening to some of us who were not sure whether we would have (or wanted) more children, and that it seemed quite remote to others. Our unease, then, perhaps even more than our busyness, prevented us from hearing her. We spent so little time focusing on group interactions that year that these resistances remained unexamined. The many months of her need and our insensitivity took their toll: by the time that we did listen to her, she was considering leaving the group. Here we had written a book

urging women to give each other support and understanding, and yet we had failed miserably to respond to someone in our circle.

The conflict between the personal and work affects our work, too:

*When I come to a meeting with some personal thing I need to talk about, and the agenda is crammed full of decisions we have to make by a certain time, I feel frustrated and angry and uncooperative. So I don't work very well at all.*

An excerpt from a letter written to the group by three of us in the summer of 1975 shows that this conflict has come closest to making some of us fear the group will fall apart:

*Our recent meetings have been frustrating. Meetings are not starting on time. Attendance is lousy each week and erratic over time. Last week we allocated some money without even discussing it, an indication of our disintegration and confusion. We have no clear working structure for our group any more; it's hard to say this because it scares us... Many of us are thinking about our plans for the fall and how the group fits into each of our lives. Our fear is that the group will fall apart without our agreeing to it. Obviously we don't want that to happen.*

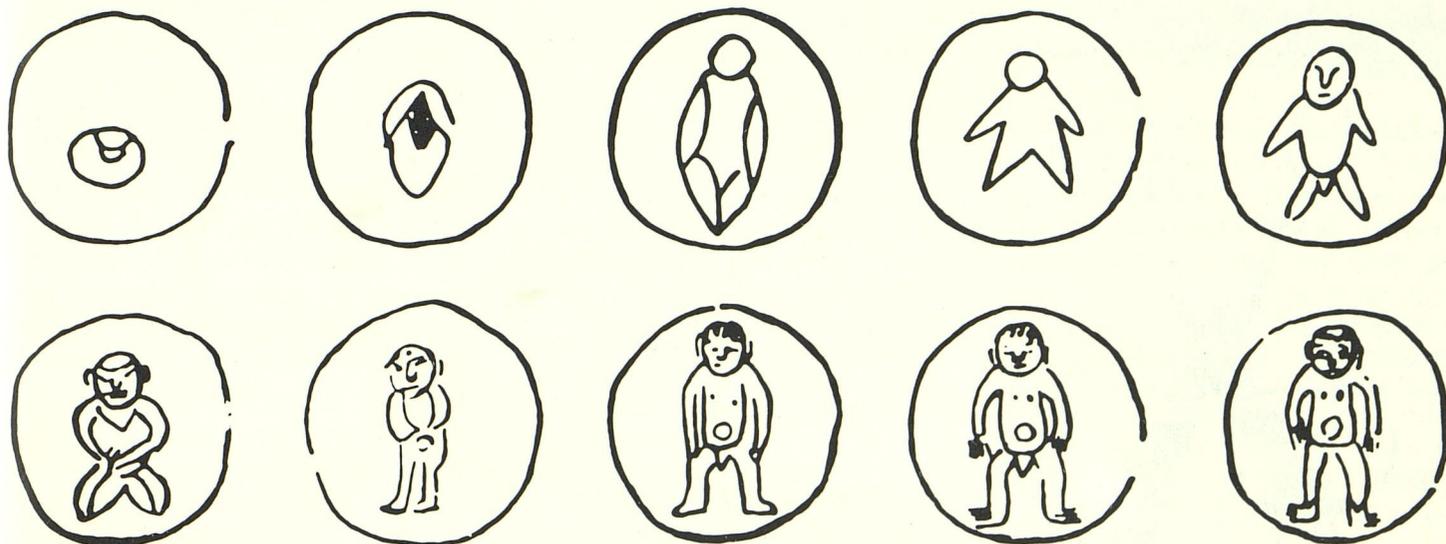
We have dealt with this work/

personal-sharing dilemma in as many ways as there have been months since we started meeting. There are times when we will break into an agenda to talk about a pressing personal issue. Other times, one or more of us will sit through a meeting preoccupied and full of resentment. Or some of us will want to proceed with business and others will not. Dividing meeting time in half, alternating business and personal meetings, fantasizing about having the time to meet twice a week — none of these has brought complete peace around this issue. During some periods we have held separate business meetings twice a month for those who could attend. It sounds simple, but required a basic change in our process: even though decisions were still reserved for the larger group, those who couldn't be at the business meeting had to accept missing out on the discussion so central to our decision making. Those daytime business meetings freed up Monday nights for some lovely celebrations and spontaneous rituals together. Recently, we have started to have day-long retreats two or three times a year, where we sometimes work but more often just simply go around the circle to hear

from each other with the luxury of enough time.

Our prolonged business periods are made tolerable by the extent to which we share in each other's lives outside meetings. Our interconnect- edness has grown steadily as we have written together in twos and threes, looked after each other's children, had family picnics, played music together and met for meals, given workshops with each other around New England and beyond, and spent travel hours in long, searching conversations. We've seen one another through four new babies (making sixteen children in all), three divorces and a wedding, one case of hot flashes, some dramatic long affairs, one child going off to college and four entering adolescence. We have comforted each other the best we could through two parents' deaths and the illnesses of several others, learning what it is for all of us to grow older and to see our parents age and die. And we've heard each other through some crucial professional decisions.

Parties of "just us," where we danced and played together, gradually alternated with parties including the men in our lives. At first, our gatherings with men were awkward.



The human fetus from the first to tenth month, as illustrated in a Chinese obstetric text of 1638, *She sheng pi p-on tsang yao* (The most important secret instructions in obstetrics).

We were all used to a pattern where women meet people socially through their men, so this reversed situation of men getting together because of us was unfamiliar. We in the group have such special energy and exuberant closeness that it is sometimes hard for non-group people (women, too) to figure out just where to fit in. And some of the men have expressed their initial feelings of uneasiness at being with the group, since they know we talk among ourselves about our lives and they wonder what we have said about them. They point out that we have at times supported each other to make changes that the men were not ready for. It has been important to us to try to bring our home lives and work lives together, so we keep trying, and gradually our joint gatherings have begun to have more spontaneous energy. We have had one wonderful party for our parents, several Seders, and a Christmas-Chanukah party with our children.

#### What Next?

The special challenge of our present situation is diversification within the group. Ten years have seen change in the professions and passions of many of us. Three people have moved away, which leaves us smaller and very much missing and

missed. For the past three years, six of us worked on *Ourselves and Our Children*. While these women were busy with the new book, the continuing health activist work of the collective became more and more the special province of a few others. With the emergence of specialized groups among us (which can't always know what the others are doing), there are inevitable misunderstandings or failed communications, and questions about how time and money are being spent. We do not yet have built-in mechanisms for evaluating or supervising each other's work, and sometimes our attempts at this end up in someone feeling attacked. We are in the almost unprecedented situation of being a working concern whose "directors" and "staff" are the same, and as our projects diversify this puts a strain on our informal methods of operation.

We have recently begun to recognize that we have been letting full work agendas shield us from confronting some of the angers that have been stirred in the process of diversification. One of us remarked:

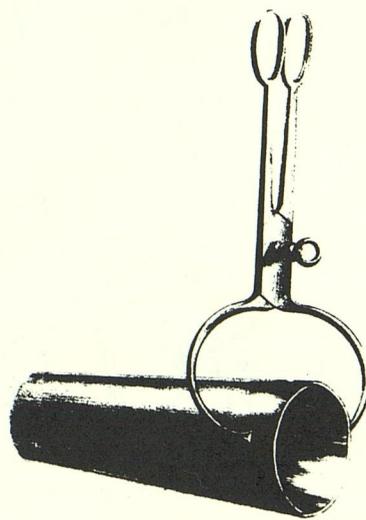
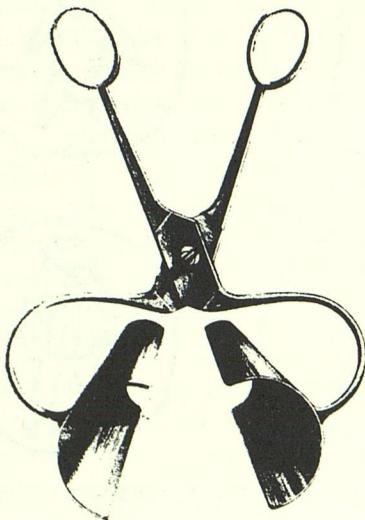
*I've sat in a couple of meetings this fall angry about how a certain project is going and seen us veer away from it, me included. It's partly that we're such a work-oriented group*

*now that opening up an anger issue would wreak havoc on our outside commitments! But I think it's more that we've all come to value the loving and support we get from each other so much that we're scared to risk it by bringing up what we're angry about.*

Working on this history together has helped us get clearer about some of our current dynamics, which means that change will come.

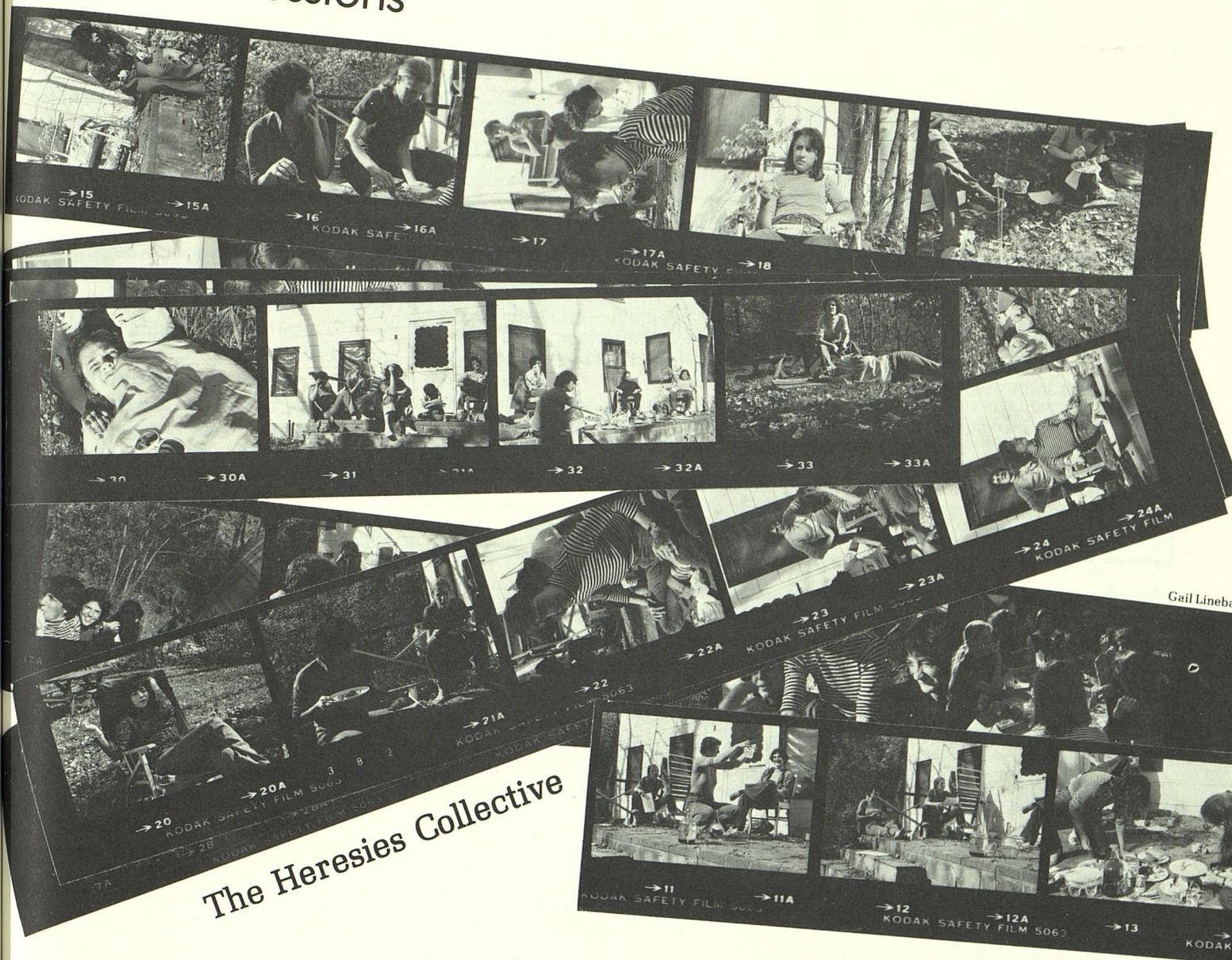
We sometimes worry that losing the single focus of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* will make us drift apart as a group. We also worry that we won't have the womanpower to carry on all the projects and women's health movement interconnections we've become woven into, as well as projects arising from *Ourselves and Our Children*. When we revise *OBOS* again, it seems clear that, because of our changing interests and jobs, women we have worked with outside the group will write many of the sections. How will this change us?

We don't have the answer, but we know changes are coming. We are less alarmed by them than we would have been a couple of years ago. We have this wonderful fantasy of the whole group of us in our seventies and eighties sitting in rocking chairs before the fire, going around the circle and talking about our lives. One way or another, we'll be there!



*Left:* vaginal speculum and tenaculum. Illustrated by Fabricius ab Aquapendente (1537-1619). *Right:* vaginal speculum, nineteenth century. Used for the application of leeches to the cervix in the treatment of pelvic inflammation.

# "True Confessions"



## The Heresies Collective

Originally the Heresies collective wanted to work together on an issue of our magazine examining our history and process, as well as that of other collectives. In this way we hoped to clarify and understand a lot of our problems in working together. It never happened, this issue we decided to call "True Confessions." When the time came, not enough collective members were able to or interested in working on it. Instead, the editorial collective that was formed included three Heresies members and the issue became more generally focused on women working

together. We did, however, want to tell our readers about our experience, so a questionnaire was distributed to collective members. What follows is a sampling of the responses.

We formed Heresies because the ideas most relevant to feminist artists were not being discussed seriously or in depth in any existing publication. There was a need for *Heresies*, and no one was going to do it but those most passionately involved in these ideas. Also, most of us had been involved in the Women's Movement since 1969 or 1970, had done

consciousness raising, had demonstrated and protested, had taught feminist courses and lectured on feminism. But it seemed as if it was time for the next stage. Was it enough for us each to (finally) have the support to have our own careers? No. Was it enough to discuss feminism with a small circle of friends and students? No. We wanted to take those debates and dialogues out to a larger public, to extend the ripples farther outward, to stretch ourselves. [Joyce]

I feel that this magazine is necessary. . . It's something I've got to do.

# H E R E S I E S

The Heresies collective is the publishing group—taking care of money, subscriptions, distribution and other business. In addition, there are separate editorial collectives for the issues, which may or may not include Heresies collective members. These more or less autonomous “issue collectives” are responsible to the Heresies collective for following the accepted theme, budget and policy guidelines.

## A Brief Chronology

Fall 1975: Meetings in NYC to discuss a new feminist art group—originally “a voice and a space” (publication and school). Spring 1976: Publishing collective of 20 women forms. The name *Heresies* finally wins out (over *Pink* and hundreds of others). First three issue themes decided and statement of purpose written collectively. Typed flyer sent out asking for contributions. We acquire a post office box. Summer 1976: Heresies is incorporated. Enough money received for publication of first issue. Fall 1976: Open meeting at A.I.R. gallery to discuss Heresies with feminist community. Jan. 1977: Issue 1 appears. We rent our first office. Since then we've put out five more issues; acquired a larger office; received grants from N.E.A., N.Y. State Council, and Joint Foundations; and begun to pay an office staff. Our print run has increased from 5,000 to 6,000 and issues 1-5 have sold out.

It's necessary for us to do public work as feminists. Our hope is that out of doing this magazine together, something political will be made. [Elke/Janet/Patsy in discussion]

*A self-selected group formed from random networks—artists, writers, performers, academics who shared an interest in feminism, art and politics. Long, intense meetings became the forum for creating our first problems. We needed a structure and a collective statement that would express our ideals and goals. Since many of us didn't know each other before we began to meet and none of us had edited a magazine, this was an ambitious project. Most of us didn't know what we were getting into.*

The initial meetings terrified and exhilarated me simultaneously. I had no “consciousness-raising” experience so was not used to group process (unemotional words for a complex human interchange). [Sally]

There has always been a spirit behind Heresies that is unique. An energy, a group working on a project together that does end up to be a publication. But the energy and

spirit shifts and changes according to the needs of the collective, issue being worked on and members' needs. . . . I became involved with Heresies because it was the beginning of a dynamic project with a group of equally dynamic women whom I wanted to work and identify with. My expectations were met for a certain period of time, and then they weren't met. It's complicated. . . . [Joan S.]

The fact that Heresies is a collective project is important to me. Because I am a painter, I work and like working alone in my studio. Because I also have needs to work with other women, I usually seek out a place to work collectively. . . . These two needs are intimately connected. Much of my work draws on the traditions of women's creativity (a collective history). I see myself and Heresies as part of that tradition. Working collectively means creating something out of individuals' ideas, feeding off of each other and tapping into the tremendous skills and powers we have, sharing them, creating something that could not be done by one woman, something larger than

self. [Harmony]

Reasons for joining Heresies: (Conscious, ostensible) A desire for a new level of thought and action among women. Specifically to attempt to work out the relation between feminism and socialism through addressing aspects of this problem in articles and visuals and/or an entire issue—with all the discussion and exchange that accompanies such an editorial goal and, possibly, through acting as a contributor of such articles/writings/visuals. (Less conscious, on a deeper level) To satisfy my need for community; to help build community and a support system for women; to humanize the art world, a world I live in and a world I find brutalizing. Ultimately—survival, psychic, aesthetic, moral. [May]

In the initial meetings everyone was trying to feel out the others on things like political attitudes. It was a frightening group of people. A lot of women had their political attitudes down pat. They were not interested in anything but what they were interested in. Now there are expected responses to everyone's political box—no surprises. [Elke/Janet/Patsy]

*The idea of how the collective should work was never clearly developed: we just did what needed doing. Setting up a mailing list, initial fund raising, producing the first issue, getting subscribers and starting a distribution network were jobs the entire collective wanted to have a hand in. Eventually, work had to be assigned to committees that took responsibility in special areas, but the problem arose of who would work, who would honor her commitment to committee responsibilities.*

The conflict between a commitment to one's individual work and work for Heresies is growing greater. A lot of the founding members are no longer visible, or only sporadically. We've wrangled, bitched, analyzed, sweated politeness over this issue for as long as I've been in Heresies, and there's really no resolution. We cannot deny or overcome that con-

flict of commitment—almost no one seems willing anymore to sacrifice herself wholly to the collective work (except in short spurts) and thankfully so, because it's going to, it is, forcing us into new understandings of what being "political," being "collective," even being a "feminist" means. [Su F.]

I think *Heresies* has changed and the change has brought frustrations, pain and guilt—and I don't have any solution. My perception of the change: in the beginning, we were a cottage industry or better—a war effort where everyone pitched in and worked around the clock to get a job done. There would be frantic phone calls to take things here and there, mail packages, distribute flyers, lug issues to a conference. A lot of women love this kind of front-line action—I don't; it frustrates me because I see a lot of wasted energy—but then I would never dream up an idea like *Heresies* to begin with. But now, with the decline in our need for this "front-line action" I think several members are not quite sure how they now fit in, why they're needed, what contribution they can make now or want to make. [Sally]

I can easily understand the problems women have who work all the time as compared to those of us who are either on leaves of absence or simply not putting in the time. I don't feel *Heresies* is a collective any longer. . . . Too much coming and going. [Joan S.]

Over its three-year life *Heresies* has changed most in the sense that we now take it for granted. It actually exists! This never ceases to amaze me. . . . The office, the telephone, the people are all a continuing miracle. . . . It's harder now to keep up the ideological excitement. It's easier now to be exhausted by the work and the meetings. But I can't imagine leaving *Heresies* at this point. If I ever do, it will be because we have stopped growing and, selfishly, because I will have stopped growing within *Heresies*. So long as we keep attracting new members, new prob-

lems, new readers, I don't see much danger of stagnation. [Lucy]

There are a lot of problems in producing a magazine on an almost totally volunteer basis. It seems crucial that *Heresies* begin to plan seriously to pay its members for their time. It's hard to work full-time and then give overtime to *Heresies* (work is work, even if it's something you care about). . . . I think a lot of the resentments within the collective stem from this conflict over time (practically speaking) available for *Heresies*. If *Heresies* is a leisure-time activity, then what must be given up to work for *Heresies* is my other leisure-time activity (my art work, my writing, my friends). What a choice! [Sue H.]

Can women with different amounts and kinds of time, energy, talent, experience, family and other commitments, work together? . . . I realize that the need for respect and recognition of age and experience and achievement (a desperate need sometimes, in the world that treats all women with contempt. . . . and has little use for women who are not youthful and sexually promising) carries over into our relations with each other. We find it hard to leave the baggage behind. [May]

I think we should cherish each other and not let go of people—no one who is not working at the collective day in and day out is spiteful. She is not there for good reasons. Let us trust. Let us work "around" the problem. Let us rearrange the collective (the business part) and pay people for their time. Let us continue to contribute out best ideas to this ideal of *Heresies*. [Mimi]

When we work, it's usually alone or in a traditional hierarchical situation—or together by choice. Somehow we all feel we have to control everything.

Women who know how to do things do them. This creates a power situation. Those who don't have expertise often feel subservient.

We're always changing our minds—making the same decisions 15 times.

We don't respect deadlines. We don't even respect the decisions we make. [Elke/Janet/Patsy]

*Within the collective there have been conflicts over the demands of the "shitwork" necessary to keep the magazine afloat (bookkeeping, correspondence, fund raising and so on). The most "glamorous" tasks seem to be editing and designing an issue. In fact, the editorial work is also difficult, with its own elements of drudgery. And the editorial groups have had internal problems. But they always produce an issue of Heresies.*

Things changed for me in the collective. I never worked on an issue, which left me as a committee person and meeting person but never creatively involved in the magazine itself. . . . So not working on an issue leaves a space that I feel needs to be filled as a member of *Heresies*, and I left it empty and was left feeling empty to a certain degree. [Joan S.]

I've learned a lot about myself and how I interact and don't interact in group situations, and that's been invaluable to me. The most difficult and frustrating experience was working on an issue. The intensity of it seemed to bring out everyone's worst side. (I have a lot of questions about collective creativity and how to make it work to get everyone's best, rather than a lot of less-than-brilliant compromises.) I have no desire to work on another issue for a very long time, but I love the discussions about upcoming issues. [Joyce]

During my involvement on the fourth issue. . . the meetings drove me crazy—they were tiring and I hated the sense of guilt I felt if I didn't attend one. . . . I fluctuate between blaming myself and blaming others. . . . While I personally learned a great deal from the articles in the issue, I feel a detachment from the process we went through which I don't quite understand—partly it's the painful memory of one woman's temperamental outbursts, another's vacillation, another's driven energy, another's absence and manipulation,

but it is also my own lack of experience as an editor and in layout and production and, hardest to admit, my not having a clear perception of my own role. [Sally]

Even though it wasn't supposed to happen, leaders emerged. Those with big mouths, those who talked fast—they became leaders. They had connections and political power outside the group.

Although a lot of the others don't feel this way, I think the business is interesting—and political. [Elke/Janet/Patsy]

In the spring of 1978, *Heresies* collective finally hired its first office worker. Too many things needed daily attention that volunteers simply could not provide. We had rented an office, and for the first time *Heresies* was a physical place as well as an idea, a magazine, a group of individuals. Grants had been awarded to us; a loyal readership had developed. All this contributed to our success, our new sense of permanence. Of course our conflicts continued. They probably will always be with us, as much a part of the group as long-winded meetings and the feelings that develop with them.

We still have a lot of trouble listening to each other and trusting each other. I think we definitely need more contact with each other as a group than the business meetings provide... It's disappointing that as a collective we've never really discussed any of the issues we've put out. How can we evaluate what we're doing? At the moment we're puppets on the string of "business"... *Heresies* is not just a publication, any publication; what is important are the ideas behind it and whether or not they are being expressed—what we want *Heresies* to be. In failing to evaluate that (and constantly re-evaluate it), we may make the wrong decisions. [Sue H.]

I am less involved in *Heresies* now because I'm too busy with other things, but I am not disappointed in it. I went through a period of de-

moralization as most of the original members became less and less active and the meetings became more and more about business, but I now accept the inevitability of these changes. I feel we have to keep bringing in new members with energy and enthusiasm and that if older members are tired or otherwise involved that we should understand these cycles. I hope we don't overstructure ourselves. My favorite meetings were the early ones, when everyone was shouting at the same time, as the ideas all came tumbling out. [Joyce]

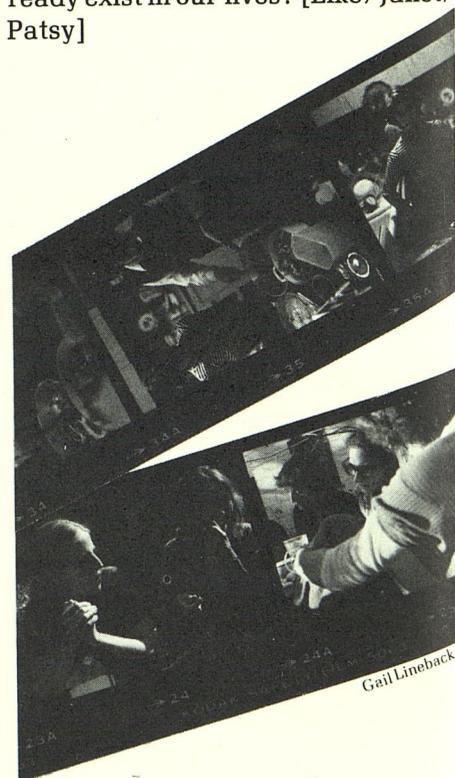
Can we accept each other's weaknesses—and even harder—acknowledge each other's strengths? Can women whose lives are extremely focused, whose commitments are made, whose involvements must be limited to only the most essential, work with women who are still tasting widely and sampling alternative lifestyles and commitments? Obviously to do so is richer for both and rubs a little of one into the other. Time is different in its essential nature when you have used up the larger portion of your allotment. [May]

Feminist political structures and creative processes can learn from each other. Obviously there are different types of collective art, and there can be different forms of collective structuring. The notion that collective process involves sitting in a circle and assuming we are all equal, and that everyone does everything all the time, is not only naive but dangerous. It denies reality and doesn't acknowledge the differences between us. [Harmony]

The notion that collective process involves sitting in a circle and assuming I wish we had clearer strategies and time to be closer to other non-art groups. I wish we were doing more of the "reaching out" and "being responsible to the broadest feminist community" we so often talk about. I wish we had contributions to the magazine from a wider variety of people and places so that we could

have a wider variety of readers. I worry about us becoming too academic, too self-indulgent, too specialized (and not professional enough) to attract that broad audience. I worry about the mistakes we keep making in dealing with people sensitively and ethically while we're under pressure. Sometimes I'm frustrated that I have so little time to relax with members of the collective. Sometimes I feel betrayed by other collective members' lack of enthusiasm for *Heresies* itself. And I wish the collective were more varied in class, background, vocation so I could learn even more. [Lucy]

Perhaps it's always easier to recollect and to complain about the things that don't work. I hope we'll think about some positive things. Why are we still involved? What keeps us here (other than our guilt)? What are we learning (in terms of specific technical skills, in terms of learning about ourselves as feminists and as women who have to form some relationship with each other, and in terms of some "intellectual" channeling of our thinking in areas which are usually more dormant in the rest of our lives)? What do we find, still, in this organization, that does not already exist in our lives? [Elke/Janet/Patsy]



Gail Lineback

# Creating Alternatives

## A Survey of Women's Projects

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Eleanor Olds Batchelder  
and Linda Nathan Marks

### INTRODUCTION

Many of us have ideas and dreams for new projects, but what does it take to turn these notions into concrete realities? We conducted a survey of women's workgroups to discover the variety of their experiences and to explore their common themes and their differences.

The two of us were members of the *Heresies* #7 collective. As woman-identified women, we were particularly concerned with those work situations which have been explicitly created by and for women. This led to a proposal to carry out a survey of women's projects, which the collective enthusiastically supported.

Our joint venture grew out of a shared interest in political analysis, as well as our individual histories. As a co-founder of *Womanbooks*, a New York City women's bookstore, Eleanor had personal experience starting a project. Frequently asked for advice, she was aware that there was little printed information available to suggest the range of methods and goals that existed among women's enterprises. She was interested in comparing her own experiences with those of other workgroups: How did other women evaluate their efforts? How did they structure their time and work? How much difference did capital or expert advice make? What were projects doing about burnout?

Linda was an unemployed anthropologist, trying to decide whether she wanted to continue working in academic settings or if there were alternatives. One intriguing option was to create or become involved in a feminist project. In the course of conducting the survey, she became a volunteer at another local women's bookstore and seriously considered becoming a co-owner. Linda was interested in the personal situations of women who started projects: Why did they do it? What did they want to accomplish? What happened to them as a result of carrying out the project? Which needs were they able to meet?

We designed a questionnaire and gave it to several local groups for feedback. As a result of that pre-test we revised the survey so that it would be more open-ended, and then sent it out to over 200 groups.<sup>1</sup> Projects were selected from the *New Women's Survival Sourcebook* in each of their categories, primarily on the basis of being in or close to New York City. (We originally intended to interview a number of nearby groups to supplement the questionnaire.) In addition, we sent surveys to a list of women's bookstores throughout the United States. We could then compare responses of similar enterprises that were geographically well distributed. Finally, a few projects were given questionnaires because of personal contacts.

Thirty-one groups responded to the revised survey. Added to the six projects who sent back the earlier version, that gave us a total of 37 groups. These written accounts have been supplemented by one interview transcript, numerous conversations with friends and acquaintances who have been involved in workgroups like the ones in the survey, our own experiences and the reading we have done on collectives.

Who answered the questionnaire? Seventeen projects were located in New York City. The other 20 were fairly well distributed through other parts of the East, South, Midwest and West.

Most of the responding groups were small: 19 projects were started by either two or three women. Six groups were initially medium-sized (4-7 members). There were nine large groups (8-25 women). These figures exclude three projects for which initial size was unavailable or irrelevant.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For a copy of the questionnaire, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to *Heresies*, P.O. Box 766-SY7, Canal Street Station, New York NY 10013. Reprints of this article are available at \$1.50 plus \$.50 postage, prepaid. (Bulk rates available on request.)

2. As our intent was to learn about projects that involved women working together, we discouraged replies from projects carried out by only one woman. Nonetheless, we did include in the survey a few projects that were started by a single founder since they actively included other women at later stages.

The groups began in the period ranging from 1970 to 1978, with the most (11) starting in 1977 and the average (mean) being 1975.

Twenty-one of the 37 groups were women's bookstores.<sup>3</sup> However, to call them all "bookstores" blurs their considerable diversity. They included three art or craft galleries combined with bookstores, one "womyn's center and bookstore," one "antiquarian bookshop" and one "feminist restaurant/bookstore." Bookselling projects ranged from groups of 2 to 25 and from profit-oriented to non-profit. Bookstores' heavy representation in our survey means that our results are skewed in the direction of enterprises engaged in sales. Although the preponderance of bookstores can be seen as a limitation, we believe that the issues raised by the survey are relevant to a wide variety of workgroups.

Other groups in the survey include:

- a prison project that teaches law classes to women prisoners and handles legal cases
- two counseling projects (one focused on rape)
- a lesbian feminist organization
- a lesbian archives group
- two mail-order businesses—one making needlepoint kits and notecards, the other screenprinting T-shirts and other items
- a travel agency for women
- an architectural network that describes itself as "an ongoing conference on the relationship of women's needs and rights, and the built environment"
- a cooperative art gallery
- a women's music group that published a newsletter for producers, distributors and managers, distributed records and produced concerts, films, etc.
- an artists' newsletter
- a one-time summer tour based on a slide presentation of women's performance art
- a literary magazine
- two groups involved in publishing literary anthologies

Throughout the article we include quotes from the questionnaires. Quotes are identified when appropriate by type of project and number of members, e.g. (Bookstore, 3). We have included as many quotes as possible because of our commitment to presenting members' experiences in their own words.<sup>4</sup>

Since responses were rich in information, at times we found it hard to decide where to place them. Occasionally we cite responses made to a different question from the one being discussed. This is especially true for members' state-

3. We added a handwritten note to the bookstores' cover letter, which may partially explain their high response rate: "P.S. As we're both connected with New York women's bookstores, we're particularly interested in comparing the experiences of women's bookstores."

4. The original quotes have been slightly altered at times for two reasons: where the spelling or punctuation detracted from clarity and where the group's identity would be obvious to readers (members' names, geographic locations, etc.).

ments on their project's "highs and lows" as well as the advice they would give to others. We hope the quotes will be read for their own insights, whether or not readers or group members agree with our interpretations of them.

Our cover letter assured groups that we would preserve confidentiality, to encourage members to speak frankly. Many women did discuss both the troubling and sustaining aspects of their projects. We are grateful for members' willingness to share vulnerabilities with us. In turn, we are protecting groups' identities where possible. What makes this decision hard is that we are unable to acknowledge their participation publicly. The questionnaire was lengthy and demanding. It easily required two hours to answer and some groups obviously spent a great deal more time. A few appended long explanations or sent us printed accounts. Clearly, this article depends heavily upon these contributions.

Our original concern was with beginnings. Most groups, however, did not confine their answers to the initial period. Thus this article is mostly about the early stages but also looks at middles and sometimes at endings. Although we have paid close attention to members' accounts, we have not hesitated to draw on our own experience, analysis and intuitions where they are relevant. We hope to stimulate discussion of women's projects, not to present "answers" or "how to do it" formulas.

The article is organized around the main questions covered by the survey:

- Beginnings
- The Workers: Motivations, Prior Relations, Turnover, Similarities and Differences, Profile, Needs Met and Unmet
- The Work: Time, Tasks
- Resources: Backgrounds, Experts, Capital, Payment and Burnout
- Collective Process
- Summary: Highs/Lows, Advice

Our division of labor made each of us primarily responsible for particular topics. Both of us have read and commented extensively on each other's earlier drafts. Linda wrote the sections on Beginnings and The Workers. Eleanor wrote the sections on The Work, Resources, Collective Process and Summary. The Introduction and Concluding Remarks were produced by the two of us. Neither the *Here-sies* issue collective nor the responding groups would necessarily agree with everything we say, and we two have not always agreed with each other. We hope that others will build on what we have begun.

## BEGINNINGS

*Thinking back over your project's history, what were the important steps in moving from an idea to a functioning reality?*

We wanted to know how women saw their projects begin. What were their origins? A variety of circumstances

could lead to the formation of a new project. One restaurant/bookstore developed from Wednesday night, women-only dinners which were held at the house of one of the founders. "Other women came to sell whatever (books, pottery, jewelry)." A women's architectural network grew out of previous collaboration in 1973 in organizing

... a national traveling show and book on the work of women in architecture. After the show... a group formed by professional women in architecture, art, teaching, who were involved directly and indirectly in the exhibition, reassembled. ... What started as a once-a-month dinner club eventually involved (Aug. 1977) many students toward the realization of a conference (June 1978) thus expanding the network.

Involvement in the women's movement through consciousness-raising, study or activist groups stimulated the birth of a number of projects.

The archives idea began in a CR group generated by the particular vision and enthusiasm of one or two people and picked up by the others who helped turn into specific action the vision being talked about.

A rape organization started after four women, active in an antirape group, broke off to start a counseling service. Two months later they got their headquarters and first phone.

The women's movement also inspired many projects that did not directly emerge from prior groups. A travel agency grew out of two travel agents meeting and "both realizing how much our services were needed in the women's community." Similarly, one woman "decided the Women's Art Movement needed a newsletter and began one." A couple started a newsletter, production and distribution business: "After the music festivals we knew we wanted to get involved in women's music."

Some projects grew out of feminist identification but had more personal origins. Two were the result of making gifts for friends.

We began printing because of necessity. Two years ago July [1976] it was a friend of ours' birthday. We were broke and hadn't any idea of what to give. We had access to a silkscreen kit and decided to create our own gift—a "fine feminist flag" with "the future is female" printed on it. Two weeks later another birthday came to a friend who had recently purchased a motorcycle. That was the birth of our first T-shirt design—"Dykes with Bikes." We decided with encouragement from these same friends to begin creating more designs for lesbians to use as T-shirts and stickers.

Dec. 1973—gave two friends handmade needlepoint kits with original feminist designs—good response to them. June 1974—we both took a one-month trip across the country—met many women... and it inspired us to produce our needlepoint designs and sell them across the U.S.

A 55-year-old woman's decision to open a book and cheese store was the culmination of years of dreaming about such a venture:

The idea was always there, but always deferred for: husband to finish Ph.D., children to raise, and disabled parent to care for. Finally, in Feb. 1975 decided it was then or never. Spent next 5 months negotiating a loan (SBA insured) and doing a lot of homework. Store opened Aug. 1975.

There was considerable variation in how long it took groups to proceed, once they decided to go ahead with their idea. A bookstore and art gallery came to life relatively quickly:

June 1974—Two artists conceived the idea of starting a gallery displaying solely women's art work. The eventual dream was to create an arts center devoted entirely to women. Two additional women added the idea of a bookstore that would bring in extra revenue.

Aug. 1974—One of the artists and one of the book lovers decided to go for it. The others were having doubts about the commitment, etc. We found a space, borrowed the money from parents, visited a bookstore in New York City, got lists and started ordering and consigning art work. The whole process went very fast. (Opened Oct. 1974)

As a different bookstore and crafts gallery put it, "we just sorta did it—very little planning." In contrast, a lesbian archives group gathered material for almost two years before they were ready to open the archives to the women's community.

Projects can result from either approach. Speed, high energy and naive eagerness may be responsible for one group's success; another group may require gradual gearing up and elaborate planning to actually get themselves "to do it." Beginnings may involve extensive fund-raising and organizational schemes, or they may be incredibly modest. (An antiquarian bookshop started with buying a bookcase and offering five used paperbacks for sale.)

The point we want to make is that neither approach turns out to be "better" or "wiser." Our impression is that there is no correlation between the amount of time and effort that a workgroup spends in preliminary preparation and the likelihood that the project will get off the ground.

*Did you have a vision of what you wanted to create or do?*

Most groups in the survey reported a vision of what would be desirable and possible to achieve. A sense of both daring and strong determination comes through in some statements, e.g., "It seemed important to risk all our funds and time to make a woman's place real." (Restaurant/bookstore). By making "a woman's place real," a group is both speaking to and expanding the reality of women's needs and experiences.

We wanted to create something women could be proud of, working conditions which were good for women (us), we wanted to make women's literature and ideas available and also create a center for communication. We wanted to make a political statement of support for women and women's space. [Bookstore]

I wanted to create a high-quality literary magazine that published women exclusively. I wanted the magazine to be known for its eclecticism and evenhandedness. I did not want to publish a clique but the very best work by women we could.

Vision of making needlepoint a feminist endeavor rather than just a traditional woman's craft with rather sexist or dull designs. We wanted to honor it as a centuries-old craft with a positive image of women. [Mail-order crafts]

Groups described visions that emphasize connections between women, through time and space. Words like "cultural center," "feminist environment," "community" and "resources" are common. There is a recognition that women join together to create an actual or symbolic space, and then the space enables women to come together. Providing resources concretely links women by collecting and disseminating our shared knowledge.

Connections between projects were also apparent. Ideas for new endeavors sometimes came directly from already-established institutions:

Two of the founding mothers had just returned from a trip during which they visited several women's bookstores and were very excited about creating a similar space for women in City.

Some groups acknowledged receiving both inspiration and advice from older enterprises in the women's community. Other workgroups lamented the lack of such contacts, either out of geographic isolation or because they did not yet exist. A rape counseling project that began in 1973 stated: "There were no models—we were one of the first in the country." The collapse of an older project could be the impetus for a new one:

These women needed their own space, particularly since the women's center had folded. [Lesbian organization]

We ultimately took the place of a previous women's bookstore, but we did not develop from it...

The original vision might have to be altered, usually because it was too demanding or unrealistic:

We had a vision of an art center that could expand in every direction—women's coffeehouse, women's studios, women's school, etc. Our ideas soon dwindled when we realized that only two of us really had the commitment. [Bookstore/gallery]

Our initial vision was doing art performances while traveling across the country. Later we narrowed it down to something that felt more comfortable and manageable—our slide presentation.

Other projects expanded their earlier ideas. The antiquarian bookshop wrote: "It just developed as we went along. The visions have grown since the shop has become more established."

The visions themselves could involve public objectives, personal objectives or a combination of both:

We believe in social change and saw our bookstore as a way of encouraging social change in our community. Most important for us was/is working together as womyn and living "politics is personal." We believe in joyful struggle.

I wanted a small store, to be able to know all my customers, to prove to myself that a small, humane store could "make it," to hand pick every book, card, note, cheese, etc., and to be a community resource.

A women's architectural group explicitly acknowledged these dual purposes:

Public/collective vision: reaching a larger audience... disseminating information, public consciousness raising in how space

hinders or supports the quality of our lives.... Individual vision: personal and professional network of contacts.

For the most part, groups did not express internal difficulties over formulating an idea, image or vision of what they wanted to create or do. Here the lesbian archives experience seems to have been typical:

In the beginning the archives collective did have lengthy discussions on principles and goals—all of which were agreed upon. ... The archives vision was never a topic of dissension.

This was not the case, however, with a bookstore that tried to incorporate women from competing political perspectives:

The general vision was to have a special place for women to come and be able to buy books by women that were collected in one space, to serve as a resource center, and do outreach in the community. Each woman had specific visions of what she wanted the bookstore to be—some of which soon became incompatible.

The turmoil the latter project went through over differing individual and political visions was unusual among the workgroups surveyed.

We did not ask groups what their visions have become. Future studies can look at how ongoing projects continue to define their goals. What is the relationship between daily activities and larger purposes? When do new visions evolve?

## THE WORKERS

### Motivations

*Were there circumstances in members' own lives at that time that made involvement in this project appealing and possible?*

Initial financial support, time and, perhaps, investment money made it possible for women to start new projects. Most important, basic living expenses already were being met. This was true for almost all members of both full-time and part-time projects.

We both had money we could depend on from outside the business. It made our low-profit years easier to face. [Mail-order crafts]

One member had savings she did not need to live on; one member was driving a cab, at loose ends about that job; one member was trying to come out of self-imposed retirement (2 1/2 years) while raising a child; two of [these] members were being supported by a lover and a husband. [Bookstore, 3]<sup>5</sup>

Founders within the same workgroup sometimes had very different economic circumstances, making it easier or possible for a wider range of women to originate projects than might otherwise have done so:

One owner (Lucy) had money she wanted to invest in a feminist/women's business; the other woman (Marsha) had run a part-time bookstore for a year with limited capital.

5. We include number of members when it could be important for clarity or to provide context. Since many groups varied in size over time, we use the figure (or range) that is appropriate for the issue at hand.

Lucy had both "money and time." Marsha

had the opportunity to quit her social worker job and be paid a livable wage for working in the bookstore, due to the store being well-capitalized.

Another bookstore brought four women together who had varying time, money and support situations:

The appeal was the women's focus. For one woman it was possible because she had recently become free of family responsibilities. For two women—we had independent sources of financial support reducing the financial pressure on the store and making free time available for working on the store. A third woman had a full-time job but it was flexible in terms of time.... The fact that three of us were financially independent of the store made it possible to include one woman in the group who was not.

What motivated these women to begin projects that could be both risky and demanding? And how did they figure out what to do?

Although some women expected that their projects would support them financially, only a few responses included economic need as a motivating factor in starting an enterprise. These were all from businesses made up of two to four members. For instance, two booksellers listed their "need for income and strong desire to have own business plus involvement in women's movement." Supplemental earnings could be the goal, rather than basic maintenance: "both needed a part-time, flexible-houred job for extra money" (Mail-order business).

Generally, the women who started these projects were looking for something "meaningful." This could grow out of a sense of void, of a need to find a fulfilling activity:

We were both out of college and without commitment or focus. [Bookstore/gallery]

I was feeling a void of political (radical, left) activities with which I could identify, and at the same time a growing feminist consciousness and personal need to be around feminist women. [Bookstore started by individual, subsequently became a collective]

Most groups indicated that they were "looking for something" to put their energy, time, capital or politics into. The desire to connect personal lives with feminist politics was central in many responses.

Had personal savings and had waited to do something good with five-year herstory in women's movement. [Bookstore]

It was possible because women were living on part-time jobs and unemployment, did not have children or home responsibilities, didn't feel the need for much money. It was appealing because the women were looking for something specific within the women's movement to put their energy into. There was a real felt need as there was no gathering place for women in City. [Bookstore]

Even women with no previous feminist involvement said they wanted to develop projects that were centered around women. Some were looking for a personally comfortable way to touch base with a more political or, at least, wider women's community "out there."

R: ... After Terri was born [now 5 1/2] I did a lot of reading, but I was in Arizona and I felt very isolated there reading about what was going on in Boston or in New York. And, when I got back to the City, Kate and I joined a mother's support group. ... but what we really wanted to do was read and what we were reading were things by women. And the people we felt we wanted to talk to were women. And I think we wanted to have the bookstore to—that that would be our women's activity. Instead of joining something else. ... That it might come to us somehow being here, surrounded by all this literature.

The desire to replace isolation with deeper or more extensive connections with other women seems to underlie many groups' statements. Founders wanted to share experiences, to be with like-minded women who would be sympathetic and supportive.

The desire to develop a project jointly was expressed most strongly by members who were lovers or close friends. A project meant a way to work with each other publicly. Less intimate groups were not organized around the connections between specific individuals. They became a workgroup to carry out a project, rather than rely upon individual solutions. A writing support group acknowledged their

Need for nonauthoritarian group of woman writers. Need to feel comfortable cohesiveness as a group. Growing confidence in our work made us want to publish our anthology.

More than a third of the projects expressed the desire to create a way to use and develop individuals' skills, interests and experience. This concern was important in all artistic and literary ventures.

One of us, me, had just finished college and wanted a challenge and a project to focus on. Books were an interest, and I had connections with a New York City women's bookstore. ... The other woman had had a pottery studio business before and wanted to stay in the art world, be her own boss and make money at it. [Bookstore/gallery]

Marjorie was humiliated in a fiction class by her teacher ... and felt it was important to create an alternative to learning about literature. She also wanted to edit a literary magazine ... seemed a satisfying way to combine feminist commitment and her literary interests.

Frustration over the lack of opportunities already available could lead women to invent alternative solutions:

The city job freeze made it impossible for us to find work as librarians—we were desperate—[and] our mothers were willing and able to invest money in our project. [Bookstore, 2]

Almost all of us were unknown artists, in our 30's, who were extremely anxious, even desperate, to start showing. [Cooperative gallery, 21]

The last quote adds another dimension: the desire for public visibility. Artists and writers were looking for a chance to exist in a public context, to have their works recognized as both art and feminist.

Political organizing activity was another realm where public visibility was important. The chance to participate in a new endeavor attracted both political newcomers and veterans:

Many were middle-class to upper-middle and could afford to invest money. Also, a strong lesbian group was emerging one by one, and these womyn had a lot of energy to contribute. All members were also City Feminist members (if not the core) and wanted a visible front. Basically, most members felt the need (to varying degrees) to create a space for womyn to work and play together. [Women's center/bookstore, 25]

Some of us were students or part-time workers so we were available. Most of us had no background in political work, either outside or inside the Establishment. This was the first visible organizing point for feminism in this community, aside from a few transient women's studies course offerings just starting to flower. ... Saw ourselves as a center for feminist information and literature, and a complement to a local newly-established women's center. Felt that even if people never came into the store, it was important for them to see that we existed. [Bookstore, 10]

Creating a focus for a local women's community was an engaging prospect for many project members. Eagerness to make women's culture visible could operate on a larger scale as well. Founders of feminist publications and products usually had in mind a nationwide distribution. The lesbian archives group wanted to create a permanent institution: "We are not a business or a short-term political activist organization. We must last beyond our time to have meaning." The desire to validate feminist—and for some women, lesbian—consciousness through a public space or activity was important for the majority of groups in the survey. Establishing a project allows the formerly private to become legitimated through its public expression.

It is not necessary for all members to have exactly the same reasons for starting a project. What may be so attractive to one woman, e.g., an opportunity to replace household boredom with publicly respected tasks, may be irrelevant to her partners. Workgroups could combine women with somewhat differing personal motivations provided they shared common goals for the project.

Frequently, women found a proposed enterprise appealing because it allowed them to combine a number of purposes. They were not being forced to choose between using their artistic skills or making a contribution to the women's movement. The considerations we list in this section represent a set of linked motivations to find something meaningful to do: wanting actively to connect one's personal life with feminism; the desire to work together with other women; the desire to use and develop individual skills, interests and experience; frustration over the lack of available opportunities; and the desire for public visibility.

### Prior Relations

*How long had the members known each other, and in what ways? (Friends, lovers, relatives, co-workers, etc.) How did the previous relationships (or lack of them) affect the project?*

We wondered whether women's projects were usually the outcome of already-established bonds between mem-

bers. So we divided up the groups according to the extent of previous intimacy. This led to three categories:

Intimates: 12

Intimates Plus Others: 8

Acquaintances: 14

Our classification of a few groups is approximate, as we were not given adequate information to decide clearly. Three of the 37 groups were excluded entirely for this reason. Size did seem to make a difference. Not surprisingly, groups comprised of intimates were very small, usually two or at the most three women. The 19 small groups in the survey were almost all either intimates (12) or acquaintances (6). Mixed groups (intimates plus others) tended to be rather large—eight or more members.

*Intimates.* This category is made up of groups of lovers (6), lovers plus friends (2), close friends (3) and relatives (1). All were composed of either two or three women. Personal relations seem to have been a crucial factor in intimates' decision to start a project.

Desire to be involved in women's music biz. Also we were lovers and wanted to work together on projects we felt were important to the women's community. [Music enterprises]

Friends for two years. Had worked together and knew personality traits, goals, etc., of other. [Bookstore]

We wanted to do something. As soon as we thought of opening a feminist bookstore we started actively working on the project. ... I was sisters-in-law with one partner. We had known each other three years. My distant cousin was married to my other partner. We had known each other five years.

We often assume that it is better to have extensive previous knowledge of one another before working together on a project. Intimates know what to expect from one another. A close, personal relationship can be a source of strength to women who are starting a new (often risky) venture. However, there can be disadvantages as well as advantages to working with intimates.

In this respect it is instructive to look at the experience of two women who started a bookstore after they had been friends for 15 years. They had no trouble agreeing on their goals and objectives for the store and were delighted that their similarities enabled everything to proceed very smoothly.

It was very easy in that we both agreed on what to do all the time. We knew what our reaction would be, I mean I would hardly have to ask Kate what she would have done, I would just describe the situation and know that she would be supportive.

Nonetheless, it was hard for them to discuss the work arrangements they had created, even when they agreed there were problems. To question the ways that each functioned in the workplace could be threatening to their friendship. By the end of the store's first year, it was apparent that their personal priorities differed in ways that affected their respective involvement in the project.

Several months later, one partner decided to withdraw from the bookstore.

Intimates may have so many taken-for-granted understandings that it can become difficult to acknowledge, let alone deal with, differences that emerge. Projects do create new and complex demands upon members' prior relations. Although starting any project can involve risks of various kinds, intimates are particularly vulnerable. Both the enterprise and the relationship are put on the line continuously. And the success or failure of one can have serious consequences for the other. These issues are intensified when sexual involvements are part of members' intimacy.

Groups made up of lovers were evenly divided in expressing enthusiasm or pessimism about this kind of collaboration. As one might expect, it seems to depend upon the state of the couple's relationship at the time the questionnaire was answered. When the lovers were intact as a couple, they tended to regard the project and the relationship as mutually beneficial:

We ... are lovers and had been since 1972. We are also friends since we were both ten years old. Our very close friendship and then love relationship gave us the perseverance to get through the first few rough years of our [mail-order crafts] business. We also share a lot of ideas with each other all the time and together can usually figure most things out that we need for the business. We seem to have complementary abilities. We get along very well, too, and that helps. ... This common goal and working together drew us closer emotionally ...

Their description emphasizes the importance of the work process itself, being able to actually *work* together.

Loving one another is not a sufficient basis for developing or maintaining a project. The couple we quoted earlier who initiated music enterprises discovered this. They had already been lovers for a year. Though the "relationship provided energy to work together to make these projects happen," it was

extremely difficult for us to work together—there was a constant power struggle and individual needs for recognition. ... Both very stubborn about having our own way.

The couple split up; the project continued by dividing up its various functions. One partner commented:

Giving up the newsletter was a very difficult and painful decision for me to make. The newsletter was almost like a child since we both created it together.

Her depiction of their creation as a "child" may apply to other women's groups as well and may be part of the motivation to begin publicly visible projects.

Another couple did not have trouble working together but encountered a different kind of problem:

We had worked together for one year in [another] collective and had been lovers (intensely and mostly "couple"-format and monogamously) for six months. We expected to continue to be lovers for a long time.

The work took precedence over the relationship. We "broke-up" as lovers early the following spring ... and worked and

worked to be able to continue working together. Sometimes having more (i.e., getting reinvolved) and sometimes having almost no relationship outside work. We have recently decided that it is futile to continue trying to work together and have given ourselves the rest of August and September to decide who will stay and who will leave.

Needless (?) to say, being lovers (or not or in crisis or ...) complicated working together and vice versa. As much as we wanted the *good* parts to intermingle, so too did the bad ones, i.e., being on the verge of sleep or sexuality and the compulsive one popping up with "I forgot to order \_\_\_ book! Oh no!"

We did 3–4 months of couples counseling, trying to save the relationship.

It seems to have been a case of a couple of women (lovers) meeting a bookstore. One of the women fell in love with the bookstore and basically left the relationship with the other woman. (Not that she wasn't also involved with the store, too.) It took many months to figure out what happened as it *looked* like the women were still lovers. (Woman + woman + project = nonfunctional nonmonogamy).

The attraction and demands of the bookstore they originated proved so compelling that their project engulfed the relationship that created it.

Some three-women groups included lovers. One enterprise was started by non-monogamous women, who had known each other "a few years as friends and lovers" before beginning a restaurant/bookstore. Some members felt that their relations were not particularly central to this decision:

[We] don't think our making love influenced the three of us so much as our shared desire to do something at this time in our lives that reflected a more or less common political approach. ... We each made love and/or became friends with other women, mostly with those we work with (we have about six staff other than ourselves) but sometimes other women outside. Don't feel lovemaking is important in a negative way. Working relationship has been a struggle but has steadily improved.

Another member of the same group said "Two of us became not-lovers, which was difficult for the not-loved." Clearly, one of the requirements of working in such a situation is the ability and willingness to deal with considerable emotional change.

Two projects included a couple plus a third woman. Three lesbians who had been friends for four years started a bookstore. Two of them had been lovers for two to two and one-half years. Their closeness

made the project get moving better, but it was hard to find women who wanted to work with us. A *small* part of this was due to the strength of our relationships which was intimidating.

Two years later, none of the original members were still involved in the bookstore. This outcome was not described as the result of problems with intimacy. They explained that there was "No money so we were always personally broke which was the main thing that led all of us to leave eventually."

Another bookstore was created by three women who initially had less symmetrical relationships than was true for the preceding project. We quote Mary, the "third" partner:

Two were living-together lovers; the third one knew one of the two lovers [Sarah] through work on a conference and did not know the other one well at all.

For the first two years of the store's operation, Sarah continued working at her former full-time job and was only peripherally involved in day-to-day bookstore matters. That left the two women in charge who had the least-developed relationship. Their shared commitment to the project provided the incentive to get through the early hassles. Indeed, Mary implies that their lack of intimacy may have been an asset:

The first two full-time members barely knew each other so there were few expectations shattered; they circled each other warily at first and eventually established patterns of working with each other. The goal was paramount (that is, establishing a place for women) so that personalities were secondary. There is no doubt that subverting members' personalities to the goal resulted in "saner" work relationships. A year after [Sarah] joined, the relationship between the lovers broke up.

Lovers are not likely to consider the possibility that they could break up when they begin projects together. One couple in their twenties, for instance, started a screen-printing business after they had been together for six years:

We are two very loving women who relate and empathize with each other. We know we work well together and it is inconceivable to think we would not be together working and loving.

The combination of "working and loving" may be especially beneficial for both couples and projects. However, the "inconceivable" can happen, though it may be difficult to anticipate.

When intimates establish projects together, it is very hard to ask questions that acquaintances might raise more readily: What will happen if one of us wants to leave? What will happen if one of us wants the other to leave? What will happen to the project if our relationship breaks up? What will happen to our relationship if the project succeeds or fails? It may be that to discuss the possibility of an ending in any intimate relationship is taken as a signal that something is wrong.

One couple anticipated these kinds of difficulties. Their relationship terminated in the course of carrying out the project. One of the women wrote:

If I was doing it over, I wouldn't do it with a recent lover. But if I hadn't done it—I'd still do it. Advice: ... Make contingency plans for members exiting and/or folding up the project. We made them, and I'm glad we did.

Such plans offer some protection in a situation that is inevitably traumatic.

Because the breakup of couples is disturbing to both insiders and outsiders, it may be tempting to conclude that it is a mistake for lovers to create an enterprise together. One group member expressed the pain of what had happened to her and her partner by advising, "Do not work with a lover!" As understandable as this reaction may be, there are (at least) two problems with this conclusion. The first is

that when we take risks in love—or work—we do so for what may be gained, not for what may be lost.

The more general issue is combining sexual relations with work relations. The decision to work with other women sooner or later involves issues of sexuality—whether women are heterosexual or lesbian. However a situation is initially defined, it can become eroticized. Projects can heighten members' attraction to one another as well as defuse this kind of energy. Or groups can repress sexuality. We were told about a well-established publication, almost all of whose members are lesbians, who have maintained an "incest taboo." The taboo was erected when they decided that sexuality within the workgroup was disruptive to the needs of the project. While their decision may or may not be unusual, it stems from awareness that issues about sexual relations are bound to arise when women work closely together.

The consequences of ignoring, acknowledging or discouraging sexuality among co-workers is a topic we would like to encourage women to discuss; its ramifications are political as well as personal.

*Acquaintances.* Women in the 14 projects we include in this category "hadn't really known each other." Nine consisted of two to four members, five were larger. Groups formed around shared interests in the enterprise. Prior personal relations were not key to women's willingness to be involved. Members began as colleagues, acquaintances or virtual strangers.

Very few of the members knew each other before work on the gallery began—our great desire to start a gallery was our main impetus, and not knowing each other previously didn't seem to matter.

The few descriptions that mention friendships do not emphasize intimacy as a reason for participating. Nonetheless, it is obvious that women in these groups were recognizable to each other. They were "friends of friends" or had been part of the same "community," or were similar "social types."

Beginning group was formed by friends and/or colleagues (as distinct from co-workers). Trust and mutual respect were crucial factors, stressed in first meeting. Some could re-acquaint themselves personally with "names" or "voices" known through other members of the group. ... Friendships had developed through working and accomplishing a major task together, rather than socially. [Architectural network]

Such familiarity enabled women to assess one another fairly quickly. Some groups which began this way developed successful projects without any change in the initial founders. A women's travel agency was created by two travel agents:

Mona and I met through a mutual friend who knew Mona was interested in starting a travel agency. We met, and two hours later shook hands on our partnership—two weeks later, signed the papers.

Most projects in this category, particularly those involving more than five members, experienced a lot of turnover during the first several months. This sorting-out process meant that the women who remained felt confident that they could work with the other women. The goal was to establish the project, personal relations developed as it proceeded. That some groups did develop friendships was mentioned but that was an outgrowth of working together, not a prerequisite. A literary anthology started off with four members who then dwindled to two:

The project brought us together (mutual friends). Previously, we didn't know each other, but we don't feel this has hampered our working relationship. It may have even enhanced it.

Two women created a bookstore after

Three months as acquaintances through owning other women's businesses. ... Changed from two virtual strangers in a mutual enterprise through learning about each other, into a business/ friendship. There have been periods of strain on the relationship, outside of business, but the relationship has become stronger, more trusting.

Unfamiliarity means that women who are working together need to pay particular attention to how they actually function. Little can be taken for granted. Respect, competence and agreement must all be negotiated. This process can be subtle or it can be obvious, especially when conflict arises.

Only one of the returned questionnaires attributed difficulties to members' lack of familiarity with each other. Two women started a bookstore who had known one another

For two years, slightly. Because of only superficial knowledge of each other's work skills, personalities, and politics, we suffered a lot of problems.

They did not get along well, and one partner eventually left. We suspect that this situation is not unusual, and that we did not hear much about it because we only contacted projects that had existed long enough to be publicly visible. Undoubtedly, there are many projects that never get off the ground precisely because their initiators find themselves unable to cooperate satisfactorily. We do not know, however, whether this occurs more among intimates or acquaintances.

What we find most intriguing about the survey results is that women can start and maintain projects without having already established close relationships. As one group pointed out, lack of previous intimacy may even be an advantage. Not having to protect a well-developed friendship or love relationship may make it a lot easier to get on with the task at hand. The project is the main thing members hold in common.

*Intimates Plus Others.* The eight projects in this category included women with longstanding personal relations as well as women who knew each other more casually. Five

were collectives begun by more than seven women. Typically, members had past social and political connections.

Seven of the womyn were in a lesbian rap group together for at least one year before starting to talk about the store. Four of these womyn were in couples with each other. The eighth womyn was/is in an ongoing womyn's rap group with one of the womyn from the lesbian rap group. Most of the womyn were friends, hung out socially with each other. This was very important as it gave us some pre-knowledge of our politics and personalities. The couple relationships did not interfere. [Bookstore]

Sometimes previous ties *did* interfere with the needs of the project. Nine women were involved in creating a lesbian archives: "Most [were] in CR together (two couples, some close friends) and two women not from the CR group." Four people left within the first year, either because of time pressures or

personality related—people who decided they did not want to work with other people for reasons growing out of past relationships. ... One time during the early days of the archives, two members used it as a bargaining point in the breakup of their relationship, each refusing to be part of the archives if the other was present. This involvement of the archives in a personal battle broke all our rules for archival survival.

The problem of integrating women with varying levels of closeness into a workgroup was mentioned by several projects:

I had a relationship with Arlene that was very separate from my relationship with Betty. Basically they didn't get along that well, and one of my roles on the first issues was to smooth things out. [Literary magazine]

Some were long-time friends and had worked together on other feminist projects and had been involved in the womyn's community here for years, some were lovers. One mother/daughter set, a few were "free-lance feminists" never associated with formal organizations before. What happened is that the "newies" (free-lancers) sometimes felt not as important or trusted as/by the oldies (friends and lovers). This situation has mostly disappeared as womyn became more involved with the actual maintenance of our space and learned to assert themselves... [Women's center/bookstore, 25]

Combining intimates and others can lead to problems of jealousy and exclusion in any group. When a project is at stake, however, women who remain seem to be willing and able to deal with these issues—or to function in spite of them.

We would like to learn about interpersonal processes in women's projects—whether they are formed by lovers, friends, acquaintances or a mixture—but this awaits a deeper study. Our impression is that personal relations was a conscious, important topic in some workgroups and that it was steadfastly avoided in others. Although we lack data about the ongoing effects—on both members and projects—of various kinds and degrees of closeness, we do know that women can start enterprises together successfully regardless of the extent of their prior relations.

## Turnover

*Did the group membership change in the course of the beginning phase?*

Two-thirds of the groups experienced turnover during their first year. As one would expect, the larger projects were more likely to go through membership changes. Of the twelve groups with no changes, eight were started by two women, three were three-person groups, and one was composed of six members. There were only two two-women groups that split up. Information on changes, then, comes primarily from groups ranging from 4 to 25 members.

The beginnings of these collectives typically involved sorting out who was definitely interested from the maybes.

... the initial formation of the collective meetings had changing attendance—a self-selection process especially decisive for women who dropped out when it was clear there was no profit and no wages. [Bookstore, 6–10]

As projects progressed, some groups became smaller and others became larger. Members left for a variety of reasons:

Womyn who put in an initial burst of energy burnt out and left the group, others came in and took up projects, assumed responsibilities.... [Women's center/bookstore, 16–25]

Approximately half of the group left the collective in March 1976. Five for political reasons and four lost interest or had other priorities. [Bookstore, 3–13]

Projects connected with educational institutions usually have yearly turnover, as they are mainly staffed by students.

Two groups with relatively long histories—over five years—had contrasting membership changes. A lesbian organization lost some members when

a number of very radical lesbians decided that lesbian-feminism, separatism, etc., was bourgeois, “turned straight,” joined the October League, got married...

A literary magazine found that “slowly the group began to include more lesbians and more women with middle-class origins.”

Women coming and going was clearly the norm for most enterprises. These transitions could be painful, depending upon the particular circumstances in each group:

One of our most difficult times was when one of our members quit due to political differences. We did not want her to leave without discussing the issue but she felt too alienated. It generated a lot of sadness. Since then we have tried to be more sensitive to each of our needs and have tried to deal with members' leaving in a more constructive way. [Bookstore, 5–8]

Women leaving without satisfactory solution, without connecting with why they didn't fit, just feeling pushed. This happened because it takes a long time for principled politics to get sorted out of everyday struggles. It's possible, too, that women stop growing and don't really want new (uncomfortable) ways and ideas after all.... When someone

leaves the collective, reasons could be positive (moving on in her life) or negative (philosophical struggle). [Bookstore, 6–10]

We can look at membership changes from two different points of view, the individual and the group. We are inclined to assume that when someone leaves a project, it is a bad sign: something must be wrong with either the person or the group. The opposite is just as likely. When a project has successfully met a woman's needs—if only to enable her to clarify what her needs are—she may be ready for something else.

Of course, some changes occur because a woman finds it intolerable to continue working with the other individuals on the project. If the member who leaves is considered “troublesome,” her departure may be greeted by the others with relief. But when a valued woman leaves, one who has been central to the project's operation, this may be viewed as a betrayal—whatever the reason for her decision. Small workgroups that have functioned together for several years are in an especially vulnerable position.

The worst low ever was this year when one partner announced she was leaving. That decision changed the bookstore structure that had been working for 5½ years. ... We had no notice and the experience was totally emotionally draining. [3 women]

Once the leaving does not feel so raw, such changes can become opportunities for new ideas, methods and energy. Projects, like individuals, need to be able to change. Workgroups would be less immobilized by loss if they anticipated and planned for the probability that members will leave.

## Similarities and Differences

*In what ways did similarities or differences between members become advantages in carrying out the project? Disadvantages?*

When we join with other women to create a feminist project, our ways of working become highly visible. What is similar about our orientations, style and skills tends to be reassuring, what is different may be either prized or a problem. Our previous relationships, however intimate or non-existent, do not prepare us for working together. When we become co-workers, we are forced to evaluate each other's characteristics freshly.

Group members said that these kinds of similarities had been advantages:

1. Political/ideological—four women who started a bookstore as virtual strangers commented, “Having similar ideologies made similar goals possible.”

2. Shared commitment to carry out the project—“Our similarity was that we both felt we could do whatever needed to be done.”

3. Common interests—“Both book freaks” ... “We had all done work as performance artists, which made it a

natural topic for our slide presentation.”

4. Compatible work-styles—“We were all somewhat compulsive about getting things done and out of the way and there was some competitiveness to get things done” [Bookstore, 3].

The last quote may surprise some readers as it suggests the opposite of the usual feminist tenet that competition is evil. Indeed, a writer’s group composed of six women, when asked how they compared to other such projects, replied: “Less competitive; all at same level.” Yet the bookstore that uses “competitiveness to get things done” is actually following the same principle as the “less competitive” writer’s group. Both are saying, we get along because we ensure that no one stands out as clearly more skilled (“better”) than the rest of us. This raises the question of whether we all have to perform at the “same level” to be comfortable and effective as co-workers.

Certainly, some kinds of competition get in the way of a project’s ability to function. A music business that was started by a couple floundered because

It was extremely difficult for us to work together—there was a constant power struggle and individual needs for recognition. ... Both very stubborn about having our own way.

Their experience suggests that it was important to learn how other groups handle competition. Its presence should not surprise us. It is the absence of ways of negotiating competing demands that we should worry about.

Shared social and cultural backgrounds were not usually stated to be an advantage, though they may have been taken for granted. The architectural network acknowledged a related kind of similarity:

There is a prevalent feeling that a commonality of background and values resulted in better understanding and agreement in general and basic issues.

One writer passionately described the consequences of being working class in a feminist world that functions differently:

The women who started [literary magazine] and who were primarily responsible for keeping it going were working class in origin and had a strong sense of their background and how it limited their opportunities. Compared to other publications we knew of at that time, we were decidedly the underdog. ... While I didn’t start out with an overwhelming class consciousness, the experience of editing [magazine] has given me a sense of frustration and anger with an enormous class bitterness. It is clear to me at this point that we can’t really escape our class origins no matter how hard we try. There is a class component to the women’s press scene that no one ever mentions or discusses. Reviewers in women’s publications, when they’re not reviewing their friends, don’t touch this aspect of women’s culture.

The issue of class in the women’s community is largely unexplored. We hope that others will analyze the influence of class backgrounds on women’s workgroups.

Another kind of shared life experience for some mem-

bers was dealing with children. Several groups that included both mothers and non-mothers commented on ways that this affected their projects:

Concern for children ... resulted in a large section of nonsexist children’s books.... Political differences (between separatists and nonseparatists) complicated by one of the children being a male. [Bookstore, 13]

Children oftentimes had to be brought to store. [Bookstore, 7–10]

An interview gave a more detailed account of the issues that were involved for two women who started a bookstore, both of whom had children and husbands. The interviewer asked about their husband’s contributions to the enterprise.

They both felt very excluded. That because it was a woman’s bookstore, it was excluding them. Childcare was one area that they realized they would have to cooperate with. And they both were cooperative... we had thought that having a store, it would be easy to have them [children] around.... It turned out that they were really very distracting... and it was hard to pay attention to them and to pay attention to what we wanted to do or give time to customers. So it ended up that they were only here in emergency situations.

Shared motherhood promotes solidarity, but unfortunately cannot solve the practical difficulties of childcare. Real solutions to the problems of working while having children require radical social change.

Women reported that there can be disadvantages in being very homogeneous. Too much similarity between members can result in relatively limited community involvement:

Cohesiveness and being close friends were advantages, also similar interests was an advantage. However, the limitation meant there wasn’t a broad spectrum of women at the store at first. In retrospect, it would have been good to involve older women, women of color, women with children. [Bookstore, 4]

These similarities were advantages in making the original group able to work together well. The disadvantages were that they were, and still are, unable to attract large numbers of women who see us as dirty, hippies, bums, too radical, too white, etc. [Lesbian organization, 8–100]

Another serious problem with similarities is if all group members lack an essential skill. A bookstore partner remarked:

Sometimes I just feel like neither of us was very good at dealing with the outside world in general. And the actual running of the store should have involved a lot of that.

Differences were often described as positive contributions to the project:

We knew different people and different segments of the community. We had different skills and could pool information. [Bookstore, 3]

Our differences were important in establishing the three ongoing projects or phases. [Women’s educational union, bookstore and bimonthly coffeehouses]

Such variety was *complementary* rather than disruptive.

As one group put it, "We seem to have complementary abilities—common goals, different skills." Differences can be utilized, appreciated, even cultivated, if there is sufficient agreement on the purpose of the project.

The early experiences of a lesbian archives group show that complementarity may be the result of a process, rather than happening automatically. Their ability to work with differences productively got the project off the ground:

It was not that there were only "theoreticians" and "practical people" with labor carefully divided. Each shared in the other's realm both in discussion and in doing the work—but it was clear from the beginning that neither alone would have started a project. It took the combined energies sparking each other (and sometimes creating annoyances) to do it.

"Annoyances" stemming from varying perspectives can either fuel suspicion and distance or, as was true for the archives group, lead to a joint creation.

One of the splits, real or rumored, that has surfaced periodically in the women's movement has been along lesbian/heterosexual lines. We wondered whether survey groups that included both gay and straight women would find this difference significant for their project.

It was not an issue for a bookstore started by two lesbians and two heterosexuals. Their account suggests that this was related to the point in time (January 1973) that the bookstore opened in their community:

Historically speaking, it was early enough so that there was no real separation. Women of different sexuality got along well.

Another bookstore claimed that gay/straight differences were not relevant to their daily interaction: "We never based our working relationships on identification of our sexual preferences." A different group acknowledged the potential difficulties of the combination by noting the formation of a primary alliance: "There's never been any problem with our straight vs. gay women because we are all woman-identified." However, this bookstore began with seven lesbians and one heterosexual so their experience may not reflect the kind of process that more equally mixed groups face.

Some projects discussed this issue by identifying diversity in sexual orientation as an asset:

Advantage that we were both gay and straight; made for more tolerance and openness. [Literary anthology]

Our differences allowed us to become a pretty broad-based educational/cultural operation, which was aimed at all womyn, i.e., we appealed to both heteros and lesbians. [Women's center/bookstore]

While outreach may be enhanced, this difference may strain the internal, personal relations between co-workers. An example is provided by the originators of a gallery and bookstore. The two women had met recently, one was an artist, one a "book lover." They came from different parts of the country and had substantially different economic situations. However, it was the fact that one was hetero-

sexual and one a lesbian that was singled out as the most sticky:

Our differences in sexual preference was the hardest hurdle—took us through some emotionally draining times (we lived together in the same building as the gallery). Since we lived together it was necessary to get through the problem—we did and have survived the pain.

We suspect that other groups, also, have learned how "to get through the problem"; that may be why this difference is not identified as a disadvantage. Of course, a workgroup may choose to minimize the difference or pretend that it has no implications. And feminist ideology can be translated in ways that make it difficult for members to raise and discuss their feelings on the subject.

Groups composed of women with the same sexual orientation do not have to deal (overtly) with gay/straight issues. Indeed, that may be an implicit part of the reason for the group's formation. Only two projects explicitly related their (unmixed) composition to their purpose: to function as organizations for the lesbian community.

One lesbian group was decimated by a related conflict over separatism. The 13 lesbians who formed the collective included

political subgroups of separatists, socialists, independents, and co-members of the City Lesbian Organization. As one of the women who helped with this questionnaire put it, "political friends and enemies—we knew what to expect from each other, more or less, but we had a lot to fight about."

Fighting became the agenda. Coalitions were formed.

The separatist-nonseparatist conflict began soon after the collective started and after months of intense political disagreements, the separatists left. The group couldn't or wouldn't deal with the dichotomy of viewpoints. Often, meetings would end in chaos and hostility. Women weren't listening to what each other were saying. There was a lack of trust. Each group thought the other was trying to control the collective.

Maintaining individual political convictions became more important than running the bookstore together.

Any kind of difference can become the target for battles. And fighting can be the sign of health rather than disease. Groups as well as members vary in their eagerness, tolerance or distaste for fighting as a way to resolve differences. (Class and ethnic backgrounds may influence these choices. Unfortunately, we have little such information about group members.) Fighting can eventually promote solidarity if there is a shared goal, and if the actual problems are acknowledged and dealt with.

One bookstore reported positive experience with fighting after earlier failure to handle partners' differences. The original founders did not know each other well. After a while the partnership ended. The surviving owner explained: "Because of only superficial knowledge of each other's work skills, personalities, and politics, we suffered a lot of problems." Her lover subsequently came to work with her in the store. Although they knew each

## PROFILE

Please give the following information for each member in the beginning phase:

We listed the characteristics that appear below so we could compose a profile of the women who create projects. What did they share in common? How diverse were members of workgroups?

Responses varied in their detail. After each characteristic, we list in parentheses the number of groups used for analysis.

*Age (28)* It was women in their 20's who typically started these projects. Twelve groups were entirely made up of women in their 20's and nine additional groups included members in their 20's within a larger age range. Three groups were begun by women in their early 30's, one enterprise was founded by women in their early 40's. Several projects contained younger women (aged 16-19) as part of their workgroups. Only two projects mentioned women in their 50's, one of whom was the sole proprietor of her store.

Half of the groups were made up of women relatively close in age (0-5 years apart). The smaller the group, the greater the likelihood of being relatively homogeneous in age.

*Race (32) and Class* Projects were begun by white women. Only six groups mentioned nonwhite members; in each case there was one such woman.

We did not include class in the revised questionnaire. A few groups who had one or more working-class members raised the issue. Most group members probably had middle-class origins.

*Education (31)* Founders were almost all college-educated. Twenty-seven groups were made up entirely of women with at least "some college" and many members had undergraduate degrees. Eleven of the projects contained one or more members with graduate or professional degrees.

Four groups included women with only high school educations, but non-college women were in the minority in those projects.

*Sexual Preference (32)* Nearly half of the groups (15) included both gay and straight women. Sometimes these groups were predominantly heterosexual or homosexual; usually the proportion was more equal. Mixed groups tended to be medium- or large-sized: 12 had four or more members.

Twelve groups were started by lesbians. Nine were very small (2-3), and these tended to involve lovers. Two of the larger projects were specifically designed for lesbians. The other large project (13 members) was a bookstore.

Five groups included only heterosexuals. At the time the questionnaire was filled out, however, two of these groups had members who had become lesbians. Four of the five projects were very small.

*Children (28)* Enterprises were evenly divided on whether or not any members had children. Small projects (2-4 members) seem a little more likely to be founded by nonmothers than by mothers: 11 of the 18 small groups were started by women without children. Of the ten larger groups, seven included mothers in the initial group.

Groups were somewhat homogeneous with respect to motherhood. Either no one had children (14 projects) or everyone did (3). Eleven groups contained both mothers and nonmothers. These varied from being mostly mothers to mostly nonmothers.

*Home Situation (23)* Usually, members of a group lived in relatively similar circumstances, that is, their members were either living-together lovers, or were living with husbands and children, or were in "single" life-

styles (living alone, with roommates or in communes). Ten workgroups combined women with varying home situations. These projects were likely to be medium- or large-sized.

*Sources of Financial Support at the Outset (31)* For almost all projects, members were financially independent of the enterprise they started. Only four groups included women who were primarily dependent upon the project for support. The majority of groups had at least some members who were supported by full- or part-time jobs (outside the project), though other sources of economic maintenance were social services (unemployment, welfare, etc.), husbands or lovers, savings and "personal wealth," and student-related (scholarships, loans, parents, etc.) More than half of the projects had members who were relatively homogeneous with respect to source of financial support. However, even when there appears to be heterogeneity, similar lifestyles may mute potentially visible economic differences.

*Previous Involvement in the Women's Movement (34)* A little over half of the founders had considerable or heavy prior feminist experience. They had generally been active for at least two years in a variety of political groups, projects and positions (organizers as well as members). The rest of the founders had relatively little or no previous feminist involvement.

Seventy percent of the groups were composed of women who were homogeneous with respect to previous political experience. Ten groups did contain internal variation in the extent of past feminist participation. For the most part, then, members were not confronted by co-workers with widely varying political sophistication.

other intimately, they had to work through many difficulties before they could function together as co-workers:

We fought tooth and nail! Til we developed a trust level that allowed us to deal with our differences. This trust level never happened between [first two partners] because work skills were so different.

Trust cannot be merely assumed or asserted; like that other favorite rallying cry, "commitment," trust is an ongoing achievement.

If trusting one another is based on a demand for complete similarity, then, of course, members will react to the inevitable differences as threatening and as violations. There can be considerable disagreements and differences between co-workers without jeopardizing a project:

Because we were three very opinionated and determined individuals with very diverse backgrounds, it was sometimes painful to arrive at consensus. Often, we each felt that our way of seeing and doing was "superior" to the other two and it was hard to understand why they couldn't see that. Again, because the goal was too important, we found ways to work around to agreements that we could all live with. [Bookstore]

We need concrete descriptions of how such groups arrive at workable arrangements. Under what circumstances will groups play out differences for all they are worth? How do members get past the kind of rigid insistence that can lock them into irreconcilable positions? What enables dissenting individuals to clarify what is shared and get on with it?

The answer seems to lie in figuring out what difference the differences make. What is at stake in battles over the "best" place to put a shelf or the "correct" line to take politically? Whose interests are served? What is accomplished by the other extreme, pretending differences do not exist?

We raise these questions to stimulate feminists to study and evaluate our projects. We do not make them stronger by extolling or despairing their results. If we weren't so surprised at how hard it is to work together, we might discover how easy it can be.

### Needs Met and Unmet

*How did the project meet the personal needs of its members? In what ways did the project make demands on its members that interfered with their needs as individuals?*

Groups expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for the ways their projects met members' individual needs. Their comments suggest that they got more out of the projects than they had dared hope for—personally, socially and politically:

I can speak only for myself—a chance to learn, to learn to write, to have my say, to be part of the community. [Art newsletter]

Most gratifying to be involved in a project that carried out a rewarding goal of opening a woman's bookstore. Learning process—starting a business, learning business skills, participating in a collective process. Way to meet other women

in the community and getting involved in other projects. Being able to do our thing for ourselves without being oppressed by the patriarchy.

The process of turning an idea into an actual project validated women's abilities, building up confidence and autonomy:

It showed us that we could do something if we set our minds to it. We were proud of our achievement and had a sense of accomplishment. It was exciting. [Bookstore/gallery]

Mary: Gave her an outlet for her art that could reach more people. Gave a feeling of confidence by building on raw skills and developing them ...

Sally: Gave her first chance in a long time to express creative skills. Gave her a chance to experience initiative and decisions away from previous work experiences with "bosses."

A number of groups mentioned aspects of their work environment which contributed to their sense of personal fulfillment. In addition to the absence of bosses, they delighted over being able to care about the work they were doing and the connections being forged between their personal and political lives. Women expressed pleasure in creating their own projects, rather than fitting themselves into a pre-existing traditional work situation.

It fulfilled the desire of all members to be involved with women for most of the day; by providing a space for women such as they would like to go to and which did not exist in the area they live in. It gave an opportunity to learn a business from the ground up. [Bookstore]

A women's architectural group that met only once a month was able to speak to members' "personal isolation within male-structured profession":

Outlet for engaging in work and ideas not allowed for in regular paying jobs. Connections to a personal and professional support system ...

Women who felt isolated reported that their projects gave them a chance to make contacts with other women and with other organized groups in the women's community.

Created opportunities to meet other lesbians by taking our wares to conferences and gatherings. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

Was a catalyst for other feminist development that meets both our needs. Allowed Myra to work at a job that was satisfying in its purpose and in contacts with other women. [Bookstore]

Larger collectives could provide this expansion of networks through their own social events and ongoing activities.

For many groups the establishing of social connections went hand in hand with the building of political ties. This was true for relationships with women outside the work-group, but it was particularly important among the members themselves.

Many of the collective members were working out personal awarenesses about race, class, politics, and women's culture. They used the collective process in deciding ways the store could function as a political extension of themselves—in the

books they sold, services to offer, and functions to sponsor. [Bookstore, 13]

Gave us a place to discuss our politics in depth in terms of learning to work together ... gave us all contact with other women; made our politics a reality. [Bookstore, 5–8]

*Needs Unmet.* Though projects succeeded in meeting a number of important needs of their members, they could also interfere with other aspects of those same individuals' lives. The majority of groups said that time demands were a serious pressure. Bookstores, in particular, could be all-consuming. Groups of various sizes expressed this concern, but the most anguished responses came from projects composed primarily of intimates:

Time and Energy. We worked 60–70 hours a week. 8 a.m. to midnight for months. Neither of us did anything else—play, sex, lovers, other work, anything else for a long time. We gave priority to the work over our relationship. We became work-zombies. Very narrow-visioned. [Bookstore, 2 lovers]

In an interview another bookseller vividly conveyed the daily pressures imposed by the business:

I: Is there some way to ... try and figure out what the mutual relationship was between the friendship and doing the bookstore? ... Here you have this 15-year friendship, not based on having done a major project together like this. Then you start doing a major project, and it's—

R: Then it became very frustrating because we realized we were seeing each other every day, constantly, every night, but we were always talking about business. We had no time to talk any of the things we'd spent years and days talking about. And it's still kind of hard. I know that when we get together, we want to do both things. So there's a conflict. Can we talk about our personal lives? Do we need to talk about the bookstore? ... It's always kind of going back and forth. I recognize those two categories, and there is always a tension to get the business done.

The amount of time members spent on projects had implications for other parts of their lives. If women seriously curtailed previous commitments or ignored their own health, they were likely to "feel the pinch" in one form or another.

We had to work long hours sometimes and had to deal with the guilt of preferring to be away from husbands and children. [Bookstore, 3]

I find the magazine very compelling, but it seriously interferes with my creative life, my research, and my health. I also love it. Sheila drove herself into a state of exhaustion over the double issue and came down with mono with a hepatitis complication. Generally, women end up resenting the amount of time the magazine takes up although they rather love it.

Some women's projects did not involve everyone's constant attention; they were designed as part-time activities that had to be fit around other things members were doing. Even so, time was not always easily obtained.

The main problem is/was finding time for all of us to meet together and work on our project ... most of us now work full time for money to survive on. [Bookstore, 5–8]

During times of intense involvement with book production

some members resented time needed for work and meetings. [Anthology, 6]

Time pressures are part of a larger problem: the inherent struggle between project needs and members' needs. Women's workgroups varied in their stance on this issue. Some projects emphasized the goals and tasks for which they came together:

We did not let our personal process interfere with running the store. [Bookstore, 4]

I really don't see X as a project meeting the personal needs of the women working on it in a very great way. The women who worked on the magazine and are still working on it basically wanted to be connected with a literary magazine.

Most groups wanted to combine project goals with individual concerns; therefore they had committed themselves to dealing with at least some of the personal needs of their members. This balance was negotiated differently in each group, depending upon the particular circumstances at hand. One project acknowledged the problem of time demands, but devised a structural plan that would get work done in a personally supportive way:

The demand for time (as always) was the major problem. However, women made clear what their limitations were and those women putting in more time toward the realization of the conference were reassured of and guaranteed a backup system as well as encouraged to recognize doubts or incapacity to carry out the task and to demand help rather than run the risk of leaving the task undone. Interestingly enough, everybody did more than they originally said they could do. [Architectural network, 15]

Other groups grappled with members' motivations for participating. A gallery and bookstore lost a partner who

wanted to stay in the art world, be her own boss and make money at it. She wasn't able to make the money she'd envisioned and has since left.

The desire for social support that made these groups so appealing could interfere with the needs of the project, especially in the beginning stages:

Looking for connections with other feminists was a basic expectation. This could happen within the collective or across the counter. Some women expected the collective to offer more personal support/social/friendship network support than it could. At first we had to concentrate on business/political purposes. [Bookstore, 10]

We all had different needs, sometimes it was hard to get anything done, some women wanted the collective to be a large CR group and a source of friends, we all needed support. [Women's center/bookstore, 25]

Eventually, the collectives that developed visible projects established methods that would work for them, knowing all too well that this could mean compromising individual needs:

The key faculty that keeps us together smoothly is being organized, sometimes in a way that cramps personal style ... [Bookstore, 6-10]

Not always a lot of room for creativity. Not always enough time to share with other workers. [Bookstore, 7-10]

Though unusual among the responding groups, another alternative was to make members' personal needs the priority:

We have always tried to place ourselves as individual people before the "business" to avoid burnout and so close the store whenever we need to.... Our work is fun and this store is mainly for our benefit.... Advice: To consciously place yourselves as women and workers as the most important aspect of the project and care about yourselves—the business comes second. Base decisions on these values. [Bookstore, 5-8]

Only a few groups directly acknowledged the importance of staying in touch with individual members' needs.

Would spend more time getting to know each woman involved and air our expectations as well as fears in greater detail—we dizzily sped through this process into action and had to do some backtracking about ten months later. [Women's center/bookstore, 16-25]

In general, the question of needs has to be addressed by the entire group, rather than only being a matter of individual evaluation—and strain. Members should be clear with each other about what they feel they are gaining, as well as what they feel they are being asked to give up.

We were struck by the willingness and determination of almost all project groups to carry on, regardless. The enthusiasm and pride that so many groups expressed suggests that in spite of the hardships they have endured, they evaluate their efforts positively. Members feel good about the results, even when the process has clearly deprived them of other things they value.

## THE WORK

### Time

*How much time (hours per week) did you spend on the project in the beginning?*

There was an enormous diversity in time spent, depending on the nature of the work to be done, how many women were involved and how long the beginning period was to last:

Three-hour meeting once a week. [Anthology, 8]

Before the store opened many, many hours were spent on remodeling and researching skill areas needed, plus a 3-4 hour meeting each week. Later, the store was open 45 hours a week and the weekly meetings continued. Some women spent as much as 20 hours per week; others only went to the meeting or worked a shift. [Bookstore, 13]

From 50 to 100 hours per week. [Art newsletter, 3]

The one main organizer whose \$ [was invested]—10 hours a week, 6-7 days a week. Others 5-30 hours a week. [Bookstore, 10]

Some answers reflect a number of hours and totality of commitment that few of us would knowingly agree to in advance:

Between 38-52 hours each. This was as much time as we could because our regular jobs took 37 and 48 hours respectively, on

top of our own work. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

It seemed like all our time, whether we were actively doing things or merely planning. We lived and breathed it. [Bookstore/gallery, 2]

Most of these groups do not appear to regret a period when they lived mainly through the project, although there are signs that a merciful veil has descended to blur their detailed memory of it:

65–75 hours a week each. Sometimes more. A couple months of 8 a.m. to 12 midnight. I flinch to remember. [Bookstore, 2]

Perhaps such intensity reflects personality differences (some of us tend to throw ourselves into a task), or perhaps it results from extreme determination (we feel we *must* do it). This obsessive period may creep up on us, swallowing our lives bite by bite despite our best intentions. For a time, it can be an exciting and productive way to live, but the projects which depend for their continuance upon this level of effort are in for hard times—burnout, schisms and bitterness.

Time and money are connected: when money is used to purchase certain goods and services, then members do not have to spend their time on these things, or they can be paid for doing so and thus spend less additional time earning a living. Painfully, nearly all of these projects—even the profit-oriented ones—never have enough time or money to be really comfortable. This is partly because the wish to provide services always seems to keep a jump ahead of the means to do so; as women and as feminists we want to be generous and helpful, but it is hard to do this without draining ourselves and our resources.

Lows: ... When we all realized that we didn't have the energy to be everything to every woman, and we faced that reality. [Bookstore, 25]

We want to be able to work productively together to achieve our goals, while still attending to our own needs. The time and money available to us are real limitations and, as we will discuss, may also represent even deeper issues of conflicting needs or expectations.

### Tasks

*How did you spend most of your time? What tasks or processes were critical to the project? What skills did you have to learn?*

A bookstore which developed over a ten-month period gives a chronological outline of their beginnings:

February: Group of 7 womyn formed to talk about doing a bookstore.

May: Collective members began making monthly \$ donations.

Summer: Began files and writing book companies.

November: Benefit concert and found and settled on a storefront.

Early December: Decided what stock to order and ordered.

December 13: Opened store.

and tells how they spent their time:

Originally much of our time was spent discussing politics—did we want to be a woman's store or did we want to carry other types of books? Could we pay salaries? Critical tasks were finding a location; getting info from publishers; ordering books; finding out about state, city & federal requirements. Skills: bookkeeping; decision by consensus; filling out legal forms, tax forms; budgeting; dealing with customers and salespeople.

Other groups compressed these tasks into a much shorter period; here is a bookstore at the other extreme:

Placed an article in the September newsletter of the lesbian organization asking all interested women to meet. After several meetings the group decided they wanted to establish a collectively run store and women's space—money or not. In October a benefit Halloween dance was held. Soon a rent-free location became available and remodeling began. Finally, the store was opened about the middle of December.... Most of the time before opening was with fundraising and remodeling. Most time after opening was for staffing the store. The most critical tasks were proper book ordering, handling the money, bookkeeping, legal matters. Had to learn them all. [13 women]

All groups undoubtedly spent some time planning—talking over ideas and getting to know one another, doing research, and building skills and knowledge that would be needed later. These two groups gave particular emphasis to this process:

In the beginning, we took about six months choosing poems and choosing a title, an act that became symbolic of commitment and learning to work together. We had to learn typesetting, layout, and book design. [Anthology, 8]

A lot to learn, and went to many women's events to sell books, which took a lot of energy. We also took business courses. We also did demographic studies of the area in which we planned to locate. We spent one year checking out various aspects such as location and policy of book distributors, publishers. Also talked with other women in business and women's organizations (e.g., NOW chapters). [Bookstore, 2]

Probably emotional work was an important part of this planning period and a continuing task for most groups—dealing with feelings as the work proceeds:

Most time together was spent at meetings—doing organizing and planning, eating and talking. Time was spent separately doing errands, writing letters, and doing research. We used consciousness-raising techniques to talk about money, traveling, our fears and expectations and to confront our differences. Brainstorming was a vital process used to generate ideas. We had to develop skills in public speaking, interviewing, working together, sharing differences and taking risks in interpersonal relationships. [Slide show, 3]

From other sources, we suspect that this emotional work is a "task" both critical and time-consuming, but few groups mention it here. Several groups, however, were aware of "dealing with people" as a task, and a few even felt pushed to improve their interpersonal skills:

Skills: putting ourselves forward and making contacts. [Anthology, 4]

Buying books (hunting), pricing and repairing, stocking store, mail order. Only skill needed was to learn how to deal with the public. (Not to mention all the things about books. That process could take 25 years to learn accurately.) [Used books, 2]

In general, the number of specific tasks mentioned defies categorization; some responses give the impression that groups picked a few at random as they faced the questionnaire, finding it hard to remember all the many ways time was spent in those hectic early days.

We learned production, editing, proofing, layout, paste-up, retouch, promotion, filing, list-keeping, photography, headline writing and about eight other things as we went along. [Art newsletter, 3]

No members of these groups can refer to a traditional “job description”—each woman does many different things, perhaps in a single day doing the work of administrator, janitor, figure clerk, friend and craftswoman. An individual woman does not see herself as “the bookkeeper” or “a counselor”—she dons various hats as needed to accomplish the group’s goals. Thus, the project does not confer a specific occupational identity on each woman involved; rather each woman’s identity is more general, connected with the whole group and its goals: “I am one of the women who started the gallery.”

The tasks seen as “critical” are not always the ones on which the most time was spent. For example, many answers report that the labor of creating the physical space was time-consuming, but few report it as “critical.”

Most critical: Buying books; getting artists to do consignment and arrange shows; learned bookkeeping. Most time: painting and building bookcases, getting info on where to order and titles from other women’s stores. [Bookstore, 10]

Presumably, the emphasis here is on tasks that required considerable skill or judgment to be effective as opposed to things that had to get done but where it didn’t much matter how they got done. Thus, “time-consuming” tasks were ones where friends and supporters could pitch in even though they had no particular familiarity with the project, while “critical” tasks were those which group members felt required their own judgment and commitment to the project, or ones which involved skills that needed to be developed within the group for future work.

Both critical and time-consuming were the tasks central to the project—book ordering for bookstores, creating products for artists and craftswomen, etc. These tasks often involved getting familiar with the ins and outs of a totally new world (book business, wholesale production, etc.):

Much time was spent on preparing artwork, building each screen to be used, hand printing each piece. We had to learn new methods, tricks, where to purchase and product information on materials we used. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

As this quote suggests, critical skills were learned by nearly every group in degrees ranging from considerable to astounding.

Organizing committees, getting incorporated and tax-exempt, negotiating a lease, renovating the space, getting out publicity,

applying for grants. Whoever did these things pretty much had to learn how as she was doing them. [Cooperative gallery, 21]  
Writing letters, talking with potential record accounts, \$ management, organizing business. We had to learn production skills, bookkeeping systems, magazine design & layout, inventory, brochure design, contracts, hiring technicians, handling finances. [Music enterprises, 2]

Of course, learning “magazine design and layout” (to take one example) for a particular and immediate purpose does not mean that one acquires overnight a new profession. Still, as these women testify, they managed to do a number of things they had never done before, learning as they went. Presumably, they were able to do this because of two factors which we may initially underestimate. First, some of the goals of our groups may not require “professional” efforts. A newsletter can do its job of publicizing and informing even with primitive layout and a lot of typos; the main thing in the beginning is to get it out.

Second, many “skills” which our society regards as full-time specialties are in fact not so mysterious as they seem. The “technical mystique” that stands between us and our goals is sometimes an illusion. Bookkeeping, for example, mostly consists of classifying amounts into appropriate income and expense groups, writing them neatly in columns and adding up the columns. These tasks require common sense, arithmetic and careful attention to detail, all of which are abilities familiar to us, whether we have them or not. “Bookkeeping” is only a system that organizes these familiar skills in a new way, and its conventions are easily learned once we have overcome our awe of the “mystique.” In the same way, other seemingly unfamiliar skills are quick to resolve themselves into new uses of familiar abilities. After several such encounters, we can begin to assume that many skills are within our reach—the reflex “I’ve never done that; I don’t know how!” becomes “I’ve never done that; what does it involve?” One group makes this point explicitly:

Both of us had been homemakers for 20 years and those skills are transferable to business, i.e., budgeting, planning, accounting skills. We feel this important for women to know—to blunt the whole “business mystique.” Also the skills women acquire in dealing with people are important—and rarely mentioned. [Bookstore, 2]

Of course, the process of applying familiar skills to a new problem or task is a learning experience, and at first there is awkwardness and inefficiency. But the new confidence gained by this process is a resource that each woman had for herself, to draw on the next time.

### Backgrounds

*Did any members have specific backgrounds, skills or personalities that were especially key to the project?*

A very few projects were started by women who already had considerable experience and special skills in some aspects of the work to be done:

Jane is an accomplished graphic artist with a love for detail work and technical aspects that are very necessary—especially when we branched out to notecards. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

One of us eleven years in wholesale travel—the other nine years in retail travel. (Travel agency, 2)

Several answers also mention the value of “connections”—a familiarity with the field and an acquaintance with a number of people already in it who can be drawn upon for support and technical assistance:

Some had worked in galleries or museums, and their connections and knowledge were extremely helpful. (Cooperative gallery, 21)

Nancy [the editor] had spent her adult life in the art world. I had been active in some of the women artists groups then forming. But neither of us had experience in journalism per se. [Art newsletter, 3]

Often the project itself takes direction partly from the abilities and enthusiasms of the women involved in it:

We are all responsible, committed and hardworking. We have all worked in performance and were familiar with the performance work we wanted to share. Between us we knew personally most of the artists we interviewed, which helped in contacting them. Lydia and Judy are skilled in photography. We all have graphic design skills, which helped in designing a poster for our presentation. Lydia has printing skills and access to free use of printing equipment. [Slide show, 3]

Most projects, however, did not hinge on such special skills, but benefited from a variety of interests and abilities:

Two of the women had worked in a community bookstore before, although their skills were not extensive. All of us had group skills which facilitated communication and group interaction. One of us was particularly gregarious and skilled in public outreach. Several of us have good writing skills which aids in writing newspaper articles and other raps about our collective. Each of our different areas of interest (education, psychology, bee keeping, literature, sports, ecology) provided a balanced selection of stock. [Bookstore, 8]

In many of these answers, the line between “skills” and “personalities” is very thin. We have all had the experience of acquiring by dint of hard work and perseverance “skills” which seem to come to others effortlessly. On the other hand, when we have an interest in or an attraction to something and therefore spend time doing it, we may acquire “skill” in that area without realizing it. For example, is an “eye for design” a skill or a talent? Probably both.

Few skills that involve long formal training are required in these groups, so when a member has an aptitude or liking for a task, combined with some previous exposure to it, she is often considered “skilled.” The employment-agency approach to “skills” can be misleading—we all possess many abilities that help us reach our goals; many of them never appear on a job resume. The following sampling shows that each woman is valued for her particular talents:

Sue is a good business woman and likes keeping account books. She is a steady and responsible person who follows

through. Josie has enthusiasm that is inspiring and got us through rough times and kept us going. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

I had worked in publishing; one had published her own chapbook; one was good at publicity; one had experience community organizing; one good brainstorming ideas. [Anthology, 8]

I had connection in women’s bookstores and so elicited their help. I also had confidence in my management sense and easygoing, nonthreatening nature (I wish somebody else could write this instead of me). My partner had connections with women artists and was an aggressive go-getter. [Bookstore/gallery, 2]

Substantial differences in skill levels sometimes caused problems:

No one had specific business skills or experience in starting and running a bookstore. There were some women experienced in library work, carpentry, and group facilitation; others had strong preferences for bookkeeping, book ordering, fundraising, and publicity.... Lows: Too much required of some collective members with special skills, i.e., the bookkeeper, book orderer, and carpenter. Some of those who couldn’t contribute as much felt guilty. [Bookstore, 13]

Sometimes skills missing at the beginning are identified later and supplied:

Carol had elementary production skills that got us through the first and second issues. Ann took the initiative to learn production skills. Karla, a professional copy editor, arrived for the fourth issue and refined our editorial standards greatly. Ann’s and Karla’s skills were critical to the development of the magazine. I also seemed to have organizational skills and put together an efficient bookkeeping system that made grant applications and fiscal reports easier to fill out. [Literary magazine, 3–4]

Since many of these groups were organized around shared feminist politics and goals, often political activity and interests helped, both in the actual work of the project (dealing with the public, making decisions consonant with political beliefs) and in managing the collective work environment:

Some members were more experienced in political work, either from leftist or feminist political experiences. This may have made them more adept in dealing with a collective. [Bookstore, 13]

Some answers explicitly state that members had previously “started” or “initiated” other projects:

Some had experience in starting large projects, some had experience working in small groups or “collectives.” All were readers; all had experience meeting people in a public setting. [Bookstore, 4]

Many had experience in organizing other projects, some had a lot of energy, but not the needed experience, a few had business experience—we were large enough that, whenever we needed a specific talent, it seemed it was always available. [Bookstore, 25]

Previous success in implementing their ideas predisposes women to believe that this time, too, they will be able to create something new. This confidence in their own power to effect change is, we think, what is sometimes referred to as “drive,” and is a “skill” critical to success for these groups:

Initially, and for the first year or so, in addition to commitment was sense of organizational skills and structure on some women's parts—people who had the drive to take a discussion and translate it into practical action. [Archives, 9]

Both had one or more years of bookstore experience, without which we couldn't have created this store as quickly as we did. Personalities: We're both determined. This and our willingness to work made the store viable. One of us is compulsive—for better and worse. "Creativity, drive and compulsiveness!" [Bookstore, 2]

Such confidence is not usual for most of us; as members of a highly structured society and as women in that society, we have been socialized to "follow," to take direction, to fit in. In the "regular" work world, especially in large hierarchical organizations, it is hard to feel that our efforts have been decisive, and even harder to retain any personal identification with the results. Conditioned by this daily reality, our expectations are often small and our efforts correspondingly tentative and anxious.

We approached every aspect of operating the bookstore from the standpoint that everyone could do everything. But not everyone believed enough in herself to figure out/learn what to do. Some members felt a lot of stress around having to take on difficult work or having to repeatedly ask for help, feeling inadequate. [Bookstore, 10]

Many projects discussed here have been started by women who have at least partially escaped or emerged from this widespread insecurity. Previous "organizing" or "political" experiences have taught them to expect to have an effect. And these projects, sheltered for the most part within the women's community, can enable experienced women to expand their confidence while also giving other women their first taste of it.

Some comments from the "Highs and Lows" section document the importance of this learning—the realization that the "official" institutions around us did not spring up magically, and that we can create equally self-sustaining and public organizations that are seen by our community as "real":

We never really believed women would actually pay us for our products—but they did! That was very gratifying. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

We felt good we were making our ideas a reality, and that we could work together and produce a product. We felt the book was uniquely ours, in a way it wouldn't have been if we had entrusted its production to an outside, impersonal printer. [Anthology, 8]

We loved it!! We found we *could* do anything we set out to do. We also found that being in business was not all that difficult. (Male myth.) [Bookstore, 2]

## Experts

*Did you use paid or unpaid experts? How were they helpful?*

The responses here reflect both the "expert mystique" of our specialized society and the counterpoint "do-it-

ourselves" spirit of feminism:

We needed an accountant to help us set up books and know how to maintain them, and to do year-end taxes. Both too complicated for a nonprofessional to do. [Bookstore]

We have never used a paid expert. We learned how to deal with taxes, non-profit status and incorporation by reading and writing appropriate agencies.... The rest we just figured out workable systems. [Bookstore]

We used no one and five years later we are sorry. Our books are a mess. [If we were beginning again] we would start with an accountant and set up good books. If we had done that from the start we would have been able to get bank loans. And a lawyer to draw up in advance agreements about what to do if one partner wants to leave. [Bookstore]

We had nothing, so we could pay for nothing. We had a volunteer lawyer do our non-profit incorporation, but that took over a year. I did our tax-exempt status application. [Literary magazine]

Most groups used an accountant, a lawyer and/or other advisers:

We went to SCORE [Service Corps of Retired Executives]—for free. They helped. Everything else we figured out ourselves and learned from our many mistakes. [Mail-order crafts]

We took a small business administration seminar course at a local college.... They gave us lots of forms and a checklist for how to go into business. The course helped. It didn't tell us how to do anything specific, but it did show us all the things we didn't know. Beforehand, neither of us knew anything about business, like the difference between accounting and book-keeping. [Bookstore]

Carpenters were named often and with enthusiasm:

Lawyers wrote up articles of incorporation. Bookkeeper helped us set up books. Both were very helpful. Carpenter [heart symbol] she was wonderful. [Bookstore]

By the way, nearly every group mentions bookkeeping somewhere (or two or three wheres) in the questionnaire; perhaps we should consider short bookkeeping courses as necessary to our autonomy as consciousness-raising.

Much expert assistance was unpaid; advice and support came not only from friendly experts and expert friends, but from women in the community and related groups or similar businesses.

Paid lawyer, architect, accountant, carpenter. Also some unpaid experts who volunteered to paint, etc., and actually helped us more than the architect. [Bookstore]

Especially in the beginning stages, most women's workgroups draw sympathy and assistance from a wide circle. Successful groups seem to be skilled at responding to these offers not only with gratitude but also with specific requests for help. The line between employee, volunteer and interested passerby may be a thin one and many projects prosper by encouraging these distinctions to blur.

The need for help and advice is clear from the following answer to the question "If you were beginning again ..."

We would spend less time at trial and error that could have been saved by consulting an expert. [Anthology]

Certainly it takes precious time to "do it ourselves," but

sometimes we get less than we would like from the professionals we consult:

I regret them [paid experts] now—we spent too much money on lawyers, accountants and other bureaucratic work we could have done ourselves or with the help of less expensive “experts.” [Bookstore/gallery]

From lawyers we seek clear agreements among members, and from accountants we want financial records that give useful information. But the standard solutions we get from these licensed experts are sometimes cumbersome and usually expensive, and it is often hard to get clear information in advance about their advantages and disadvantages in our special situations. Moreover, training in law and accounting, patriarchal disciplines geared toward profit and adversary relations, is not necessarily helpful in setting up structures that will encourage equality, mutual responsibility and responsiveness to a wide community.

Perhaps sometimes we hire experts because of a feeling that we need “official” sanctions and paraphernalia—we may sense, for example, that an undertaking not incorporated is not “serious.” Sometimes we purchase their protection against the complexities of “the system” (they will at least warn us if we are doing something wrong), or we are required to get their rubber stamp:

We do everything ourselves. We consulted an accountant once, to clear up some bookkeeping questions we had, but we do our own books and tax preparations. We needed an attorney of record for a recent incorporation. [Bookstore]

We hope that as more of us are able to state our needs more clearly, we will increasingly find ingenious and insightful experts who can meet them.

## Capital

*How much money was necessary? How did you get it?*

Most projects started with comparatively little money—the median was about \$2,500, with a range of \$500 to \$36,000. A few projects made getting money an early priority and devoted energy during the initial period to loan applications, grant proposals or benefit events.

\$700 [was needed]. \$200 from private donations; \$200 from making and selling The Common Woman poster and showing *Salt of the Earth*; \$300 lent by the Women’s Resource Fund. [Bookstore]

As originally conceived, \$36,000—\$6,000 mine, the balance bank loan. [Spent time in the beginning] preparing the package for the loan. [Bookstore]

Others had personal resources to draw on.

\$400 to start—personal loans, \$200 each. [Travel agency, no storefront]

We started with only \$3000. We each borrowed \$1000 from parents or husbands. [Bookstore]

\$10,000. Three out of four of us loaned the money to the store. [Bookstore]

Still others apparently began with little idea of where the

money would come from.

Well, we opened with between \$400–\$600. \$160 of that came from a benefit concert. The rest from donations from collective members or other community people. This enabled us to pay our first month’s rent and order about 100–150 books. [Bookstore]

Some made do with very little, starting small and poor and building up. Some got windfalls—unexpected grants or donations of space and other resources.

In the beginning we spent a fair amount of time trying to get the school to give us money. We started with \$500 from the graduate student council for the first issue. We later managed to get \$400 from the same and \$180 from the student senate for the second issue. I loaned the magazine money for the third issue. This sum (about \$300) was made back on a benefit reading I organized. The fourth and subsequent issues we partially funded by grants from CCLM [Coordinating Council of Little Magazines]. [Literary magazine]

Some collected a small amount from each of a large number of members:

We began with members making a contract agreeing to give \$250 or work 20 hours per month [for a year] or any combination thereof. So we had \$2000–\$3000 to start with. Later we changed it to \$250 or 10 hours/month because the work hours weren’t equivalent to the money. Now we ask 1.5% of income and 4 hours/month or 48 hours work on special projects throughout the year. . . . We started with only \$800 in stock. We now [17 months later] have over \$5000. [Bookstore]

As we will see in the next section, the better-financed projects often are able to pay small salaries soon after beginning, and are able to grow at a more rapid rate; those which begin on a shoestring require more perseverance and fortitude to survive the years which often precede even minimal prosperity. But most projects had little choice but to start with small capital. Few of us women have access to capital, and many of our projects are not seen by traditional sources of capital as “good risks.” Amounts which in this article are called “large” would be considered very small by comparable “business-world standards.”

Some groups made the availability of money an implicit precondition, choosing members with money, for instance, or dating the “beginning” of the project from the receipt of a grant. Generally, however, the responses demonstrate that many projects got off the ground with initially tiny amounts of ready cash. Some groups began on a very small scale, without costly equipment or special space. The following two groups started as “cottage industries,” each begun by two lovers in their home and later expanded into a full-time storefront business.

We used what \$ was left of our paycheck each week after paying our household bills. Whatever \$ we had we invested into stock. All \$ we received for our products went back into the business. [Mail-order crafts]

Very little at first. Profits always buy more books. Needed \$2000 to open shop. Borrowed from parents (what bank would have looked at us?) [Used books]

Of course, not every project can start small—a feminist

hospital would need costly facilities and equipment even to meet minimal health care standards. But many ideas need not begin full-blown; a bookstore which recently expanded to include a branch location began in 1976 with "2,000—one woman's divorce."

Another way that projects make do with incredibly small amounts of capital is to get much of what they need without using money—labor is volunteered, or contributed in hope of future reward (a true investment); services, supplies and space are donated or stolen or reclaimed.

Started operations in three months with all that could be raised that soon—about \$500. Received free rent and utilities (except phone) for about nine months. This was probably worth \$85–100 a month. We had done, however, extensive remodeling ourselves, including structural repair (damage caused by fire). [Bookstore]

Collection among members. Space was free, supplies taken from jobs, equipment and furnishings donated. [Rape center]

It helps that modest beginnings are often encouraged in the women's community, which regards with suspicion many of the expensive trappings of the larger society. Factory-made plastic bookshelves, for instance, might be considered not only expensive, but ugly, compared to homemade ones. And without expensive security devices, many urban groups find it risky to own fine machinery and equipment: few burglars bother with a 15-year-old Underwood standard. At this stage of our history, we are torn between envy of the "right" equipment and tools, and pride in our ability to "make do."

We have less evidence on groups with lots of money. The bookstore above which began with \$36,000 seems to be doing well, although their report of "losing money hand over fist" for a long time matches the experience of stores with much less initial capital. One statement, from a lesbian feminist organization begun in 1972, sounds a cautionary note:

Very little \$ was "necessary" to form organization. Someone anonymously gave \$3000, but (personal comment) I feel this was not only unnecessary, but detrimental, as it delayed the process of members taking responsibility for their own organization. It has long since been dribbled away.

Concern with money may feed on itself. In the question, "What advice would you give ...?", seven groups recommended starting with more money than they had had, yet among these seven were three of the four largest initial capitalizations that were reported! Perhaps starting on a small scale protects us from inflated hopes; as we grow we can gradually adapt our expectations to the developing reality.

We do not advocate that women foolishly throw themselves into projects without thoughtful planning, but sometimes "no money" may be less a reason than an excuse. Though we may nod and murmur sympathetically when a friend says "no money," "no time," "no experience," none of these lacks is absolute. The women we quote here have

been able to design groups and work plans that make use of what they have.

### Payment and Burnout

*Were members paid? How did the group plan to handle members' time commitments (volunteer or paid, rotations, etc.)—what about burnout?*

For groups that generated income from their projects, three factors seem to make a difference, statistically, in achieving this goal: capitalization, length of time (in years) and size of group. The following quotes from two bookstore projects, which now support themselves give an idea of the range of attitudes and experiences groups have with money; the starting year and investment are given:

We were thrilled to have meaningful work and to start supporting ourselves.... After six months we got \$25 a week each. We worked close to similar hours.... Lows: Lack of money worst problem. We expanded too fast since we were pitifully undercapitalized. When we can't pay our bills things are bad.... Our work fulfills many needs—political, self-actualizing and survival. We cannot burn out. We are working women and this store is our livelihood. [1973?, \$3,000]

The second woman had the opportunity to quit her job and be paid a livable wage for working in the bookstore, due to the store being well capitalized.... We're fortunate to be pretty well financed and paying salaries; many [other bookstores] don't. [1977, \$25,000]

Several similar projects, however, had different stories:

Two were paid, one had welfare. Everybody did equal number of hours. Everybody got burned out from no money. We eventually decided not to expect the bookstore to meet personal salaries and expanded the collective [from three to six].... Advice: Don't expect it to support members financially—small businesses don't make that much money. [1976, \$800]

We have less information about groups that were funded by sources separate from the work itself. The two groups that reported that they received funding for salaries pay one or two administrators, who coordinate the work of a number of other unpaid participants; they also benefited from implicit subsidies such as free space and academic credit.

[Initially, we got] foundation funding for a two-year period, of \$50,000 a year. Students receive academic credit, come for one year. Executive director has ultimate responsibility; she is only person to stay longer than one year and only paid employee. [Prison project]

The counseling project was begun in the fall of 1971 by an M.Div. student [who was also] an experienced abortion counselor and mental health worker. Working 11 hours a week out of a small, shared office in [the student activities building], she ran the project by herself during the fall of 1971.... By mid-year she had trained and was working with three volunteers, one of whom was doing her field work for an M.A. Though housed at the University, the project operated independently and received no funds from the University. The coordinator was paid through work/study money, and two small grants and private donations covered expenses.

How much money do groups pay their members? The

range of figures cited (after taking into account the reported hours of work) is from \$1.25 an hour to \$6.00 an hour. We did not explicitly ask for dollar amounts, and most groups did not volunteer them, so these figures may not be representative. In addition, since some groups answered in terms of their early period, and since the income of a successful project (whether from sales or other sources of funds) is likely to increase over time, as the group becomes more skilled, widely known and stable, these figures may understate their current situations. But it is not our impression that any women are "getting rich" from this work—at best they are supported in a moderate fashion.

We feel it is important here to make a distinction between groups that had payment as one of their goals and groups that from the beginning did not make payment a priority. To plan on paying salaries to some or all members will affect how the project is structured from the outset—size, capital, time spent, etc.—and will naturally be a principal criterion of success for those groups which adopt payment as a goal. On the other hand, groups that do not set themselves this goal will be much less concerned about it.

Of the 37 groups reporting, 18 apparently did not plan to pay members; the organization of the project did not include any provision for salaries, nor did members expect to be paid from the beginning. Another 18 groups did plan, or hope, to contribute to members' support by the work of the group. One group leaves us unclear about their expectations. Two significant facts about the groups that planned for salaries is that they were all small (four or fewer members) and that all but one centered their activities around the sale of some product or service.<sup>6</sup>

Our survey did not emphasize economic goals in the wording of most questions. Nevertheless, we can make two statements about the responses. First, a substantial number of groups function successfully without paying their workers a salary. Second, groups that do make financial support a priority and structure the project accordingly have in general been able to meet this goal to the members' satisfaction. And, some groups which did not originally plan on paying salaries have in fact come to do so.

A few groups report difficulties with payment: some that expected to support themselves found it was not possible; and others give evidence that their goals were unclear, that they did not articulate their expectations and structure the project accordingly:

This was one of our main differences. I felt that our projects were business enterprises and my partner felt that it was political work.

Few groups reported explicitly that issues of not enough payment or none at all were serious problems. A number of

6. Recently, the federal government has contributed paid labor to some groups via CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act); the impact of this program on women's workgroups remains to be evaluated.

groups do complain about lack of money "to pay the bills," and this statement may extend to salaries, too:

Members were never paid. Women worked when they could and left the magazine when they couldn't handle it any more. [Literary magazine, 3]

It seems apparent from the quotes here and elsewhere that these women, even when they depend on their projects for their living, also—and perhaps as important to them—receive other gratifications. They have typically not previously been on "career paths," but have held an assortment of jobs over the years, including periods of unemployment, study and travel. Such marginal employment backgrounds help explain why women value the rewards of their work despite low or no salaries, and may indicate the pool from which future members of such groups might be drawn. Also, as discussed under "Motivations," many of these projects were begun by women who did not expect or need to get their main financial support from this work, although the level of financial independence varied among individuals in some groups. Most projects restricted their members to those who could manage on the rate of pay (or no pay) provided for all.

Several kinds of payment-substitutes are worth mentioning. One bookstore gives payment in kind:

Still no pay, all \$ goes back in, have expanded two times. Get 25% discounts on most items and bonus merchandise for hours worked. Do three-month schedule, one day a week for as many hours as you can that day. [8 women]

One group mentions income sharing—the contribution from their private incomes by some members to support other less affluent ones—but others may practice informal income sharing, particularly those groups which include women who live together.

Despite all these enabling factors, many groups felt acutely the difficulty of squeezing out enough time to work on the project, and it is here that the issues of payment and burnout join. The need to put in long hours on the project in addition to time spent earning money increases the physical burden of the unpaid work:

The first year we never made enough money to pay ourselves. We just did work when it came in. Have never paid ourselves a salary, just absorb \$ into our personal living expenses. . . . Lows: No money for profit—we supported ourselves in other ways and just kept going in hopes the business would one day make \$. [Mail-order crafts, 2]

Since most groups did not plan on being able to pay women for their work immediately, and many not at all, what plans did they have for getting time from their members sufficient to carry on their work? Some groups structured the project from the beginning to use small amounts of time from a large number of women:

Members were not paid, we volunteered our time, and everyone donated 50 hours of work to renovating the space, plus committee work. [Cooperative gallery, 21]

No. There was no burnout because of the amount of people involved as well as the efficient management of the project. [Architectural network, 15]

Several groups were specifically designed as short-term projects:

We did not receive financial remuneration; we decided to undertake project as a service. Regarding burnout: we did not experience this because we knew there was a finite amount of work to be completed by a specific date. [Slide show, 3]

In the early period of a project, members can put all their energies and passion into its work, but when this level of effort stretches over years, it can become oppressive. The following two bookstores, one paying living wages and one with only token payment, explicitly set out to limit their efforts, feeling that to overextend themselves would ultimately defeat their goals:

We were not paid for the first nine months, then paid ourselves partial salaries. At the end of the "beginning phase," we were approaching paying ourselves for actual hours of involvement—no burnout. We had unequal time commitments according to who had time available. After the opening no one put in more than 40 hours a week with the exception of one woman who worked a full-time job [elsewhere] and some hours in the bookstore for a period of the first six months the store was open. [4 women]

Originally, we all worked on a volunteer basis, although now we have a small amount of salary \$ (\$150 a month) [to divide among us]. From the beginning, we did not think that amount of time spent at the store equaled amount of commitment or power. We agreed that all members should come to weekly meetings and try to work at least four hours a week in the store. We strive for equal power. We have always tried to place ourselves as individual people before the "business" to avoid burnout and do close the store whenever we need to. [8 women]

Another way to deal with this "burnout from intensity" is to provide for turnover of members; as women become exhausted, they retire, and new, fresh ones take their place. This occurred in some groups unintentionally:

No pay—women just went in and out of the project as it became too much. [Bookstore, 5]

Dream on! All members signed up for shifts each week to work what they could. Those who had special jobs could also do a shift if they had time. Special jobs were to be rotated every three months—but this never happened. Most of the burnouts were original collective members who faded away in the second nine months. [Bookstore, 13]

In the early days of a project, when its very existence is but a dream, the last thing on everyone's mind is its long-term maintenance and change, so we do not often build in provisions for turnover. In long-lasting groups, it just happens, and groups go on without their founders. Difficulties arise if we become so identified with our creation that we cleave to it until we die or it does—and of course the latter is much more likely. Sometimes, worn-out members who think about leaving are reluctant to be disloyal to the project and to the group; perhaps this explains why some members "faded away." Groups "owned" by their members may find that the difficulties of legal and financial

transfers, when added to the inevitable emotional issues of separation, bring members almost to the brink:

The worst low ever was this year when one partner announced she was leaving. That decision changed the bookstore structure that had been working for 5½ years in one certain way. We had no notice and the experience was totally emotionally draining. She wanted to be paid one-third of what she considered the store to be worth. We had to have inventories, appraisals, etc. We had to restructure with two partners. [Bookstore, 3]

Turnover is also one solution to another kind of burnout which may confront groups that survive several years—boredom. Even when work is remunerative and not physically exhausting, women can "burn out" in the sense of getting tired of the same tasks, the same problems, even the same satisfactions day after day. If the project has contributed to her growth and change, a woman may want a new focus, to work in different areas, try a new environment. Or perhaps some of the members grow stale, still invested in the original vision and unable or unwilling to adapt to the changing needs of the project or the community. And, too, those whose commitment was to the original creation of the project may find its day-to-day maintenance less exciting. Or other changes in our lives may result in the project's not serving our current needs.

Basically, what happened is that a small group of the original 25 did most of the actual work. Many of them have now either left the city, taken a leave of absence, or just dropped out. They have been replaced by others who stepped forward to keep us going. [Bookstore]

Payment itself is often not the central issue. More important is whether payment is seen as a project goal and consequently contributes to a sense of success. If the women who compose these groups begin with the primary expectation of jobs and salaries, then a continuing lack of adequate payment will certainly drive them to leave. To the extent that their motivations and expectations centered around other needs—autonomy, political activity, cooperation—and payment was not anticipated, then the issue of salaries did not by itself lead to burnout. Instead, "burnout" could occur when the other needs were not being met, or when the motivations of the women in the group changed.

The problem of burnout, we conclude, is not solely to be solved by paying salaries, though that can be important; we now regret that we joined, in the wording of our question, the issues of payment and burnout. The term "burnout" is often a catchall for anything that causes exhaustion, that "uses us up." It can refer to physical overwork, emotional stress or merely getting bored/tired of the same old thing. It can also be understood as the point for each individual where the rewards of working in the project are not worth the effort required. Money for salaries may also be a focus or symbol for larger issues of value and satisfaction, of needs and expectations which are not being

met. If, in our groups, we can discover the real causes hidden behind the catchword “burnout,” we can deal with them: by changing the group goals or process, by providing for turnover or by disbanding the group—sometimes things come to a natural end, and even the project itself can “burn out.”

Or, alternatively, as one answer from a bookstore shows, groups can change their philosophy and structure to meet changing needs:

The bookstore was begun sometime in 1970 by radical women and men ... in the beg, borrow or steal manner of many counter-cultural projects. After a couple of years of operating in this manner, a decision was reached to change the bookstore into one run by women, with a philosophical bond to the city's Women's Liberation Union. The issue of money and salaries was not as crucial in the early 70s when there were many women on student subsidies, VISTA, unemployment, etc., who were looking for a tangible way to use their energies for the “movement.” Since 1974 salaries have been paid with an ever-increasing emphasis as we have grown to realize the importance of working for something we believe in—as part of a total life commitment. ... Salaries have gone from one woman at \$75 a month to two women at \$200 a month two years ago to three and a half women at \$500/month at present. Taking these kinds of financial risks is very difficult for us. We feel, however, that women historically have been oppressed by being underpaid and we don't want to repeat that mistake.

And, finally, one woman had a personal solution to burnout:

Burnout? I fight it by learning to value *all* the work I do. Trying to get strokes for my work. Demanding a good work environment. Staying in touch with other bookstore women. Taking time off when it gets too bad. Now we're each taking home \$400/month. I feel almost rich, eat out, am buying a car, etc.

### COLLECTIVE PROCESS

*What was the philosophy of work? How were decisions made, and tasks assigned? How did this philosophy or structure evolve?*

Nearly every group reported that they operate as a collective. Of the larger groups, virtually every one used the term “collective” or some synonym—nonhierarchical, consensus, cooperative, democratic, participatory.

The philosophy was and remains democratic. Everyone is supposed to do equal work and have an equal say in decision-making. [Cooperative gallery, 21]

Work was volunteered for, we never pressed contract commitments. Decisions were made by collective discussion and final vote. Our philosophy and structure evolved through trial and error, through collective discussions of priorities. [Bookstore, 25]

One group quips: “Basically collective, verging on chaotic.”

In groups of two and some groups of three there is such a longstanding intimacy that their process is buried too deep for analysis here:

Since our working group has grown out of intimate relation-

ships, power becomes particularly difficult to define. We know each other so well that jobs are delegated or asked for according to the recognized skill or preference of the person. We have divided up responsibilities sometimes in an unspoken way. While our threesome makes work easier, we do not qualify as a working model of a collective. [Archives]

What do these women mean by “collective”? The term is sometimes more confusing than descriptive. Some women assume a collective must be a large group. For others, “collective” means a more or less equal sharing of the work, responsibility and decision-making power.

A good feeling of cooperation. Even though one woman owns, that woman shared skills, gave direction to others in areas they knew about and [workers] asked her for direction on “what's next to be done” ungrudgingly. Every woman's new ideas are incorporated if group feels good. Owner still gives overall direction. Lists of all workers' duties posted. ... We are not a collective in consensus/women's movement sense. Judith is responsible for bills, buying, concerts; one woman does accounting, one trains new women, one in charge of art shows—others no special responsibility. I/we often get defensive in this area but it works for us. [Bookstore/gallery, 10]

Our communication with each other might be clearer if we had more specific terms, but meanwhile we can be aware that not all of us understand the word “collective” in the same sense. In this section we are concerned with how tasks and decisions are arranged within the group and how notions of equality are implemented, and we feel that on these questions groups of three or twenty share many of the same ideals and problems.

What are the ideals? What benefits do these groups seek when they choose to work “collectively”? The concepts of collective workgroups and humane workplaces have been current for over a decade, and feminism has inherited much of the existing theory. The following description is representative of this legacy:

Alternative organizations embodied activists' desires to start afresh, to create workable institutions that could serve as models while they provided services unencumbered by old modes of action. Technology, bureaucracy, and “professionalism” would go by the board. Relationships in work would be personal and open. Members would participate directly in the affairs of the collectivity—one person, one vote. They would seek equality in other ways, too, notably by rotating jobs and sharing the dirty work. The new organizations would provide goods and services cheaply, help stimulate political reforms, and restore feelings of community, purpose, and satisfaction in their members.<sup>7</sup>

Many of these goals appear to be important to the groups we surveyed.

Feminist ideology—didn't want to follow patriarchal structures. [Rape center, 4]

The philosophy was always nonhierarchical—there has never been a president, etc. Socialist and feminist principles

7. *Introduction, Co-ops, Communes & Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. John Case & Rosemary C.R. Taylor (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 7.

combined discipline and openness in meetings. [Lesbian organization, 10 core group]

Some groups emphasized that their collective ideals enabled them to meet members' needs for *personal* growth and change:

All members would share work equally. Each member brought different skills, outlook and philosophy—different likes and dislikes; the goal was not to allow any of us to appropriate that part that came easiest and run with it. The structure and philosophy evolved because we were all concerned that we each feel right (“good”) about the work needing to be done whether it was “glory” work or “shit” work. [Bookstore, 3]

The sharing of responsibility and authority has been both a tremendous relief to project members, who no longer feel the pressure to “perform,” and a means of empowerment in making choices and taking control of one’s own life. The non-hierarchical structure facilitates an atmosphere where staff can explore and develop their own interests and abilities within the framework of the work of the project. Some staff prefer to structure their time and provide themselves tasks, while others prefer the freedom of an unstructured setup. One member says, “I feel very strongly that this is a place where you can flounder if you want and find out what that feels like, or be constructive, or try something new. It’s a place to experiment in, a growing place.” [Counseling center, 11]

From one group we received a policy statement prepared previously which reveals their commitment to *social* change:

Each of us in the collective has felt the bookstore has been a very important factor in her personal and political evolution. [It] functions to insure availability of feminist ideology, radical politics, etc.... necessary for nourishing cultural structures.... We believe that we are cultural workers and we take pride in doing that as best we can.... So we sell because we believe in our product, we believe in ourselves, and the power of others like us who want change to happen. We believe in alternative business as representing a medium or a transition from oppressive systems to a non-exploitative future.... To set up a business that operates within the framework of feminist/humanist values and supports and encourages the growth of this kind of business by other peoples can potentially be a political act. It provides a model for others to act on and follow in freeing up their own lives and energies. Making the experiences of women and alternatives visible is very important to us.... Our commitment also lies in worker management and ownership and community accountability. [Bookstore, 4]

### Tasks

Let us look first at how these collectives assign tasks. There are two basic systems—rotation and specialization. Rotation approaches most closely the ideal of parity and tends to enforce it:

Our philosophy was that work should be enjoyable, that tasks should be shared and no one should get stuck with a task she didn’t like all the time. Decisions were made by consensus and tasks rotated. We believed each of us should be able to put different amounts of time into the store and that this variable should not affect decision making. This all evolved through discussion. [Bookstore, 4]

Most behind-the-scenes work—ordering and bookkeeping tasks—was done on Sunday while we were all together, so we

learned a lot from each other and were able to share many decisions. Proved very efficient. [Bookstore, 3]

Specialization acknowledges and takes advantage of differences in skills and preference:

Tasks were divided up on a volunteer basis, often based on specific access to people or equipment (printing equipment, good typewriter, AAA card for travel information). [Slide show, 3]

Most groups use some combination of the two:

Our work is fun and this store is mainly for our benefit. We do our work as rapidly and efficiently as we can, without burning out. So we prioritize. People tend to do whatever work they prefer doing, although there is some work which must be done daily and which is handled by whoever is working. We talked originally about having rotating jobs so as to learn all the skills, and this has happened, although not formally; everybody at some point in time has kept the books, organized files, paid bills, etc. From the beginning ordering of stock was done so that each of us had equal input; usually we divided our ordering dollars equally among all members. This structure is based mainly on our view that our work is fun, political and collective, tempered by the reality that some of us have more time and energy than others, and our interests and skills differ. [Bookstore, 8]

The goals of equality and good feeling are sometimes elusive; whichever mode is used, work differences may cause problems:

Lows: Women who felt excluded, that what they had to say counted less because they hadn’t been around as long. Also, when the bulk of work fell on the shoulders of a few, and many women did not honor their commitments. We have always needed a system for fair distribution of labor, have never come up with a workable plan. [Bookstore, 25]

Lows: Not letting one person give most direction. Hard workers holding back. Having trouble in making it known that everybody must share work, that all can share skills, learning to take responsibility. [Bookstore, 5]

The ideal situation is where everyone is interchangeable—in hours, skills, tasks, etc., but this is rarely practicable. For one thing, continuous rotation of tasks may lead to disaffection if one member really likes doing one set of things that the other person dislikes, but both decide it’s politically more correct to take turns. Moreover, all these groups are composed of particular, individual women, and the ideal must often be compromised in practice to get our work done. Individual differences, however, and the ways we adapt our work arrangements to them, may have wider consequences for the collective ideal:

I feel some contradictory ideas here about whether equality between workers is real or possible, given different backgrounds (not class, but work experience), talents (artist, organizer, reader, watcher), and basic aptitudes (math) and temperaments (anxious, uptight, quiet, too quick, shy), etc. ... We have lots more to say about power as access to information or sheer hours put in equaling more information for more power in practice, and more authoritative-seeming presence at meetings. But it’s not possible to have everyone work the same amount of time. We all have other jobs. [In this questionnaire] our *present* operation doesn’t seem touched as much as the

start-up period. Many forces still at work, but current members felt left out. If longevity is not leverage, as we say, then doing this to newer members is antithetical to espoused equality ... sigh ... [Bookstore, 10]

A group tries to accommodate to its members in order to meet their personal needs and benefit from their abilities, while at the same time maintaining a sense of equality among members—as measured both by members' feelings and by objective tests such as responsibility and decision-making power. Perceived or real power differences can be knotty problems in these groups which strive for equality:

Some people did more work because of having a car or time—had to be careful that those who did more work did not gain more power. [Bookstore, 5]

We may sometimes be too quick to leap from the perception of differences to the conclusion that these create power inequalities. We need to be able to address the issue of power in its own right without demanding that all diversity be erased, and this path can be blocked if we assume that equality means identity. The variety of experience revealed in these questionnaires shows that groups *can* accommodate many kinds of diversity—in skill, time, effort, needs, backgrounds, etc.—and that most groups, each with its own mix of individuals, will also have to deal with power.

Highs: Maybe the most important has been becoming comfortable with collective process, learning how to use our power and let each other use power. [Bookstore, 25]

### Decisions

What do we mean by “consensus”? This key word is defined by *Webster's* as “agreement, accord; loosely, the convergent trend.” Some groups obviously understand the looser meaning, which blends easily into decisions by majority vote. At the other extreme is the purest meaning of a practical unanimity, with the expectation that discussion and compromise will continue until a solution is found that everyone feels okay about.

Our decisions were made by discussion and compromise; but we decided that all must be comfortable with all decisions and so all maintained veto power. [Slide show, 3]

Between these two is the interpretation hardest to implement—the “sense” of the group; in the absence of clearer guidelines, this can mean, for instance, that two passionate and verbal members will outweigh four indifferent or timid ones.

I guess the group from the beginning agreed not to spend time on “group process” but rather was task oriented. Decisions were made by consensus officially, but perhaps were also a reflection of whether someone was willing to undertake a project and/or push for it. Nothing was done against the general feeling of the group. [Archives, 9]

The hardest part is learning how to be in a collective, seeking and sharing skills, being *required* to have an opinion,

subsuming individual preferences, talents, viewpoints to the consensus (the minority can rule). [Bookstore, 10]

As a group spends time defining its goals together and members come to know and trust each other, it develops a “backlog” of decisions and understanding which form a consensus model in each member's mind upon which she can draw for guidance. When this occurs, the effectiveness of the group is greatly extended by giving to each individual member an increased ability to act on behalf of all. An architectural network of 21 says it clearly:

Decisions were made collectively, tending always towards unanimity. Of course, it takes a long time to make decisions this way. What happened during the last part of the organization of the conference was that decisions pertaining to the specific task that each woman had were made individually. Everybody had enough sense of the group dynamics to discuss the “big” decisions collectively. Tasks were identified and then assigned on a self-selected basis. This methodology developed from our previous individual experiences working with women. What made all the difference in the world was mutual trust and respect for each other's work.

This ongoing consensus develops from a fairly high level of agreement among the members on the goals of the group and the means by which they should be achieved. Usually such agreement also implies a sharing of many personal and political values. Several groups, on looking back, wish they had done more to assure consensus:

Would try to bring tougher (less *laissez faire*) political standards into play for who will be collective members, so we have more basic assumptions in common. This, even though I realize women will move and grow (I have) from where they are at entry point, that diversity is desirable, and that feminist theory is still evolving and we must bring women along from wherever they start. [Bookstore, 5]

Would suggest a lot of discussion beforehand about goals and visions of the project. [Bookstore, 5]

When this basic consensus does not exist, or breaks down, the group is in difficulty. The testimony cited in the sections on “Similarities and Differences” and “Turnover” on women leaving the group could be repeated here. One quote in particular shows a possible interrelationship among differences, power struggles and lack of consensus:

After months of intense political disagreements, the separatists left. The group couldn't or wouldn't deal with the dichotomy of viewpoints.... There was a lack of trust. Each group thought the other was trying to control the collective. Other problems were unequal division of work, various levels of commitments and expectations for commitments. Many of the women who could not be as committed also left the collective about the time the separatists left. The problems of unequal work and commitment solved themselves, since the five women who remained put forth fantastic efforts just to keep the store open. [Bookstore, 13]

Those of us who have lived through such periods know the wrenching pain of such hostility and distrust.

We need to be clear about what collectives can and cannot do well. When we work in collectives, we are “agreeing to be limited by the insecurities of others ...

while being strengthened by their energy and ideas.”<sup>8</sup> Each of us trades some of her autonomy, and compromises some of her personal goals and methods, so that she can benefit from the pooled skills and resources of a number of others. Collectives are built on diversity, and the tension of differences often sparks new ideas. Success in creating new realities lies not only in surviving conflict, some of which is inevitable, but in harnessing it for productive ends. Many a disagreement can be the occasion to invent a solution that we would never have imagined without the clarification of opposing views:

One of the most interesting things that occurred with our process was that we began to learn to think out loud with one another. For example, I would start a discussion by stating opinion A; Judy would then raise some objection to this position, presenting opinion Z; then Susan would suggest some modification and point out flaws in both opinions. This would go on, and on. When we ended, perhaps Judy and I changed our opinions completely. It was a strange process, but we loved it, because it felt beautiful even when we were disagreeing. I think this happened because we had worked very closely together, but this method of airing ideas and opinions and then collectively discussing them is integral to our functioning. [Literary magazine, 3]

One way to channel conflict is to examine our process from time to time. Some collectives we have heard about do build into their schedule regular evaluations—of each member, of the project’s progress toward its goals, and of the group process itself (both formal and hidden). In our survey, however, no group mentions that it does this, and only two groups allude to it as a possibility.

We should realize that calling our groups “collective,” does not magically bring about a new way of working and relating. Without much formal theory to tell us just how to achieve this equality, this consensus, this new world, the old world often just burrows underground, a family or a schoolyard in feminist/collective clothing. It is hard, though, in the face of other urgent work, to reserve time and attention to keep our collective machinery well oiled and running smoothly.

These are the stresses inherent to collective work: the individual vs. the group (shall we change our meeting time to allow Joan to attend, even though it’s inconvenient for everyone else?), and the group vs. the project (shall we evaluate our process tonight or get out a mailing?). These are ever-present poles; they are not problems unless we fail to keep them in balance. If we ignore individual or group needs, we risk our entire process grinding to a halt when all margin is exhausted. If we ignore our work needs, we may share the fate of one of our responding groups:

The philosophy was always nonhierarchical. Still, more meeting was done than any actual activity.

The balance we choose will depend on our specific goals,

and it will change as circumstances in the lives of members, group and project change, from week to week, and year to year.

Looking to the future, we want to keep our groups vital by choosing new goals as the old ones are accomplished, incorporating new energy as the old sources are used up—ideas, structures, motivations—and people, too, if we are not careful. We need to be as willing to risk failure when our projects are comparatively well established and successful as we were in the beginning. Knowing that it is hard to change something that worked in the past, hard even to see that it no longer excites us, it takes courage to move on, or to dare to rebuild it in a new form.

## SUMMARY

### Highs and Lows

Each questionnaire response is a snapshot of a group at a particular moment in their history. Some responses were more gloomy and problem-ridden than others; some were euphoric and optimistic. We think this is less a measure of the temper of the group (or of the women/woman who filled out the questionnaire) than simply a reflection of the swings in outlook that each group experiences from time to time. And, in some cases, the most recent victories or difficulties may have received more emphasis than long-past ones, which is only human.

*What kinds of gratifications (the highs) did the project generate in the beginning phase? What were the worst problems (the lows) and how were they dealt with?*

Virtually every group names as a high an almost inarticulate sense of accomplishment, of success, of fulfillment in being able to see their immediate goals realized. One cannot escape, in reading these answers, the feeling that they were astonished that their efforts had visible results. Though they had worked and planned to make things happen, some part of themselves secretly may not have dared to believe that it would really come true.

We created a beautiful space—we got tremendous feedback and encouragement. We were doing it—our idea and plan, our fantasy was coming into reality. We were creating. There were no lows in the beginning. It all went so fast. Everything was new. [Bookstore/gallery]

We all felt that considering our economic limitations that the magazine’s existence was a miracle. We were happy that we had managed to do it at all. [Literary magazine]

“Wow, we can really do it!” Finding a location. Realizing that we had (or so we thought) enough money to open. Community support in funding. Opening the store—of course—having a special woman’s space. [Bookstore]

Many of the comments focus on tangible proofs of reality—sales, the physical space—as measures of “suc-

8. *No Bosses Here: A Manual on Working Collectively* by Vocations for Social Change, 107 South St., Boston, MA 02111 (1976), p. 45.

cess," like pinching themselves to see if it is a dream.

The big high was a concrete space of our own which we could shape any way. The second biggie was the opening of coffeehouses and discovering the vast supply of woman talent here in our own small city. Then came our bookstore—seeing our books on shelves we built. [Bookstore]

We never really believed women would actually pay us for our products—but they did! That was very gratifying. The personal correspondence from women and even men was exciting because it came from all over the U.S. and gave us a sense of the spread of feminism to every small town. [Mail-order crafts]

The second most frequently mentioned "high" (half the answers) is support and approval from the community. Perhaps this is important as another proof of the reality of their efforts: it is public, other people see it and take it seriously. But we think that many of these projects were conceived from the beginning in the context of a conscious community of women. The sense that the project makes a contribution to the community and has a permanent place there is important in and of itself. And, it is not beyond belief that our vanity is touched at times—we like to be singled out for attention and admiration.

Just doing it! What a trip—to hear all these women thanking you for just existing! [Travel agency]

Enthusiasm of women who came to the store; a sense that we did make our idea of reality; continuing growth. [Bookstore]

To see and feel community support (all of our bookshelves, adding machines, couches, etc. were donated to us). [Bookstore]

Serving the woman's community, becoming known all over our state. We're the only feminist bookstore in the state.

Most of our gratifications come in more subtle form: feedback of appreciation from members of the community, articles about us in the media, just knowing we're gradually being known and respected. The feeling of community that we are helping to feed. [Bookstore]

One-quarter of the groups explicitly mention feeling good about fulfilling political goals and providing needed services; perhaps this satisfaction is also implicit in the responses above about community support.

Satisfaction at helping lesbians in job discrimination, making the major city newspaper respond. Euphoria at attracting so many lesbians through softball. [Lesbian organization]

Much political unity and growth. Able to expand our community by using the bookstore for outreach to women who normally aren't included in the "women's community." [Bookstore]

The planning, thinking through of problems and situations and then seeing the whole take on a shape. The knowledge that we were creating something that served a purpose in women's lives and that women would enjoy coming to it. [Bookstore]

The satisfactions of working together, functioning successfully as a group, are perhaps implicit in every "we":

Being able to do something concrete through a collective process. Great sense of accomplishment in seeing this project through. [Bookstore]

It was exhilarating to see our collective reach decisions by consensus; to discuss issues and problems from a caring, humane, political aspect. To not have a boss. [Bookstore]

Other highs mentioned are growing feelings of skill, professionalism, a learning environment.

The first was our own excitement when our first screen worked! After that it would be the responses from people when they saw our work. It was exciting when stores began to buy our things. [Mail-order crafts]

Firstly, the growing professionalism we found in ourselves, then telling or finding a story that wasn't seen before, seeing a real *publication* develop, emerge, go around the globe. [Art newsletter]

Explicitly stated by a few groups, and perhaps true for many others, are benefits and excitements intrinsic to the work itself:

To discover new, neat books. [Bookstore]

We were particularly excited to read what other women were writing and getting our views represented through publication. [Anthology]

We sponsored an Olivia concert—our city's first: very high! [Bookstore]

The circumstances mentioned as causing "lows" are fewer in number. Two-fifths of the groups cite problems in working collectively and/or women leaving the group as lows. Many of these discussions have been quoted above, so a few will illustrate:

Towards the middle, people didn't come to meetings; it was probably a fear of success, and fear of lots of us that our poems weren't good enough. Two people were lovers and when they broke up, there was a lot of tension in the group, but they've since become friends. [Anthology]

Donna and Joyce ending their partnership. Disagreements between Joyce and me, both personal and in reference to the business. [Bookstore]

The second aggravation was lack of money or worry about losing money. More than a quarter of the groups mention this, often with capital letters for emphasis.

Lows: NO MONEY—still our biggest concern. [Bookstore].

Lows: Money—the lack of it, which in turn prevented us from buying more books, which makes for a dull bookstore! We tried to make up for the lack of retail business in winter by doing more mail [order]. Thank goodness for spring!! [Used books]

Fear of financial ruin, for me (Sara didn't ever feel our position was that bad)—we reduced our expenses and worked up our sales as much as we could, and I've learned to quit worrying about it. [Bookstore]

The third source of discontent, cited by only four groups, is problems with the work itself—drudgery, mistakes and failure:

Putting off work and then trying to meet deadlines and nothing working for us. We have spent many working all-nighters paying for our mistakes. [Mail-order crafts]

Losing money on stupid mistakes. [Travel agency]

Drudgery of the work was annoying. Failure of certain designs or later notecards. [Mail-order crafts]

Two groups expressed impatience with how slowly work proceeded:

The difficulty (and slowness) in obtaining material and the realization that it would take much longer than we anticipated to finish the project. [Anthology]

A postponement by six months of the date of the conference generated a loss of confidence, followed by a painful realization of how long it takes to make anything happen. We probably were over-confident. [Architectural network]

Four groups mentioned difficulties with negative feedback:

Individual women downgrading me/us [as] capitalist, not collective, not cooperative, instead of saying how great, you give us this cultural center. [Bookstore/gallery]

Taking abuse from your "sisters" is still hard for me to take. [Travel agency]

A few groups reported difficulties in dealing with the wider society:

Persuading the bank that I was a decent risk—took lots of talking and misrepresenting proposed income (at the suggestion of the bank!!). [Bookstore]

The worst problem we encountered in the beginning stage was finding a suitable location. Many landlords did not want a women's bookstore. Solution—one (instead of both of us) went to real estate agent wearing a dress instead of pants. Compromise, compromise—this was four years ago.

However, no groups mentioned incidents of violence or repression from the "outside" world, or conflict with other women's projects or hostility from factions within the women's community. Let us hope that the silence here on these matters is evidence that word-of-mouth overstates the true frequency of these incidents; perhaps even in the feminist community bad news travels faster than good, and dramatic instances of disaster are more often occasions for discussion than continuing accord.

## Advice

*If you were beginning again, what would you do differently? The same? What advice would you give to women planning a similar enterprise?*

The answers to this question fell into two categories, and nearly every answer contained both. On the one hand, many groups ratified what they had done and advise others to follow their example for the most part; most of it worked, and a successful project resulted. On the other hand, most answers also itemized two or three areas where the group had had the most problems and would therefore make changes retrospectively, and/or advise other women to avoid their mistakes.

One-quarter of the responses touch on aspects of group work and membership:

Get a lawyer, get tax exempt and incorporated and members who agree on goals and are willing to work. [Cooperative gallery]

The technical process would be similar—suggest more skills in bookkeeping. We wish now there would have been more consciousness of involving women of color, older women, women with children. [Bookstore]

Start with more capital. Try to share responsibilities more evenly and among more women to minimize burnout. [Bookstore]

Thirty percent mention money—most recommend/wish having more than they had had:

Most of how we are as a group working together, I'd leave the same. I would borrow \$ from the beginning and start with a larger stock and do more publicity. [Bookstore]

I would never start a magazine with so little resources, contacts, and money. My advice is that it's important to have enough money to start a publication. No amount of hard work, talent, and perseverance can compensate for inadequate funds. The burnout factor is too acute and painful.

But a few recommend that others limit the scope of their initial efforts instead of seeking more resources:

If we were starting out as a collective, it would be important for the group to be able to work together politically. Probably should do more research on what is needed to run a bookstore and set priorities and goals for the other non-business aspects of a community-oriented bookstore before opening. If you have to start small, consider beginning with a mail order business—and about \$2000 capital—and investigate the market. Otherwise, get at least two other women with your same commitment and about \$4000, and skip the collective. [Bookstore]

A surprise in this section is the number of groups (37%) that feel time and effort should be spent in planning, research and training. It is not always clear whether this is what they did or what they wish they had done.

1) Start earlier. 2) Talk to people with similar experiences. 3) Talk openly about what you need from group and about fears and apprehensions about project. Get to know each other. [Slide show]

Do thorough research, get experience; talk to other women or work in a similar business, have plenty of money! [Bookstore]

Gear service toward meeting the needs of the community you're trying to serve, rather than superimposing something that may not "fit." Explore what these needs are and how your group could contribute to meeting them, and formulate the focus and goals of your group from that. [Counseling center]

Start with a basic business course and do some reading also. We should have talked with other mail-order businesswomen. Everything else we would have done the same. [Mail-order crafts]

There is some conflict on this topic between the groups who advocate seeking advice and those who urge others to ignore it:

Ignore "expert" conventional and/or male advice. [Bookstore]

Do from your life experience; you cannot listen to others' advice for what's the best way. You can take in and digest what they say, but we all must learn to trust our own sense of values.

feminism, in everyday functioning. I.e., someone said we should be a cooperative so not one person owns and could get \$ from other cooperatives. It was not comfortable, therefore felt oppressive—it was someone else's thoughts and ideas, though not wrong for them, they were not born out of poor, non-educated background where I came from. [Bookstore/gallery]

The problem with advice—and the advice these groups give is no exception—is that it is difficult to know how much of it is wishful thinking. Some of these groups are in effect saying, “Do as we say, not as we do.” Should one follow their advice or their example? Of course we all want unlimited amounts of time, money, energy and good will. In practice, however, we must make compromises or do nothing at all. The problem, therefore, is to sort out the valuable learned wisdom from the well-meant but futile attempt to avoid all difficulties. We do want, after all, to avoid continually reinventing the wheel. One interviewee puts the matter strongly:

A. Everyone kept giving us the same advice and we got so tired of hearing it.

Q. What was it?

A. It's quite true.

Q. What did they say?

A. To start a business that you should talk to other people who have done it and other people who are doing it. Have enough money. Make sure you want to do it. Know what it's going to involve. [laugh] Just endless. Common sense.

Q. And what of that do you think is actually true?

A. I think it's all actually true! But there's another element that you never know what it's going to be like unless you've done it. And it's the same thing with having a baby. You think: Oh, what can I tell this person? I've got to tell her something crucial and you say the same old things, that everybody always says. But the thing that you can't tell anyone else is exactly how awful it's going to be. I mean, you just have to go through it. And other people who have gone through it would understand but if you haven't done it yet, there's no way to prepare a person for it. Because you just don't believe or listen to the parts that you don't want to hear, because otherwise you wouldn't do it. So to do it you have to ignore all that.

Last are personal virtues and hard work (24%):

Be patient and have faith and always be professional! As well as honest. [Travel agency]

Perseverance and intense interest and (a little?) money is all you need. [Used books]

Be desperate and willful, establish at least twice the capital projected, and always expect the worst. [Bookstore/restaurant]

Members should plan to work twice as hard as they think they will. [Bookstore]

Be as committed as possible, be willing to work impossibly hard, be flexible, don't expect instant results. [Bookstore]

Be prepared for much harder work and more needed than anyone tells you. It takes more time than you think. Be prepared to be disappointed in friends. Be prepared to give up five or more years of your life to this. [Bookstore/restaurant]

Consciously place yourselves as women and workers as the most important aspect of the project and care about yourselves. The business comes second. Base decisions on these values. [Bookstore]

And one group mentions an unpredictable variable:

Differently? Nothing, other than allowing time for problems to occur. Same? Everything. GOOD LUCK!!

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

What we have learned from our analysis of the questionnaires is that women's work projects can grow out of a wide variety of individual motivations, prior relationships, economic circumstances and group structures. The methods that one group finds comfortable and productive might create havoc in a different project. Nonetheless, most women's workgroups struggle with similar problems.

If we were forced to give quick-and-easy advice to women who are thinking about starting a project, we might emphasize the following:

1. Talk over in advance what each member wants, needs, expects and fears. Have such discussions regularly.

2. Figure out how to use the time, capital and skills that are already available. Then deal with supplementing them.

3. Anticipate burnout. Take seriously members' health, external and personal commitments and the demands imposed by the project itself.

4. Plan for turnover of members.

5. Be clear about the group's goals and what methods can and cannot achieve them. Which methods are members willing to use? No group can do or be everything; priorities are essential.

6. Evaluate the project frequently. What changes are anticipated in the future?

All of these are topics for group discussion and individual reflection. In addition, many workgroups have found it useful periodically to set down their current goals and ideas in the form of minutes, policy statements, newsletters, agreements, etc. Such written documents assist clarity and help chart the group's development.

It is good to have an end to journey towards, but it is the journey that matters in the end.

—Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

## Errata from *Heresies* #6

We would like to thank Cynthia Carr, Gertrude Frazer, Jeriann Hilderly, and L.N.S. in addition to those people we thanked in *Heresies* #6 for their help.

pp. 3-11 All photos included in "The Vicki Tapes" were taken by Martine Barrat. p. 30 Photos by Fran P. Hosken. p. 38 "The Women's Crime Tribunal: 1976" was edited by Lisa Garrison, with Diane Feeley editing the political testimonies. p. 40 Photo of the Native American woman and child by JEB; originally published in *Off Our Backs*. p. 42 The name of the Committee for Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran was omitted. Its address is 853 Broadway, 4th floor, New York, N.Y. 10003. p. 48 Andrea Dworkin divided her article, "Biological Superiority," into three parts. It was printed as one continuous article. The George Gilder quote on p. 48 marks the beginning of the second section. The Virginia Woolf quote on p. 49 marks the beginning of the third, and final, section. p. 50 "Xmas Dinner" by Jacqueline Lapidus, line 27, should read, "together and only one apricot." p. 59 and p. 63 Photos by Roz Petchesky. p. 92 Photo by Corky Lee is Courtesy of L.N.S. p. 97 In "New York City Tonight" by Sapphire (section 3), a line was inadvertently dropped. The final line on page should be followed by, "repeat I am sick". p. 99 Photo at bottom of page, the "Cadillac Ranch," designed and built by Ant Farm, is by Wyatt McSpadden. p. 125 Photo by Bettye Lane.

## Contributors to *Heresies*

The following people made contributions to *Heresies* ranging from \$1 to \$200. We thank them very much.

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## Women's Slide Registry

The Women's Slide Registry, located in the *Heresies* office, includes women artists from all over the U.S. Send 3 slides, name, address and other information, plus \$5 to Women's Slide Registry, Box 539, Canal Street Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10013.

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