

sinister wisdom 49



the lesbian body



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Cover art: *Mandorla of the Spinning Goddess* (etching, sepia ink, 18"x24", first edition 1982), by Judith Anderson (photo by J. Colando). The mandorla is the oval/almond shape formed by two intersecting circles, used in various religions as a symbol of co-mingling realms (spirit/matter, life/death), but clearly representing the yoni — the female genitalia.

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

This issue of *Sinister Wisdom*
is dedicated to the
memory and inspiration of
Audre Lorde
(1934-1992)

*I have heard you calling
across this land in my blood*

(from "Meet," published in
Sinister Wisdom #3, 1977)

Sinister Wisdom is a multi-cultural, multi-class, womon-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. *Sinister Wisdom* recognizes the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our communities and our world.

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Much of the artwork in this issue came from the Lesbian Visual Artists Slide Registry. Our thanks to Happy (L.A.) Hyder for a wonderful afternoon poring through hundreds of slides of lesbians' work. Lesbian Visual Artists is a promotional and networking organization concentrating on visibility. Members come from around the world. For information, write or call LVA: 3543 18th St. #5, S.F., CA 94110 or 415-821-2975.

Notes for a Magazine _____

Elana Dykewomon

Our bodies are the flags

In this issue there are three "notes from the editor" — mine, Jamie's and Sauda's. At the end of two of our editorial meetings Jamie, Sauda, SJ, Laura, Cath, Julia, Karyn and I talked about the ways we experience and perceive our own bodies (literally and metaphorically), and the anti-lesbian/lesbian-feminist backlash. We found the idea of a lesbian body to be a kind of labyrinth — a series of chambers in which it is difficult to find our way, though we can hear her heartbeat through the walls. That several of us wanted to follow that heartbeat in separate directions seemed useful — our different perspectives give some clues to the complexity of "the lesbian body." While all our notes are editorial comment, they are meant not as group consensus but as our own voices.

For me, this started as such a clear idea: to reclaim lesbian identity. We, lesbians, will get to say who we are and who we are not. Politically, sexually, emotionally, within our communities. We will have space to discuss owning ourselves.

I've been wanting to do this issue for a year or two, in part to explore how we understand "lesbianism" in the present, in part to respond to attacks on lesbian identity. I believe the ideas that lesbians can sleep with men, that faggots can call themselves dykes and dykes can avail themselves of male privileges by calling themselves faggots, that men can be women and women who pass do it because they're simply "playing with gender" — are meant to divide and destroy us, to drive us literally out of our own minds.

But I feel already driven out. Or more like I'm driving a car with no brakes down a side road in the mountains and it keeps picking up speed. I don't know how to contain myself and make a nice, neat, clear argument. I have to finish ten books first, reread everything that came out in the last twenty years, find out exactly what deconstruction and essentialism mean. How am I going to do that, edit the magazine, go to work and have a life?

But I've got to try. I understand lesbians' claim to own ourselves (well, it's a stance more than a reality) as heroic¹. Our minds, our bodies, our labor, our sex, our heritages are constant staging grounds for war. Vastly out-powered on every front, we manage to survive and, for moments, thrive.

Owning ourselves is, after all, no small feat. That lesbians are different from "women"² means something. Consider, for a minute, women's bodies: women have been owned for centuries. This isn't just some old-fashioned out-of-date political conceit — it's why the abortion rights fight is so ugly, why fundamentalism is surging across the globe. The appropriation of female labor — including reproductive labor — is the cornerstone of social organization in the world we know. The resurgence of "family values" is the brother-movement to the ethnic "cleansing" movements we're seeing worldwide. These movements are a strategic reestablishment of hierarchical male power that positions individual men to rule and fight for rulership and resources. But in order for men to do this, women have to be kept in line.

Men create ideas about what woman are in order to control them. These ideas vary from culture to culture, but their use is the same: to isolate females, to control their reproductive functions, to use their physical labor to support and enrich males, to keep females out of public spheres as much as possible — certainly out of positions of power. Those who think "real progress" is being made might consider that in the United States, a 6% woman membership in the Senate is hailed as "revolutionary."

The "ideas" about women — sometimes called the "construction of women as a class"³ — work so well because they're so individualized, and because women are so isolated from each other. A good woman is a jewel; a bad woman courts disaster. A woman has the power to be "good" or "bad" — her rewards in life will reflect her choice. Which is, interestingly enough, a choice

¹ While I have had the good fortune to always perceive womyn as "heroic," I refer here to Marilyn Murphy's essay "The Lesbian as Hero" (in *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?*, Los Angeles: Clothespin Fever Press, 1991), a wonderful encouragement to take our ordinary bravery seriously.

² Definition appears to be 9/10ths of the problem. For the purpose of this article, I use the word "female" to mean someone born with a vagina and a womb, and "woman" to mean all cultural/economic images created as trappings for that female. The same for males/men, although it's males who create the images of men to, literally, suit themselves.

³ Monique Wittig was the first lesbian I know to use this phrase.

about how she uses her body. But both choices, "good" and "bad," belong to men, because men make these images and police their enforcement (often conscripting women to police for them).

Other lesbians of course have written papers and books on the way these things work — I think of Marilyn Frye and Monique Wittig in particular. But the point is: a lesbian is in opposition to a "woman" by her very being⁴. Of course we have to work on men's terms to make a living, but even so we mostly rent our bodies out. A lesbian body is, theoretically, a body that no man owns.

Which may be why so many folks are out to "bend" the definition of a lesbian out of recognition. If the word lesbian loses its power and meaning, but the distribution of wealth, resources and opportunity remains overall the same, who benefits? In the midst of the *San Francisco Bay Times'* current "gender debates," Caryatis Cardea wrote: "If a woman who sleeps with both females and males is a lesbian; and, if a man who submits to surgical procedure to bring his body in line with his acceptance of sex role stereotypes, is a lesbian; and if a straight woman whose spiritual bond is with other females is a lesbian, then what is a female-born-female who loves only other females? Soon there will be no logical answer to that question."⁵

Every gay paper is filled with these "gender debates." It's the '90s — you are me and she is he and we are all together (okay, so the Beatles did it 20 years ago, that only means they were ahead of their time, not that we're just following an old groove, right?). Transsexual men⁶ and their friends call lesbians hate-mongers, fascists and "essentialists" for not opening every lesbian and women's organization to them. It's in vogue for everyone to be a bi-sexual (the "natural" human state, which, oddly enough, makes lesbianism "unnatural" all over again).

Of course there's a pivotal point in these arguments: what are women and men? If a woman is the sum of her clothing and man-

⁴ I doubt the majority of lesbians would agree with me, still I think this is so. It's what makes being a lesbian scary. It's why heterosexuals wish us to be invisible and why so many of us go to such great lengths to convince them we're "just like them."

⁵ *San Francisco Bay Times*, Vol. 14, No. 5, Dec. 3 1992.

⁶ Because I refuse to consider them females or lesbians doesn't imply I have no compassion for them (although heaven forbid a lesbian shouldn't have compassion for everyone) — I just would appreciate their claiming their own identity rather than appropriating lesbians'.

nerisms, then a man can become one, and the line so often read in lesbian personals, "must look like a woman" would make sense. This is a very confusing and tricky set of logical propositions.

Here's the problem: if I claim that there is no such thing as "a woman" or as "the feminine" then I am claiming that a male or female's attempt to be a "feminine woman" is an exercise in illusion (at best).

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that you believe there is a "feminine principle" — some cosmic archetypal yin-thing that transcends culture, because it's found everywhere⁷. But if the "feminine" and "masculine" exist, that is, have an actual beingness in the universe independent of human beings — well that would suppose some grander design than I'm willing to admit. I have to go back and base my knowledge on what I can perceive⁸.

But in saying there is no "feminine" beyond culture, attitude, psychologically manufactured "psyche," I don't deny what's in front of me: there are females and males. So what is female must be the actual body. Then I end up saying: a female is a female born in a female body, who has had to deal in some way with her reproductive cycle and the appropriation of her body by males. If I understand this right, this makes me an essentialist (actually I think it makes me a "materialist" in the old political language) because I appear to be claiming biology is destiny.

I sigh, then, and say, ok, biology is destiny because men have done this to us. Haven't you gone to K-mart lately? Who do you think makes girls' and boys' toys all pink and blue? Being female is like being a Jew, or short — it's a fact — but what it "means" is determined by culture, history, institutionalized power. No matter how clearly (or not) I perceive those things, I have few choices but to play my part or denounce it. Biology *becomes* destiny seems more like it.

Many of us, who perceive men as destroying the world, are reluctant to give up the old dichotomies: men war, women nurture. We can argue forever (and seem to be) about whether it's being born with a womb or being socially constructed that makes

⁷ I can't help but stay in the argument: just because you *see* it everywhere doesn't mean it *exists* everywhere, does it? Pink tinted glass does not a pink world make. And, if you claim that constants are found in the psyche instead of the body, doesn't that also make you an "essentialist"?

⁸ I realize this is shorthand for a thousand years of philosophy into what constitutes being, but I've only got six pages here.

us "women" without being able to come to a final answer. But the more we understand attributes (self-reliance, adventurousness, curiosity, domesticity) as options instead of innate qualities, the more choices we have as individuals. Lesbians tend to choose from the full range of available attributes (and occasionally invent some of our own). That doesn't mean we don't know where we live — all of us must choose, at some point, whether or not to cast our lots with the "women."⁹ Individual choice alone does nothing to change power structures. Men can (and do) call themselves sensitive and understanding in order to maintain their power in new social climates¹⁰ (Chevron cares).

Queer Nation has picked up the idea that women and men are "created" and given it a popular spin: get behind the fluidity of identity, don't be a rigid role-monger, don't cling to your label like a reactionary to a life-boat, be flexible. It's an attractive idea. So attractive that you'd think somebody would have thought of it before the late '80s....

As many womyn, particularly womyn of color¹¹, have noted, the more you have power, the more you don't use "labels" to define yourself (you don't see a lot of Rockefellers in the midst of these debates). It's the use of the "label" that states: I have to assert my own identity. All of us who have to consciously name ourselves have, at some point, been uncomfortable with this (if for no other reason than that someone we don't like can claim the same label).

But you can't change power structures by simply proclaiming these "roles" (gender, class, race) culturally constructed, and therefore bourgeois baggage. Sure, roles are absurd — and they exist for reasons. "Deconstructing" them without challenging the power of those who make them necessary doesn't accomplish anything — it's only playing dress-up with fancy words.

This idea — everything is fluid, we can change the world by blowing straight people's minds, we can overcome our origins — is nothing new. European and American cultures have a long "bohemian" tradition, and gender-bending has, in fact, been around since at least Shakespearean times. It's a parlor game the

⁹ I know I said lesbian are in opposition to "women" by our very being. By "casting our lots" I mean we have to choose, politically, whose side we're on.

¹⁰ While we like to think that these "new climates" are the result of liberation movements, I tend to think they are more the result of capitalism's having to soft-peddle its message in order to expand the market base.

¹¹ I am thinking particularly of the work of Gloria Anzaldúa.

privileged play, and they let some of us "others" in so the game doesn't seem rigged. It doesn't go to the root. And along the way it accomplishes the power structure's dirty work: it makes it look like we can "transcend" who we are and all become "human." Race and class become things we can shed — and should try to. Womyn-only space is invaded and neutralized.

Which is why it seems to me so important for us to do the work of claiming ourselves. Our own bodies, our pride in them. As often as we have to.

our bodies are the flags that advance our causes
 age race culture size ability
 lesbian womyn lesbian
 creased into the cloth
 a permanent seam
 flapping in the evening chemical breeze

SJ remembers: I was a child and saw
 survivors' numbers tattooed on their arms
 my aunt said: cover it up shame cover it up safety cover it up
 do you want them to see?

Sauda says
 the darker we are
 the more we represent the unknown
 the thing which others are afraid of
 and are embarrassed to see us carry
 along with our daily lives
 and Karyn says, they don't just mean:
 oh you're still here, Indian
 they mean: aren't you dead yet?

and Cath says
 if I let myself feel or hear the names they call me on the street
 I'd never leave my house
 the brand has always been on the flesh
 so obvious
 we have to turn our eyes away
 while we distract ourselves
 get through the week
 our bodies bear witness

Notes for a Magazine _____

Jamie Lee Evans

Internalizing the Lesbian of Color Body*

I wonder if one reason that more lesbians of color didn't submit their work on the lesbian body issue is that when anything *owned* by lesbians is up for discussion, our first thoughts go to the white lesbian, not to ourselves. Think about it, just for a moment, lesbian *community*, lesbian *culture*, lesbian *bars* ... *who do you see?*

On TV's 20/20 Barbara Walters recently showed us the infotainment version of the 90's *lesbian*: baby birthing, rolls royce driving, coupled white lesbians who are just sooo sweet. Although most of my friends and I guffawed at the depiction of what is supposed to be *our* community, it probably wasn't too far from what we really think of when we think of the north american lesbian.

How do we come to this conclusion? Remember back to the last womyn's music festival you went to? Now think of the last lesbian poetry reading, the last lesbian play, the last lesbian softball game, the last lesbian panel at the conference you last attended. What comes to mind? Although there are lesbian of color communities flourishing around the world, I think most lesbians, of color or not, have internalized racism so deeply that when we think of anything representing us as lesbians (community, culture, body, etc.) we still see white and color becomes invisible, even to ourselves. We blend into the [white] scene, just like that ole melting pot metaphor, and with deadly consequence: we cease to exist.

The consequences of this invisibility are multiple and far ranging. Not existing in the lesbian community means when a lesbian of color considers writing about the lesbian world, she thinks of herself as an afterthought. Another consequence is that in order to feel at home in lesbian institutions, she may forget who she is and where she came from.

One night my roommate and I were driving into East Oakland in search of a renowned taco made by a Mexican-owned

* For Beverly, with dedication to our friendship and self-discoveries.

restaurant that closes at 8 because of the crime in their neighborhood. As we were driving further and further, close to 90 blocks out of the way (the restaurant was on 14th Street and we found ourselves on 98th!), we began to feel less and less safe. The area was not familiar to us, liquor and gun stores became more frequent and masses of young males began appearing at each stoplight. Finally we decided to turn around and head towards home, and began joking to take the edge off the tension and fear that had built up in the car during our journey. Remembering that my roommate's car had a reputation for breaking down, I joked, "this would not be a good neighborhood for a butch lesbian to be found in." She nodded her head and nervously laughed. We traveled in silence for a few minutes. Then we looked at each other and blurted out, "whoa, that's deep."

Two lesbians of color, Black and Asian, had seemingly forgotten lesbians are everywhere, and come from everywhere. We did gut checks on who we were thinking of when we thought of lesbians in East Oakland. We were thinking of dykes like the ones on 20/20: white, middle-class and definitely out of place in the inner city. We did find the Mexican restaurant, barely before 8, but they let us in and we ate while they closed up. While eating my taco, I watched the owners turn away customers who arrived after the hour.

Closing early, too dangerous to stay open past dusk.

I kept thinking about what I had said, what I had thought. I felt ashamed. Who wanted me to think that the likes of me couldn't be found in a neighborhood much like the Los Angeles city I had grown up in? It was that brutalizing and very alive force that declares only one race, class, only one type of person is okay, the rest of us are superfluous. *Lesbians are everywhere* I repeated again and again on our way back home. I felt close to tears. *What does it mean that I call the "lesbian community" home, but do not see myself or other sisters like me living in that home?* How many east Oakland dykes did I make invisible by my earlier statement? Was I thinking about the theft and violence that comes out of communities of poverty and imagining that lesbians are never thieves or never involved in violence? Was I remembering my own tough youth and how I knew that to be lesbian (or more accurately be *caught* lesbian) meant certain cruelty and attacks, even possibly murder? Maybe ... maybe, but probably it was

more like I was thinking that "lesbians" wouldn't be in east Oakland, because *they* are safer, smarter, richer and whiter than residents of this area. Honestly and painfully I acknowledged to myself that I internally read lesbian as white lesbian.

Consider how many times you have heard a speaker talk generally about "lesbians," and then add lesbians of color, disabled lesbians, poor lesbians, etc. to the end of the sentence. For example, a teacher saying, "Lesbian communities and lesbian of color communities ..." implying that the lesbian of color is not an *authentic* lesbian, but a special sub-set of the larger [white] lesbian set. Webster defines sub as "lower than or to a lesser degree than."

If the lesbian community were talked about in a way that included all lesbians and didn't disregard difference we would mention both white and of color. Similarly we would not say things like, "the lesbian body and the disabled lesbian body," or "lesbian culture and black lesbian culture." All lesbians make up all bodies, cultures, and communities. This is a simple formula actually, lesbians + lesbians = lesbians; or black lesbian culture + Asian lesbian culture = lesbian culture; or Jewish lesbian literature + Latina lesbian literature = lesbian literature. This doesn't mean that we don't acknowledge the differences that exist between us. It does not mean that we are all the same, one big homogeneous group of women loving women. What it does mean is that we are more careful in our language and declarations of who we actually value as the *real* and who we are otherizing as those to a "lesser degree."

We take positions and privileges even when we're not aware we're doing it. Besides internalized oppression harming lesbians of color, some white lesbians, though committed to social justice, do not realize how deeply racism has burrowed into their consciousness. While considering the lesbian body and my body as a fat semi-able-bodied mixed-blood Asian lesbian of color and again reminding myself that lesbians are as diverse as all women are, I thought back to the first women's music festival I attended this summer in Georgia. I had heard this was one of the friendlier and fun festivals and for the most part I agreed. I especially liked the free way women were moving about the land with no shirts on. Appreciative of seeing unclothed lesbian bodies, on the second day it occurred to me I was mostly seeing white lesbian breasts and bodies. Do other lesbians of color know what I mean

when I say I was severely disappointed to realize that I was once again in the minority? It took me nearly two days to locate another Asian woman in the 1500 festive goers, and I counted less than thirty visible women of color in the festival as a whole. Again I asked myself why I keep putting myself in the position of being one of a tiny minority of women of color? Why pay to be a part of an institution that isn't reaching more women like me? I didn't want to discount my enjoyment of seeing any sisters naked and free but I couldn't fight that gut feeling that once again something was very wrong with this picture. I pay a price struggling with white women and feminists who I love when most of their gatherings do not include more women like me.

Communing with, working with and loving lesbians of color has served as an antidote to the suffering I experience as a lesbian invisible in the white lesbian community. I have torn off the chains of racism more than once in gatherings of lesbians of color. I actively devote time to my sisters of color — I seek them out — at poetry readings, conferences and concerts. I remember the events that are diverse, I go back to them. I ensure my life is filled with lesbians of color and I fight the power of internalized oppression and dance a victory dance of acknowledgement and self-love. I listen to other lesbians of color who see themselves in community and I study their self-confidence and sheer lesbian strength. I look at their lesbian bodies. I am a lesbian body and my lesbian body is distinct and special, not lesser than or in opposition to a norm. My voluptuous folds, angled brown eyes, thick black/stick straight hair, short legs, small feet, hairless arms and round face make up one lesbian body. I am not a sub-set. You are not a sub-set. We together are parts of the whole.



Beauty by Cynthia Consentino
from *Dyke Clip Art*, Vol. 3

Notes for a Magazine _____

Sauda Burch

Ode To A Black Lesbian Body

The skin of milk chocolate glistens in sun; the hair of cotton devours the moisture of the dry soils. Then darkness. The Black body beside another Black Body, remembering the ancestors. Two bodies move deliberately back through time. Hands and feet for tools, they dig deeply into the earth, feeling their way to the bottom of ancient night, the playground of old souls. Only at the bottom is nothing asked of darkness. The bottom is darkness. Like earthworms they burrow. The rich, black soil protects them through their journey.

The Black lesbian body is taboo. Is the despised Body. Is the feared Body. The mysterious Body is the source. Torrents of lies fall upon it. Whispers surround it. There is pushing against its boundaries. Unforgiving. The Body of a lesbian. A Black lesbian. The Black lesbian Body survives.

The dark Body survives. The feared Body does not forget. The forgotten Body defies. The forgotten Body remembers.

Remembers dark ancestral bodies. The Body houses memories. The Body insulates. The Body is safe. The Body is a private hut, scattered with sacred objects. The Body is the womb of meditation. The body rebirths itself.

The Body has scars from past wars. The Body does not forget the defeats. The Body does not forget the triumphs. The body takes the scars from both and transforms them into armor. The body protects.

The Body is the core. The Body is the bottom of an active volcano. The Body is the center of the sun. The Fire. The Fire transforms. The phoenix soars from the ashes. The wings carry heat. Spews heat upon the world, warming and warning.

Deborah

Reflections on my lesbian body

September 26, 1992

New moon

This Lesbian body is brown and hearty.

Dark rings around my ankles, knees and elbows. I remember my mother scrubbing at it with the fingernail brush. Screwing halved, half-spent limes onto our elbows until suction held them in place in an effort to bleach the skin (after all, it worked on blond hair).

This Lesbian Body is round and full.

Large soft breasts that excite and amaze lovers. Full belly and hips that require me to rush embarrassed into "plus size" stores. Full belly and hips that provoke cruelty and judgment from the world. Full belly and hips that keep me hiding. Full belly, fat belly. Full hips, fat hips. Fat.

This Lesbian Body is scarred.

A colon that carries the scabs of child sodomy. A stomach with ulcers because it can't seem to digest the truth. Skin striped with stretch marks that announced the premature arrival of pregnancy.

This Lesbian Body is an inspiration.

Moving gracefully through my Tai Chi sequence. An ever-wise entity that speaks to me through visions, memories, sensations. Despite the invasions and desecrations my body has suffered, it still yearns for passion and orgasmic intimacy with my lover.

Alejandra Laurenz

Listen

(from *Atthis's daughters*)

LISTEN

we're scarcely given
a very crude exile

ONLY a margin of darkness
where to hide so much disorder
they say

OUR invisible ardor
doesn't heed any command
disarranges their liturgy
scrupulously

LET the dead run away
they will ignore for ever
the very great splendors
of those who never treason to themselves

LOOK at me
we're a sweet flap of wings
over the skin of the world

Escucha

(del libro *Las hijas de Atthis*)

ESCUCHA

nos conceden apenas
una cruda intemperie

UNA orilla de sombra
donde ocultar tanto desorden
dicen

NUESTRO ardor invisible
desoye los mandatos
trastoca su liturgia
escrupulosamente

DEJA huir a los muertos
ignorarán por siempre
los grandes esplendores
de quien no se traiciona

MIRAME
somos dulce batir de alas
sobre la piel del mundo

Kadeth Pozzesi

Silent Pride

I like the vein that runs over my biceps, pumped up with blood it rolls under my skin like a sea snake. I can see the faint blue green under the translucence of my skin, taut over pumped muscle.

Sometimes I like my feet. I can see the structure of my bones, bird feet, lizard feet, sculptures of narrow bones overlaid by skin. On one foot the brush tail of a dragon tattoo rides, and I especially like the black ink as it slips over the hills and valleys of flexed tendons. They remind me of Mary Magdalene's hands and feet in "The Last Temptation of Christ." I liked her. I thought she was brave.

I never look in mirrors for long. Enough to brush my hair, that's all. When I step into the shower, I have the occasional glimpse of breasts and ribs, slight thrust of hip. I don't look much, and always I think of my imperfections.

Imperfections. As if there was perfect. Perfect flesh on perfect bones. Perfect skin in a perfect color. I know better. My intellect speaks to me in reasoning words, your body is perfect for you, its shape, its grace, even its woundings, are perfect for you. Your body is you, my mind says.

My heart likes my feet, and the vein over my biceps.

You're beautiful, a friend says. I know that word beauty is connected to a standard of disfigurement. How many women rebuild faces full of life and character, push breasts up with silicon that kills them slowly. To die for a standard better suited for man-made gemstones, or hothouse flowers.

Lesbians, too, look at "beauty."

Dancing on the date floor, whirlwind pattern of bodies and hopes. Barbie dances with Barbie, the airline stewardess look

co-mingles with the fashion model, cruising butch women race to the bathroom to check that they are "still perfect." The eyes eat you up and spit you out as unworthy to know if you haven't got "the look."

When did we forget the person under the skin?

Ads in the paper . . .

"No dykes. Must pass as straight and like the same."

"Are you the kind of girl that drives men wild? Then you have the look I want."

My hands are like my feet, bony, strong and tattooed.

My hair is uncut. All of it, dark and wild. Everywhere it chooses to grow I let it. I wear the perfume of my clean flesh.

Half of me is proud. Half of me doesn't care when my boss sees me in street clothes and makes a comment that I'm as hairy as he is. Half of me doesn't care when the model perfect lesbian sneers at my artwork, colored into my skin.

The other half of me is ashamed. Sometimes I wish I had picked an easier path.

I fight not to keep my arms pressed uncomfortably down in a crowd, be it family, friends or strangers. How can a simple patch of hair offend so? How can I have learned to respect that offense, take it within? How have my sisters learned too?

"Do you have the kind of look that drives men wild? So do I, let's get together. No leather no dykes."

Unnatural.

I war with the mirror. The mirror wins more often than I, and my heart looks away first. Sighing, wishing I could be easily beautiful.

No matter how "beautiful" I am, no matter by what standard, in my heart it will never be enough.

I don't like the lights on when I make love.

Maybe if I lose 20 pounds.

Maybe if I buff up more.

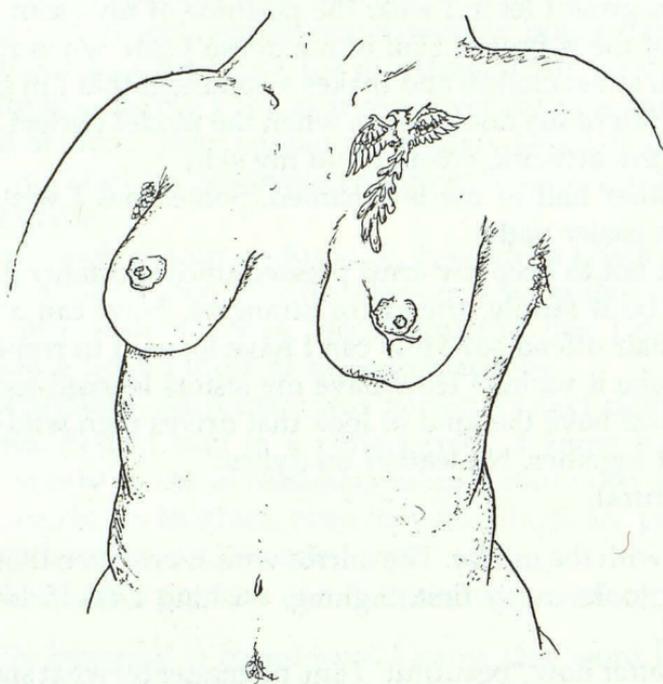
Maybe if.

I hate that I have internalized these feelings. With my mind I know I am fine. The chants of my dad's playboy magazines, of

mom's beauty books, of high school's "good grooming" classes, are all unwelcome lodgers in my soul.

I like the perfume of my sweat.

I like my feet, and the vein on my biceps.



Surgical Scar & Tattoo
on the breasts that I love
Kadeth 92

Surgical scar & tattoo on the breasts that I love

pen and ink

Kadeth Pozzesi

Caroline Halliday

the lesbian body

I

These nudes in the Tate all tidy and clean and white and mimsy
 not plush and belly and rolling belly is the place I like to lay my
 face body generous and giving luscious and plentiful and
 pleasure is proud her legs wide open at the workshop and I
 thought she is more proud of her sexuality than I am not proud
 of my vulva open legs I'm frightened overwhelmed sit on my
 face I'd hate it the smell of urine overripe cunts reminds me of
 stale smell the flashes come less often though they are strong
 the man in the street and for *no reason* I could see his body large
 penis bursting red and harsh he was large with powerful hands
 to push me about and once I wrote a healing poem, a feeling of
 being loved a velvet closeness, my cunt rich and smoothly wet by
 itself the lesbian body *wet wet wet* can't cope with this word, so
 petty for something exquisite and slippery and sensual her cunt
 as my finger slipped in, but she'd never told me it was the first
 time Fruit is not called wet, but juice running on the chin and
 up the nose slippery like persimmons where the skin gets
 thinner as the fruit ripens and becomes translucent and the thick
 fat labia lie on the tongue while the juice spreads in the mouth
 pears are the other ones pears like a woman wide with a belly and
 womblike and a vulva I've lost the gift of loving led by my
 desires All those women those cunts N's was the prettiest I've
 ever seen, so neatly arranged like a flower and the leaves and the
 pubic trailing hairs, or R's with the tough, short pubic hair like
 a brush, wanting sex so quick not an all over the body experience
 which is what I have we don't describe them enough orgasm I
 want to ask all my friends what is orgasm like for you
 The lesbian body I can cry for anger and go through the horrors
 of it if you wish fear this penis winey like jam left too long she
 says to me but supposing someone was *turned on* by your
 description of incest and he wants me to have it this red hot

thing so it burns against my vagina Lovers I want you clean, out of the bath, you stand dripping pubic hair and I kneel up to explore with my tongue beneath the hair, and I find I find smooth rich juice of your cunt contrasts with the thin dry texture of water, and I lay you down perhaps and my tongue upwards and inside

II

I have forgotten my body since you left, it took you-from-australia to take me to bed, as soon as I heard your voice on this machine I felt the rush of desire Not this empty glass booth of a person like a phone box speaking at distance the incest survivor has learnt to live half a self anger? the lesbian body is anger? all those lovers lost, S like rough tough mountain grass, to grab and pull and roll and run and her fingers thrusting inside my ass such a large new place I was so relaxed and she loved every inch of me her freedom with the physical trusting the physical the physical *knows* I know what I am receiving when you touch me, I know I am the receiving body the body and I are real and this is the present deep bright smell of red pepper insides or definite green leaf and feather of sweet corn and earth and leaves holding holding and a friend touching my face as she kisses me goodbye Yet the mind and I are real too this is direct this is what I feel put down, word, there, now. Writing and fucking nothing compares with these two

Yet

looking at you begins to be real. Hearing what you say begins to be real this is what healing is the lesbian her body *my* body

if only I could gather all these things together and stuff them into the empty phone booth and then you and I would both see the glass filled up up to the top full chock full of rich pebbles from so many beaches and woods, silks and grey rich hair a belly glowing and shoulders smooth and sturdy feet that carried me the child and through so many years poems and handmade paper and bowls, arrangements of room, ideas carried through, my baby, *me* a radical woman it hurts this knowledge of emptiness the fear of saying it and fearing you will not believe

and fearing you will think I am lying in some way or contempt
 I fear your contempt it hurt far too often when he said "you? you
 can't ..." and I was his puppet all those childminutes of my life
 and my brain goes *scatter* and reaches *the dead place in my head*
 I told my mother, she couldn't believe me I became the bad girl
 who dared to say such things and the room was empty and the
 split began

either it was their truth or mine

and *then I nearly died* and perhaps the oral rape ended only his
 hands creeping up the bed between my squeezed together legs
 as I turned away pushing between my thighs and the drumming
 of the body began the thrumming of my response and the liquid
 seeping frightened but beyond my control and for years I felt my
 body betrayed me the traitor the lesbian body betrays itself but
 I want to part my legs to your tongue with glory
 and for some the parts cut out for the incest survivor the parts
 stay but belong to someone else

the lesbian body an invaded country nothing belongs to me the
 five year old, but the arms and legs, containing the empty body
 the lesbian body an invaded country

III

it is too hard, wandering the house trying for the right balance
 which will give me time to be a writer and let me earn my living,
 support my child, achieve this new life north of the river, make
 new friends, maybe even a new lover, no, forget the lover...
 paint the new doors, raw timber mustn't get soaked with autumn
 rain... and it's me alone responsible for getting back to work
 and get her back to school not so many illness days off now we're
 into our second year proving something to somebody and I what
 I want is someone's arms around me, someone saying you can
 leave this till tomorrow or next week or even *I'll do this*, just carry
 on with what you're doing and I'll finish this get the dinner on
 tidy the kitchen so it'll be all ready for another week at full speed
 ahead

this the lesbian body the lesbian mother's body and the
 anxiety that rises to my cheekbones threatens to invade does

invade every moment of my waking daytime hateful number
 one enemy I want an autumn of contentment someone asks
 what passion in my life and I say no — contentment. High
 contentment is what I'm after these days

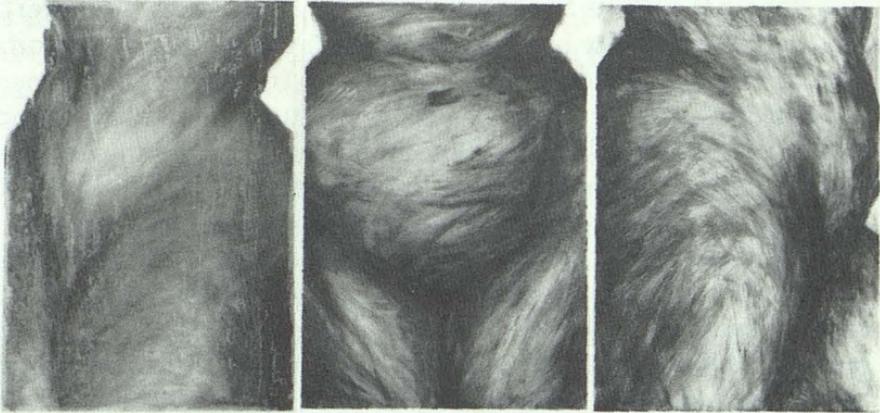
I have a photo of you taken by the sea Bexhill, when we'd
 plunged naked it was cold but leapt about our limbs you are
 outlined against the sky your face shows aging, beautiful signs
 that draw me to you my body has not remained the same you
 loved me when it was changing daily growing and now it is
 growing older changing

I deny myself the body comfort the comfort in sex because I've
 learned not to trust it I have been trying to deny myself these
 needs I haven't changed enough to live like this contentment
 High risk living the incest survivor in me all these years high risk
 living but I don't want safer living to mean no living I am
 wandering the house with this lesbian body idea and I come
 back to my bedroom hear the sudden rain pattering the skylight
 like fingers on a typewriter I have hardly written all the year not
 knowing who I am writer in this new space place

I love this room I've created it the high ceiling the skylight
 through which I can see blue and clouds and grey sky and the
 moonlight and sunlight and the peace of cool walls and yellow
 bedspread my painted curtains and the grey stone colours brown
 and iron brown two of the stones beside me now grey streaked
 and smooth to the touch these stones represent *my need* quiet free
 steady

I was hungry sometimes I can't find the rhythm for feeding
 myself sudden recognition I need hot milk and bread and
 mackerel and above all tomatoes with pepper on them and
 watercress

I will go out when this is written, and walk in the rain
 I might go and visit someone go out to meet the chaos the beauty
 of the world take its hand take a hand and hold it
 these tears represent the lesbian body there is no clear way to
 healing no clear hand to hold no belly to lie against only a
 constant emptiness that changes slowly slowly *this is my lesbian
 body* alone



Areas of Injury I, II & III

monotype and chin colle, 32"x44", 1989

Elizabeth D. Ross

Areas of Injury I, III & III are part of a series dealing with the rape and brutal murder of my mother in 1986. In these images the model is myself, the pain and injuries blurring from her body into mine.

Peg O'Connor

When Docile Bodies Dance

Our bodies are formed within networks of power relations, and the cultural interpretations of those relations. Our bodies are sites where the regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves. The subjection or docility of the body is required in order to produce an easily manipulated, self-obsessed population. The more docile we become, the more we are encouraged to speak. We become constant chatterers in docile bodies.

Power functions in such a way as to link sex and the search for "truth." Sexuality has become the site where the most fundamental "truth" of identity is experienced. In the process of institutionalizing sexual identity, sex becomes open to surveillance and interpretation. We can "know" our sexuality, but we must rely on experts to interpret it for us. This institutional interpretation of sexuality is one of the cornerstones of hierarchy.

In the western christian tradition, it was the priest who acted as the authority. In confession, the one who is confessing is encouraged and expected to reveal her every thought and feeling related to sex and pleasure — it is only through thorough examination and complete disclosure that one can be told the truth of herself. The one in the privileged position of interpreting and ascribing meaning to this secret is the expert. The secular version of the confessional is the psychiatrist's couch. The same power mechanisms, with the command to "tell all," function as well on the couch as in the confessional.

The mass media version of the psychiatrists' couches or the priests' confessionals are television talk shows such as "Oprah" or "Donahue." Many of these shows focus on topics of sexuality and there are "experts" who play the role of confessor to the other guests. These shows are watched by millions every day — each day millions of us "discover" and have identified for us, and identify and claim for ourselves, our deepest "truths."

The liberal orientation aims at liberating what is repressed. It exploits the temptation to believe that to be happy, it's enough

to articulate personal problems and remove a few prohibitions. The liberal orientation may itself be an aspect of modern power that serves as a masking function. Contemporary notions of freedom, liberation and emancipation seem to strengthen power structures by implying that there is some true self or natural body that is just waiting to be liberated.

Can we hold out for any form of resistance? The answer, I think and hope, is that resistance and subversion are possible. Resistance is not simply saying "yes" to sex. "Yes" to sex is not a "no" to power. What's at stake here isn't liberation of individuality, but resistance to and rejection of the individuals that we are *made*. The resistance is focused against the constitution of individuals through modern power/knowledge regimes. Resistance is directed at not being a docile or useful body. It seems that resistance happens when we stop the search for our "truth," when we fight against the experts telling us who and what we are, when we refuse to be docile bodies. If power is targeted at the body, then it is the body that is the site of resistance.

I want to propose three specific examples of resistance involving our bodies. First, acts of autoeroticism — the pleasures we give ourselves (not necessarily limited to masturbation) — can be extremely subversive. The second is the involvement of women in certain sports. The third activity that I take to be subversive (and highly controversial), is lesbian erotic dancing for other lesbians. I admit from the outset there are problems, controversies and issues surrounding these examples, especially lesbian erotic dancing. I mean to include the participation of lesbians of every size, age, race, appearance and ability and believe these acts can be interpreted to show just how subversive they are.

First — our autoeroticism does not seem to be subjected to the same sort of scrutiny as male masturbation. There is vocabulary and slang for men masturbating. We don't have many words for women's pleasuring ourselves. This indicates that not as much is "known" about women's activities. I can only speculate about why this is so, but I think it's tied to the idea that women don't experience sexual pleasure without a man present. Women's autoeroticism, then, is not regarded as an important or valid object for inquiry and domination¹.

If women's ways of pleasuring our own bodies are not subject to expert surveillance and opinion, and are not part of the construction of the science of sexuality, then our ways of pleasuring ourselves are not institutionalized. There isn't a body of knowledge that surrounds and captures, and hence normalizes and regulates, women's autoerotica. Therefore I take women's autoeroticism to be subversive.

The second example of potentially subversive activity is women's involvement in sport, particularly a sport such as rugby.

Sport is fundamentally about the body, physicality and strength and this seems especially true for rugby. Running after women, tackling and physically subduing other women are all done in the name of the game. There is little or no semblance of traditional "femininity." Women cannot participate in such great physical contact with other women without exhibiting some form of resistance. Women, in a sport such as rugby, are not using their bodies in ways that are useful and docile.

Women athletes train our bodies so we are capable of acts that are in opposition to those that have been prescribed for us. We can wrestle in jello, but contact sports, requiring exceptional strength or physicality, are considered off limits. One of the ways this is enforced is through invoking the dreaded label of lesbianism. Homophobia seems an obvious way of excluding women from these sports and keeping us from the subversive relationships we might have with our own and each other's bodies in this arena. Homophobia masks the power mechanisms that keep women relating to our bodies only in normalized ways.

My third example of potentially subversive activity — lesbian erotic dancing — is the most problematic and controversial of the three.

Recently, on "Donahue," the topic for the day was lesbian erotic dancing. As Phil said, "Women are doing for women what women having been doing for men for years." On the panel were Lesbo-A-GoGo (a group of erotic dancers), Catherine Wendricks, Camille Paglia (not the famous author), with Joan Nestle (founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives) in the audience.

Discussion was fairly heated. The dancers said they were dancing for fun and enjoyment and of their own free will. Catherine Wendricks didn't approve of the dancing and thought

they were going through growing pains and looking for ways to express their sexuality. Camille Paglia said the dancing was pornographic and the dancers really weren't doing this of their own free will, they were acting out male-created roles and scenarios and were therefore having a negative effect on the lesbian community. Joan Nestle was all out in favor of this dance activity as a healthy and beautiful expression of women's sexuality. Audience reaction ranged from "keep it in the bedroom," to "disgusting," to "don't go if you don't want to see it."

The issues at hand are women dancing for other women and women watching and eroticizing the dancers. The dancers maintained they use their bodies in ways they and others find enjoyable, pleasurable and erotic. When asked how their audiences respond, the dancers answered that the women appear to enjoy themselves and often dance along. The dancing was described as a participatory event. The dancers also stated they did not feel any threat of violence while dancing.

One argument against women dancing for other women is that it will encourage women to objectify women in the same ways that men have. This argument seems wrong to me on several counts. First, there is a radical difference in power and privilege between men and women, and this difference in power affects how we look and what we see.

Joan Nestle at one point in the show said, "Women are never men in society, no matter how butch a woman looks, no matter how much like a man, we don't come with male privilege. We don't look at these women with eyes that say we own the world ... I can look at a woman and touch her and feel that this world is a compassionate place."

Marilyn Frye, in her essay, "In and Out of Harm's Way," describes what she calls the Arrogant eye. She writes that [the] primary answer to the philosophical question of man's place in nature [is]: everything that is is resource for man's exploitation. With this world view, men see with arrogant eyes which organize everything with reference to themselves and their interests.... Everything is either "for me" or "against me." ... The arrogant perceiver does not countenance the possibility that the other is independent, indifferent.²

Marilyn Frye and Joan Nestle seem to be making the same point — that one woman can look at another woman without looking arrogantly³. With arrogant perception, I would believe the dancers are simply dancing for me — for my benefit alone. When one perceives arrogantly, the reality of the woman dancing for her own pleasure and for the pleasure she may feel in being watched is lost. Arrogant perception leaves no room for anyone else but the perceiver.

bell hooks, in her essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" discusses the power in looking. She begins with the observation that no matter how much power dominating adults had over her and her gaze as a child, that power was never so absolute that she did not dare to look, stare or peek. The gaze of black people has been repressed, but this repression has produced in black people

an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality." Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.⁴

In the struggle of resistance, hooks says, "the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating 'awareness' politicizes 'looking' relations — one learns to look a certain way in order to resist."⁵ The oppositional gaze of black women is developed in resistance to the dominant order. Those who have developed an oppositional gaze have resisted the imposition of the Arrogant Eye of the white male. "As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels."⁶ It is these revisions, inventions, imaginings, and creations of new meanings that are transgressive and subversive of the dominant order.

The concept of an oppositional gaze is a useful tool in understanding how lesbians eroticizing other lesbians is not necessarily "women acting just like men." I don't want to argue that there is such a thing as a lesbian gaze, but I do think the gaze of individual lesbians can be developed in opposition and resistance to

heterosexualized ways of looking at and knowing the world. Those lesbians who have constructed their identities in resistance to the dominant order of heterosexuality will most likely have developed this critical and oppositional gaze.

Looking at another woman, recognizing that we don't own the world (and that neither we nor anyone else has a right to own it) and that lesbians do not come with male privilege, allows us to see something radically and wonderfully different than those who perceive arrogantly. Lesbian spectatorship allows us to discover the power of the erotic. Audre Lorde, in "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," describes the erotic as

a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the oppressed that can produce energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.⁷

To ask women not to eroticize or look at other lesbians who want to be looked at, is to allow the male gaze to continue to dominate and suppress lesbian eroticism. Sharing between the dancers and the audience keeps the relation from being exploitative or abusive. As Lorde says

To share the power of each other's feeling is different from using another's feelings as we would a kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent is abuse ... When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connections with our similarities and differences.⁸

We look away from ourselves as lesbians when we say we are acting just like men. We look away from ourselves as lesbians when we deny that we do want to evoke erotic feelings in other

lesbians. These looking aways are denials of sexual agency we have as lesbians to discover, create and claim erotic power. Within the context of lesbian dancing for other lesbians are multiple interactions — these interactions and erotic engagements empower by sharing joy and pleasure with others.

Later in the show, Joan Nestle brought the focus back to women using their bodies in subversive ways. What she said, especially in the context of a national TV talk show, was incredible:

It is a myth that direct sexual feeling or lust for a woman isn't an intimate feeling. That it's not spiritual, it is. That it's not healthy, it is. Our community has risked everything for over 200 years in this country to kiss another woman, to enter another woman, to hold another woman. That is at the center of our culture. You may not like it, you don't like me to say these words. What they represent for some of us is the glory of our lesbian erotic courage ... Lesbians like to touch each other. They make oral love to each other, they touch each other's nipples, and they are not men. A man and a woman in this light are very different. When I touch a woman, I am not a man. It is an act of resistance against our society that thinks we are dirty. And we celebrate our bodies among ourselves.

When we celebrate our bodies among ourselves, we recognize and claim the power of the erotic. And the power of the erotic is both subversive and transformative.

1. Editor's note: if, on the other hand, the domination of womyn's sexuality is the erasure of an independent sexuality (and sex), then autoeroticism, as defined by womyn (not institutions, "experts" or men) remains a subversive act.

2. Marilyn Frye, "In and Out of Harm's Way," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 67.

3. Unfortunately, "can" is not "will." Class, race, size, age, and ability may distort our gaze.

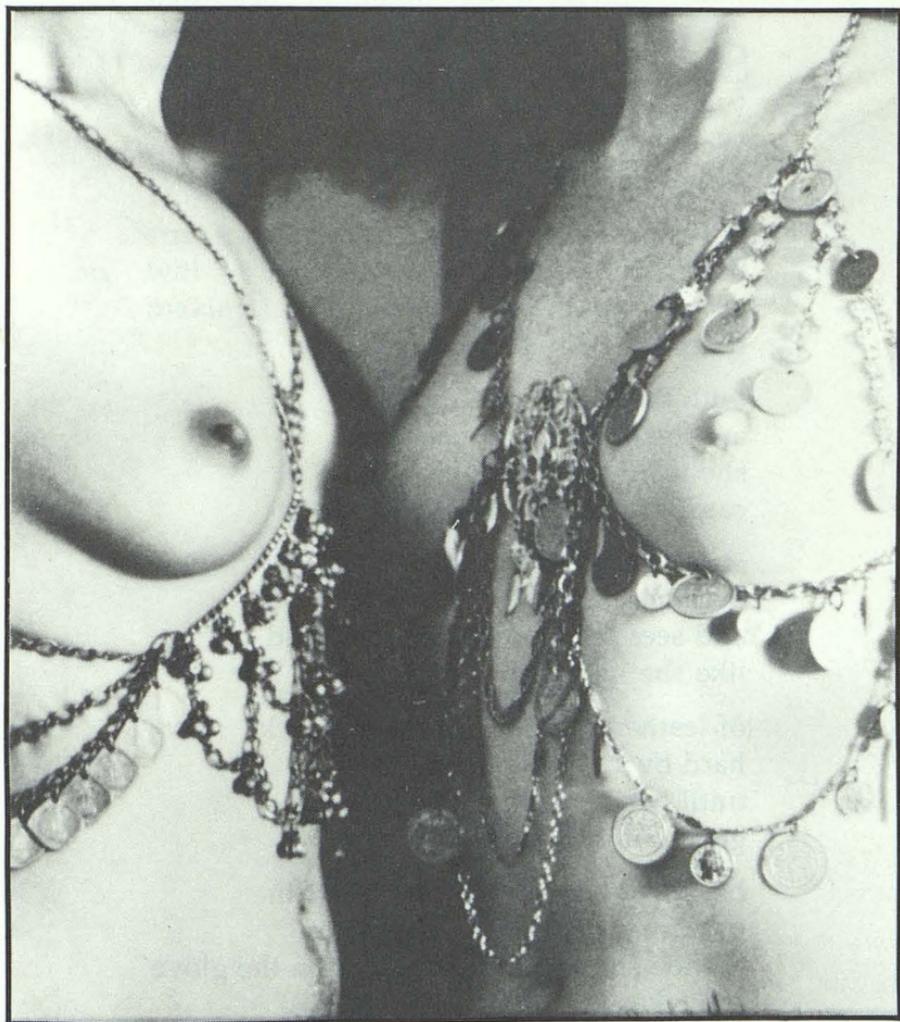
4. bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 116.

5. hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," p. 116.

6. hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," p. 128.

7. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 53.

8. Lorde, "The Erotic as Power," pp. 58-59.



Reflection
silver gelatin print
L.A. Hyder

Sheila J. Packa

A Woman Playing Ball

She begins to play
Wednesday nights for
Women's Rec II, Ruby's Cafe
slow pitch soft ball

but stops her practice
before she reaches the ease
of veterans, before she learns
to let her body connect

with the ball, to use the glove
and take out the opposition
she watches a woman on third
catch and throw, run and slide

she watches all the women on the
diamond, their guileless motion
and sees what a foul life she's had
like she had been the sphere

of leather and string herself struck
hard by a batter playing to win
until her seams split, until she's
gone out of bounds

been lost beyond the fence, left in
pasture grown over. This is not
the life she wants so she puts on the glove
she takes up the bat

she remembers how her lover
has taught her to warm up
and swing
she steps up to the plate

once she watched the World Series
learning the terms
RBI, double play, triple play,
a line drive

had meant nothing to her
she had never trusted a team
but now she hears them calling
encouragement

they wait to see what she does
with the pitch
strike, strike, hit and she runs
with all her might
making her way home

Janet Mason

“You know I used to work in the sex industry”

It takes brass balls to be a dancer —
at fourteen she knew how
to grab bills with her snatch
even though she didn't do it,
staying out of reach
except for her toes on the bar.

She's still got it,
sixteen years later, another life,
walking with me in this place
where hundred year old trees
crack through dead limbed night;
sway into morning:
dance whether anyone watches or not.

She rotates her pecs
gives me a musculo-skeletal overview:
how pasties are twirled;
smoke inhaled in gasp of cervical muscles,
exhaled in a musky cough.

I exhume my own past:
seventeen, tending bar,
a shot and beer joint
attached to a men's rooming house
where junkies stand up
on their bare stools and scream at me.

When my hands shake (one part terror,
one part perpetual hangover)
they ask me who is beating me
my husband, boyfriend or both.

I guess I was underage, I say.

The job lasted less than a month.
I never knew why they fired me or
hired me in the first place.

What do you mean, you don't know!

Her voice is a lion's roar
in this hush of trees.
At seventeen I was timid
as leaf scattered wind,
but now, blood free of my own fist,
I shout back: I don't know.
I never thought about it.

Think about it.

*The sex industry loves young fruit.
You may not have been on the bar
but you were behind it.*

Through her words
I hear fallen leaves, my thoughts
touch the ground, rest silently
before they grow damp,
compost to veined lace,
sift into sediment.

I remember grey years
vomited from mind.
Later a healing, halfway,
wordless and driven,
rain storms of daily exercise,
brown rice by the bucketful.
Memory's eraser compiled
in a dim purge of years.

For a breath the trees are silent.

In that brief inhale and exhale
I feel the lightning bolt
slice through me, charred edges,
the burnt pulpy scent of split wood.

Kate Berne Miller

Women with Knives

for Gloria

Your arms,
 freshly carved,
chill me in this season
 of remembered ghosts.

How can hearts
 such small organs of stamina
contain us.

Every pain that hides beyond memory
 will surface —
writhing under the skin,
 appearing in welts on our arms and legs.
Nothing less than blood
 can voice these words.

When I see you
 the shock of recognition,
 frigid and familiar
as steel against skin
 flays me open.

Soundless the knife speaks,
 we are bloodsisters, sworn to silence —
 we shout out at last.

Years later, our scars will remain — delicate engravings,
 spidery tracings of our lives,
 the book of our survival.

May your wounds, now visible
 heal, and your tongue
 be unbound.

Laura Hershey

Self-Body-Portrait

Bleached ribs arch up into the sun
end in jagged points
limbs mostly buried as sand
keeps drifting
between bones the wind wears at

My lover a sleek blackfeathered scavenger
perches on one cleaned rib
Heat and sand grind
spine digits ribs

Yes I know
this is not healthy as self-
images go
Affirmations are called for
I am a beautiful
source of pure light

Yet something
the whiteness of the bones
the shifting solidity of sand
intimacy with a bird's beak
something
draws me to a picture
I can see:

Erosion explains
my frame's twists and asymmetry
and what is left
the raven takes

Naja Sorella

Basics

Journal entry, Friday, September 4, 1992

I been trying to write something for the SW issue on the Lesbian Body. I go back to the guidelines and re-read them, and each time the thought of "basics" keeps getting in my way. I wanted to address the question of "why our heads get disconnected from our bellies and vaginas." And I immediately think of the migraine I got while I write this.

Migraines get in the way. It's hard to feel anything in my cunt with a migraine. There's plenty in my belly, though. Nausea. Lots of it. Nausea in my head, nausea in my belly. My head and belly are connected when I got migraines. Somehow, I don't think this's what they were thinking of when asking that question. I think they wanted something more esoteric.

For me, it's the basics that get in the way. Always the basics. These past 3½ weeks, I've been working my butt off not to lose my Gamma Globulin. I depend on intravenous Gamma Globulin, a blood product extracted from whole blood. Every ten days, I faithfully drip 2 cups of it into my veins. Gamma Globulin gives me the antibodies I don't make, due to immune system illnesses. The antibodies create a defense system I lack, fighting off infections, viruses, etc. Been doing Gamma Globulin 3 years now, and it clearly makes a difference in my quality of life. Not feeling like I'm dying is a big deal to me.

The provider company refused to send me any more shipments cuz Medi-Cal* hadn't paid them in a year. Of course, they didn't call me about it six months ago, and give me another six months to work on it, they just up and tell me the shipments are cancelled. When they told me that, I heard: "We're cancelling

*Medi-Cal is a California state program for poor womyn with children and disabled people officially on SSI.

your life for the next few months or maybe forever, depending on whether we get this figured out with Medi-Cal or not." I thought my heart was gonna stop right there and then. Been pushing myself way beyond my limits these past weeks, making hours after hours of phone calls to the provider company, to every office and branch of Medi-Cal, to the company that makes Gamma Globulin, to my friends for help, to United Way and to a phone number I was told was for getting underground drugs, but of course it wasn't really for that. It turned out to be a number for cheap vitamins for people with AIDS. Every god-damned number I called for community services of some kind, ended up being for people with AIDS. Nobody else is sick out here. No other disease exists except AIDS. Hours and days and weeks of calls. Most of those days I woulda unplugged the phone and been a t.v. slug, I was doing so bad.

But I hadda keep my Gamma Globulin. Sex I can do without. A bath I can do without and did, and do. Can't remember the last time I had one. My dirty, stringy hair keeps falling in my face as I write this. I made hours of phone calls, often to where I hadda stop or risk having seizures. Then, I binged on every sweet I could find in the house. Ate like I hadn't eaten in weeks. Crammed it in until I felt like I wasn't gonna pass out, wouldn't collapse on the spot.

I couldn't sleep, my head was so jammed with: who could I call next, what should I do tomorrow, what was the next best thing to do, who was I supposed to call back with what information? What if I did lose the Gamma? Was I willing to live in cellular exhaustion again? Lying in bed using every ounce of energy to breathe, forget rolling over. I always felt like I was dying. My muscles ached so deeply, so intensely, I swore a truck ran me over each day. When I lived in cellular exhaustion, I was suicidal. For years, I was suicidal. Gamma Globulin keeps me from feeling like I'm dying. I still lie in bed 20-22 hours a day, but much more comfortably. I roll over whenever I want. I might wait a half hour to get up and pee, but I don't wait 2-3 hours every single time. At least 60-70% of the time, I get 4 hours outta bed a day. Before Gamma Globulin, I was lucky if it was 1-2 hours. I've

been so panicked at the thought of no Gamma Globulin, it'd take hours to fall asleep, then I'd wake up every half hour. After a few hours of that, I couldn't sleep any more at all.

These things get in the way. They jam up my head. They take up all the space between my head and belly and cunt.

As if that's not enough, California's had no budget for over 2 months. Certainly didn't help matters with the Gamma Globulin. I sweated out every minute of the budget crunch, knowing that when it was settled, I'd be a loser. It's settled now. I am a loser, along with several million other Californians unfortunate enough to need social assistance programs. My SSI goes down \$37 a month*. I already know my Section 8 rent was going up \$5 a month. That's \$42 a month I won't get. Not a lot to someone making \$20,000 a year. It's devastating to me. Attendant money is also being cut. How much I don't know. My guts are clenched, gripped in fear. Medi-Cal is being axed more than its usual annual cuts. Will my Gamma Globulin be lost for good now? My head is on full time. Despite the migraines, the terrible, fogged out, fuzzed out pressure I live with every day, despite the brain dysfunction and constant brain pain, and everything else that usually goes on in my head, now, there's the fear, the panic. Trying to figure out what to do, the images of life with no Gamma Globulin, higher rent, less money each month, maybe no attendant money or very little of it, these are always hammering in my head. On top of the usual daily gut pain, now I got fear twisting them up. I guess I got a head-to-belly connection after all.

Of course, there's the neighbor from hell two apartments down, dealing crack day and night, all kinds a scumball men around. They come in shifts, a month or two at a time. Then a whole new batch of them. They shout all night, fight, throw each other around. They piss in the stairwell, write Lesbian hating notes, yell names at my butch lover in her apartment next to mine. One of the guys downstairs beats his girlfriend between 7 and 8 a.m. Then trots off to work. He's higher 'n a kite all the

* SSI is Supplemental Security Income, a federal program for poor disabled people.

time, cranks up the music so loud the building shakes, and has an equal number of slimy men around. More fear, terror. More thoughts filling my head. How to move? So little energy, so little money. My guts tight, tight. What if one of those junkies break into Frie's apartment, or mine? What if we don't live to tell about it? My head feels like it's gonna explode. My guts are knotted up.

Goddess, I wish I could be thinking of my cunt. I wish there was the energy, the desire, the ability to do something about it the few times I do feel something stirring. Last week my cunt got excited 3 times. That's more than I usually get in a whole year. At first I didn't know what the hell it was. I thought maybe it was a yeast infection. Or there was something wrong with my cunt and I should see a doctor. On the third day it happened, I suddenly remembered what that odd feeling was. I'm so used to not feeling anything sexual these past 5-6 years, that all I could think was, "What's causing all this cunt excitement? Is it the extra thyroid medication I'm taking? If it is, I gotta cut back. I don't got the time and energy to be dealing with my cunt 3 times a week. I got more basic important things to deal with." I shouldn't've worried so much. I'm back to normal. Nothing stirring for over a week. I'll probably go another 5-6 years before I get 3 days in a week. And I'll probably think it's a yeast infection.

Lisa A. Edmonds

Double Target

Does she look straight?
my friend's friend
asks of me
as though there are
qualifications
as if straight equals feminine
and this matters

Yes my friend says
cataloging my body
hips waist lips
long hair devoid of spikes
my clothes
send no social message
of masculinity androgyny
lesbianity

Now that I've passed
the gender specific test
My friend's friend
wants to meet me
Her women
must fit in
socially

An "unfeminine" woman
causes people to stare
hiss laugh suspect bash
An "unfeminine" dyke
is a double target

I have friends who
do not buy "femininity"
don't try for "straight-looking"
Even some of them

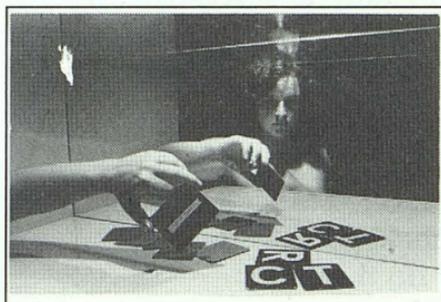
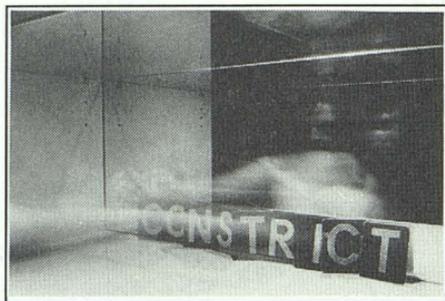
have been raped
Still each is linked in
strength and grows

My friend's friend believes
if she acquiesces
if she plucks and shaves
she'll avoid hate
She does not realize
the source of all this
pressure to surrender

I say this out loud
my breath staining
the bathroom mirror
as I dress my face
bracelets rings earrings
clicking
I do this like
a knight
bearing armor



"Pay no attention, love - it's just the ghost of Lesbians past."



Constrict/Construct

Julie Finn

Constrict/Construct, my 1985 image self-portrait series, continues to mean as much to me today as it did 8 years ago. I still battle with the internal and external forces which seek to keep me constricted, and work at breaking free and expanding to live life at my full potential.

Judith P. Stelbourn

Sliding Into Home: Identifying Lesbian Sex*

When I talk about myself as a lesbian I openly declare my sexual preference. I know there are other ways to define lesbian life: social and economic oppression, philosophies, music and literature. But there is one aspect of my life that is a constant — the truth of my loving women. Defining myself as a lesbian means declaring myself in a sexual context.

Just as there is no one way to act like a lesbian or be recognizable as a lesbian, there is no single way to be a sexual lesbian. In fact, the incredible variety of lesbian sexuality is what gives us power. The more we know about lesbian sex and desire, the more choices we have in the ways we make love, establish relationships, have sex.

By ignoring lesbian eroticism, the phallographic cultures attempt to negate the intensity and power of sex between women. In this way, our very existence is denied. I want to talk about sex because, as a lesbian, I want to exist. I don't want people thinking that because I have sex with another woman, it's no sex. As Marilyn Frye writes in her essay "Lesbian Sex," the very word "sex" has come to mean a moment when there are "one or more penises present."¹ If I am defined as a non-sexual entity, I don't exist. It is not enough for me to be merely tolerated in a heterosexual world. I want my definition of myself as lesbian recognized as a valid identity and a viable option.

I know this is dangerous. Forcing people to abandon their illusions can produce hostile reactions. But if we encourage visibility and continue to create lesbian culture, then lesbian identity must become a reality. Though many of us are still individually invisible, we must not remain culturally invisible.

A subtle example of maintaining invisibility is referring to ourselves as gay. Gay is a term associated with men. Some lesbi-

* This essay has been adapted from a much longer paper presented at Southern Connecticut State University Women's Studies conference, Oct. 1992.

ans would still rather be linked with a man, even a gay one, than claim an identity of their own or identify with other lesbians. "Society makes us invisible by calling us 'lesbian women,' that is 'women' with an abnormal or perverted sexuality. Feminists see us as 'women' whose sexual preference is to be considered among all of the other demands of feminism, a way of co-opting us into the fight to improve the subjugated condition of women in the hetero-system. It is therefore imperative that we define ourselves as lesbians."²

I don't want someone thinking that sex without a male organ is just a substitute for the real thing. And I don't want someone thinking, lesbian or straight, that if some of us strap on dildos or wear boxer shorts we want to be men. As Lyndall MacCowan says in her article on "Recollecting History, Renaming Lives," "Butch and Femme are lesbian-specific genders, two of many ways to be both a lesbian and a woman. They are unliberated only in the sense that they need liberating from the assumption, made by heterosexuals and lesbian-feminists alike, that they are an imitation of heterosexuality, a clinging to heterosexual femininity or an attempt to masquerade as a man."³

I have to talk about my sexuality, lesbian sex, because I don't want to be defined by the psychoanalysts, the AMA, local police departments, boards of education, Food and Drug Administration, national sexologists associations.

Carole S. Vance describes a conference on "sex research" where films were shown depicting heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian sex. During the conference the word "sex" always referred to heterosexual sex. Vance says that in the heterosexual films "men set the pace and the timing of the activities. Women cooperated. ... All heterosexual films culminated in vaginal penetration. ... The films of male homosexual sex were highly genital and depicted orgasm." Vance states, "in contrast with the films on heterosex and gay men's sex, lesbian sex occurred in a field of daisies, chronicled by discontinuous jump cuts. Sexual activity, never genital, consisted of running in slow motion through sun dappled fields, hand holding, and mutual hair-combing." These films were liberal, recent and widely distributed for sex education and counseling.⁴

Many years ago I heard Dr. Mary Jane Sherfey speak at Vassar College. Someone in the audience asked her to define the most important questions regarding sexuality. She said there was really only one important question and if we knew the answer most of the questions we have about human sexuality would be clarified. That single question is, what are the causes of heterosexuality? Everyone was silent for a few seconds and then began to laugh. But she was serious.

"Sexuality is power," Monique Wittig states in *The Straight Mind*. "The sexual subjugation of women leads to their economic, social and political domination. Lesbians who have no sexual relations with men therefore have an economic, political and social perspective that goes beyond the male/female categories."⁵ Wittig questions the entire category of sex as a product of the heterosexual society by which men appropriate for themselves the reproductive labor of women as well as their physical persons by means of the marriage contract. She goes on to say that only nuns and lesbians escape this sexual slavery. "Thus a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature for there is no nature in society."⁶

As a lesbian, I have many reservations about mainstream feminism which generally ignores us. A few weeks ago, I was watching a program on TV about women's issues in the '90s. The panel, chaired by two women known for their "liberal views," discussed abortion rights, the glass ceiling in business, women as combat forces in the military, child care for working women, the difficulties of single parents. There wasn't a single reference to any problems faced in this country by lesbians. Lesbian problems are not women problems because "Lesbians are not women."⁷

During the seventies men worried about losing their wives and girlfriends to lesbians in consciousness raising groups. And they were right to worry. The slogan of the time stated the idea fairly succinctly. "Feminism is the theory, Lesbianism is the practice." In the excitement of the seventies, the reality of so many women becoming lesbians forced many long held beliefs about us to be reconsidered. Many, including lesbians, believed

we were created by a bad home life or were helpless victims of our genes. We were more to be pitied than condemned. But as thousands of women made the choice to love other women, biological determination and social upbringing as "causes" for this "perversion" became inadequate explanations. Lesbians may not all be born — we can be made.

Julia Penelope, in *Call Me Lesbian*, states that, "we choose whether or not we will live as who we are. Naming ourselves lesbian is a decision to act on our truest feelings."⁸ When we name ourselves, all the other names society has labeled us become meaningless. I have to talk about "what lesbians do" not just for straight women (so they might understand what's possible without men) but for us — for lesbians who still self hate, or are embarrassed by the overtly dykey, or think they're somehow superior because of physical attributes, social or professional status. These distinctions prevent us from talking about what we do have in common: our love for women and our physical expressions of that.

Being Jewish, I am sensitive to these specious distinctions. We try to pass in so many ways. Some lesbians still believe "they'll never come for me," or "they'll accept me if I can show them I'm just like them." A little paranoia, tempered by history, allows me to believe that if they come it won't matter if you don't own a dildo, watch porno videos, or keep your handcuffs in a trunk. Your femme dress, your motorcycle jacket, your professional title, your integration won't save you.

Talking about lesbian sex openly states my entitlement to existence. And as a political and social tactic, the openness declares the best defense to be a good offense. When I hear someone define me by saying, "a lesbian is someone who likes making love to women," I want to respond by asking, "How? Do you know how?"

And I have to begin that answer by defining and examining my own excitement. The excitement comes precisely from the fact that it is two women and not a man and a woman. Instead of saying that lesbians are defined as those who like sex with women, we could say that any woman might enjoy sex with women if she allowed herself the same freedom of choice.

I make this point because it is basic to my argument — the biological similarities of our bodies, rather than deadening sexual mystery as we've been told, are instead the powerful source of sexual excitement. These biological similarities are the basis, the core of the excitement.

There are real problems in attempting to describe lesbian sex. As there are no names for lesbian relationships, there is very little language for our sex.

Let me give you an example of how language can affect sex: The first woman is placing 2 or 3 fingers inside of the second woman who is lying on her back with her legs open. If we then say the first woman is the lover and the second woman is the lovee; the first is the giver, the second, the receiver; the first is the top, the second is the bottom, that additional language transforms the action. It seems as if the second woman is now passive. The language does not indicate the simultaneity of the feeling, nor mutual participation. The words make one a "performer" and the other the "performed upon." This does not describe lesbian sex at all. It may more aptly describe traditional roles in heterosexual relationships and in heterosexual sex.

Using these words may make lesbian sex partners vacate the reality of the act itself. We may not recognize the inadequacies of the language, but react to and be affected by definitions which do not describe us or what we're feeling or doing. The language denies the essence of lesbian sex; the simultaneity of feeling and the mutuality of physical identity.

Let me describe one part of lesbian sex — not, by far, the only method, just one of the variety of lesbian sexual expressions:

When I enter another woman with my hand, fingers, I know what she feels like, physiologically. I may not know her emotional feelings, her reaction to me, but I do recognize the inside of her body. It is my body. And I know what she is feeling at that moment when my fingers enter her.

This moment of identification, communication, and recognition of shared sensations is very complex. It is her body entered. It is my body entering. It is my body responding. My body responding to the feeling of my fingers entering her. My body responding to her feeling of that same sensation. I can feel the

sensation of her in my fingers, in my head and inside me. She experiences the sensation inside her and in her head. She knows that I am experiencing the excitement of this moment and she knows, too, the way in which I experience it. So it's not only my identification with her which causes the excitation, it is also her knowing what I am feeling and her identification with me.

This awareness of the physiological similarities can intensify into a deeper spiritual sensation of connection — one may feel she is reaching up and touching the deepest part of another's being. During these moments of sexual identification and unity, it is possible for the woman entering to have an orgasm solely from the response of the woman being entered, and/or from her own identification with the sensations and the feeling of that other woman. Descriptions of this sexual moment appear in many lesbian works of fiction.

I don't think a man can ever feel that identification. No matter what the relationship, he will never be able to appreciate that moment when entry into another woman becomes entry into yourself. He can only understand his own physical reactions and identify with his own sensations. A lesbian lover can concentrate on herself, understand and identify with the other woman, focus both on the feeling in her fingers and the feeling the other woman is experiencing in her vagina.

The level of intimacy may also increase identification and heighten excitation. But the truth is, in lesbian sex it doesn't always matter how intimately you know another woman. You know how another woman feels inside. It's your body too. This communication can be sufficient stimulus for excitation.

Without this basic knowledge of the other's body, mutuality can't exist. The mutuality of lesbian sex affects excitement. One woman knows she may either simultaneously or sequentially be experiencing similar sensations. This alternating "power" role can be an important element. I use the term "power" as a created image playing out an aspect of sexuality. In lesbian sex, roles can be reversed. Each woman may get to experience both parts of this sex play in a unique way different from heterosex.

As a lesbian, I must be conscious of who I am. There are no single, simple answers to questions raised in discussing lesbian

sex. In fact, the more discussions the more questions seem to arise — this is how it should be.

While writing this, I thought about us as the group that Jill Johnston once described as the Lesbian Nation. The diversity of our sexual needs and desires should not make talking about our sexuality impossible. We are not all the same. Nor should people who comprise a nation be thought of as similar. The need to re-think old ideas is vital to our future lesbian lives. Our differences and similarities should encourage us to re-create and define our selves in a truer, more realistic, positive and energetic way.

1 Marilyn Frye, "Lesbian 'Sex'," in *An Intimate Wilderness*, ed. Judith Barrington (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1991), pp. 1-8.

2 Ariane Brunet, Louise Turcotte, "Separatism and Radicalism: An analysis of the differences and similarities," *For Lesbians Only, A Separatist Anthology*, ed. S. Hoagland, J. Penelope (London, England: Onlywomen Press, 1988), pp. 453-454.

3 Lyndall MacCowan, "Recollecting History, Renaming Lives: femme stigma and the feminist seventies and eighties," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston, MA: Allyson Publications, 1992), pp. 299-328.

4 Carole Vance, "Gender Systems, Ideology and Sex Research," in *Powers of Desire, The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon Thompson (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 375-376.

5 Monique Witting, *The Straight Mind* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992).

6 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

8 Julia Penelope, *Call Me Lesbian* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1992), p. 42.

Cherie Bowers

Fingers in Popcorn

The warm butter of your company
drips into my veins.

Can't believe I asked you
Can't believe you accepted
Can't believe we spent \$19.50
to ignore a movie.

Palms of my hands
sweat and throb
Popcorn balances between us
Fingers in,
Fingers out.
Fingers in,
Fingers out.

Fingers brush yours, with salty grease.

Say it. Say it. Say it.

Say, "I love you."

Say, "I want you."

Say, "I will never find anyone like you again."

Leaning across the bucket,
Shoulders pressing,
Ear angling to my lips,
Dark curls resting on my cheek.

Take a breath, Say it.
Swallow hard, Say It.
Wet the lips, SAY IT.

"I love M&Ms. Want any?"

Slip open the bag.
Fingers in,
Fingers out.

Suzanne

Opening Dialogue

In 1979 I was the only woman of color at my first "all-girl" party. I found myself openly staring at a 6'1", 250 lb. leather-bound southern butch woman who had a thick mustache, spiked hair and a dainty feminine name. I had never before known that a woman could look like that. I was repulsed. Even a little frightened. And suddenly very conscious of that prissy pink bow fastened to my dress. She caught me staring at her (while I was tugging off that femme bow) and she lumbered toward me. Afraid not to make conversation with this scary-looking woman, I asked her if a Black woman here might find a date. She drawled, Honey if they don't want you because you're Black then they don't really like wimmin!

I thought that made sense. I ended up leaving with *her!*



Jody

laser print

Juarez Hawkins

Donna Tanigawa

I Like My Chi-i-sa-i Body Now

Before time, I got plenny tings fo' feel shame. Whoevah said dat one Asian woman is exotic nevah come talk to me. Eh, I wish dat I was told my body was someting desirous. From small-kid time, I wen tink dat fo' be Japanee was fo' be kinda ugly. Mo' worse, I was kinda fat. Whoevah saw one not so skinny Japanee in da magazines at Tani's Superette? Not me. I nevah even see one Japanee in papa-san's dirty magazines (da ones under da sink across da Ajax). Wow, I nevah believe dat haole-folks wen tink Asian women stay exotic. Even okay looking. 'Ass why hard. Maybe my life would be different if I knew dis kine stuff. Maybe I would nevah try fo' look like one haole, yeah? Da kine, put Scotch tape on my eyelids fo' make 'um double. An' maybe I would nevah tink dat I had fo' go on one crash diet. Dis kine tinkin' wen make me hate myself.

I stay struggling now. My lover Lee-Ann tinks dat I got one great body. She loves da way my two chi-chis grew from one "almost A" fo' one cup size "C" in da last two years. Japanee women get small breasts, yeah? I used fo' tell her dat I wanted fo' kapu her chi-chis — cuz dey stay big.

Good fo' have Lee-Ann in my life. She safe fo' talk story wit at night. I tell her more an' more about my hanabata days as one kid in Waipahu. I wen grow up in one town where mostly had Pilipino folks, da sugar plantation, 'ass why. Da Pilipinos are da last group of labor immigrants fo' work in da cane fields in Hawai'i. I tell her any kine about my family. About my small-kid friends. Aftah about one year, I tell her about me, Donna.

Eh, I was one fat Japanee girl. I used fo' eat adult meals at Funaba's Family Restaurant. I ate plenny ono foods at home, too. I used fo' grind da New Year's mochi. Da rice all white an' soft. Only ting I had stuck doo-doo dat nevah like leave my okole-hole wen I ate too much mochi.

I tink dat my life wen change at Alphabet Land. I was da only

I tink dat my life wen change at Alphabet Land. I was da only fat kid in preschool. I began fo' feel shame about da size of my body. All da kids was skinny, I tink. I used fo' cry wen da kids call me "Donut" an' not Donna. "What did you do?" Lee-Ann ask me. I ate more. Mama-san wen tink dat one fat child was healthy.

At Alphabet Land, I wen fall in love wit my classmate Laurie, one haole girl. She wuz skinny an' had short blond hair. She ate plenny carrot sticks fo' lunch. I put myself on one diet so I could look like her. Just tink, one seven-year old kid going on one fuckin' diet in da 1970s. Geez, dis wuz even before health food was in da markets. I remembah, I wen make one list of all da fattening tings I ate an' had fo' stop eating. I wen write andagi, shrimp tempura, an' milk at da top of my list. Had about twenty foods I nevah like eat, bumbye I stay fat. Laurie was pretty an' had nice thighs dat kinda look like her carrot sticks.

I lost plenny weight. I came skinny, too. I noticed dat my school teacher wen tink dat I was so cute. She wen say dat I was "petite." Wow, I wen love Miss White dat year. Aftah I wen pull down, nobody called me "Donut" o' tease me. Mo' bettah I stay skinny, I wen tink.

So why, you ask, I no can believe dat me, one Asian woman, stay ono-looking? I nevah see da Hollywood movies of us-folks as Chinatown playtings, eh? I did. Or all da dirty magazines from Japan wit plenny beautiful naked women? I did. My uncle had some under his mattress. I tink dat fo' me, I wen always hate my body. First ting I was fat, den even as one "petite" girl, I still wen see myself as fat. Or at least not like da other girls. Maybe dats why my doctor wen tell my mother I was suffering from anorexia nervosa wen I went fo' my physical exam. I was one teenager an' my rags wen stop fo' tree months. No'ting. Not even enough fo' soil one Stayfree panty liner. Anyways, I liked fo' be skinny, just like Laurie.

I nevah tink dat I had problems. Laydahs in college, I nevah tink dat I suffered from one bad self-image. Only now, I can see dat I really wen hate my body. I stay 4 feet, 11 inches. I always weigh less dan 100 pounds, even before I get my rags. My waist stay 24 inches an' at least now, I get decent size chi-chis. So why I hate my body, you like ask? Ask, sistah.

I tink dat I nevah like feel good any more. Not only did I tink dat nobody wen like me cuz I was Japanee an' fat, but den I wen tink dat fo' be da kine "sexual" wuz shame. As one small girl, I used fo' play on da monkey bars aftah school. I used fo' hang real still, an' move my legs like one scissors. Back an' forth in da air. Felt good. Used fo' feel good right under my stomach. Sometimes mo' bettah play aftah drinking four glasses water. All da shi-shi made da feeling mo' strong. I had dis same feeling wen my penpal from da mainland came Hawai'i fo' da summer. We wen Eskimo kiss an' move our legs like on scissors until her aunty wen get all huhu about us. "Sick," I tink she wen yell at me.

So laytah wen Martin made da same feeling come fo' me, I wen tink, "Sick, Donna." He was my classmate in da sixth grade. He put anykine stuffs between my legs. Mostly his hands. I tink dats where I learned fo' leave my body in da canefields an' go someplace else, even if I wuz right deir wit him. I only had fo' tink dat I wuz someplace else, even if Martin was on top me.

So as one adult, I wen still hate my body. All da times dose haole men wen date me, I wen tink dat maybe they heard about me an' Martin. Silly, yeah? Here I wuz on da mainland far, far away from Hawai'i an' I wen tink dat some stupid childhood memory stay inform dese men. Maybe dey made me feel da same way, 'ass why. Eh, I was all prepared fo' be raped, I had my mind all psyched. I know it's not true, but I used fo' tink dat I was raped cuz it was easier fo' me, as opposed fo' some beautiful woman, fo' take rape. Da counselor used fo' tink dat I hated my body cuz my rapist wen violate me. True, da guy was one fuckin animal, but my small-kid days wen prepare me.

Now I like my body. I see dykes check me out. Especially wen I get all femme-out an' to go da women's bar in Waikiki. Lipstick an' heels. I tink dat da only really ugly ting about my body is da scar on my left forearm. Stay look like one mouth, all red on da inside an' thick brown on da edges. I wen make dis badge myself. Curling iron work good fo' craft 'um. I wen burn my arm every night. Den laytah, I used fo' peel off da scab an' swirl around whatevah flesh I could see. One time I wen even bite dat hole. But I no eat red meat too much. Only get stuck cuz Asian

peoples no can digest too much meat an' dairy products. I used fo' like lick da blood. All dis wen help me wit my pain. Fuck my arm, I wen tink. Da pain feels kinda good. I nevah feel "sick" like I did wen I wuz wit my penpal. (Secret-kine, felt kinda good wit my penpal.)

So wot, Donna? How you feel now? Tink you body still no good? No. I like who I am now. No big ting fo' be Asian, too. So wot my eyes no more space fo' fit eyeshadow. An' dat shit wen happen fo' my chi-i-sa-i body. Now I know dat it's no good fo' destroy my body. No starve or carve yo'self, Donna. No hurt anymore fo' look at myself in da mirror. My lover Lee-Ann make da space between my legs feel good. An' you know wot, sistah? I stay make dat place feel good, too. I make my whole body feel good. I eat andagi now.

Glossary of "Pidgin" Words

chi-i-sa-i: small; tiny, petite

before time/befo' time/befoah time: long time ago; earlier, formerly

Japanee: a person of Japanese ancestry

haole: Caucasian; white; Hawai'in for "foreigner"

chi-chi: female breasts

ono: delicious; tasty

ono-looking: beautiful; attractive

kapu: to reserve; to claim

hanabata days: childhood (literally, a time when you had hanabata, or mucus from your nose)

grind: eat

mochi: Japanese rice that is pounded and steamed/baked

okole-hole: anus

andagi: fried Okinawan doughnuts

bumbye: later on

pull down: lose weight

shi-shi: urine

huhu: upset

Arl Spencer Nadel

The Bus

Y
oung men on the bus
legs splayed wide
take up 2, 3 seats even,
Stare at you insolently
demanding their right
to take up as much space as possible.

Fat woman sits primly
Pulls in her folds
as tight as possible
takes up 1 1/4, 1 1/2
maybe 2 whole seats on the bus
ashamed, she stares out the window
and smashes herself even closer to it
if you sit next to her.

I've seen a full bus with boys taking up so much room
no one dares sit beside them
forcing them to take the real space
their skinny bodies require
I've heard and felt the sighs, the looks,
of resentment toward the fat woman
squishing her soul into a tiny space,
making room for some
disgusted skinny person.

You know buses were made by white men
for money
so's as many as possible can fit
on this cattle car for the poor.
And I know those white men
don't ride them.

Fat latina woman and
small asian woman
sit side by side
one takes up two thirds of the seat
the other's legs dangle in the air
I'm looking at all of us trying to fit ourselves
into some white man's image
I'm looking at all of us trying to survive
in this white man's world

And I wish I had the chutzpah
to spread my legs and
let my beautiful fat body expand
let my arms fall to my sides,
to stare insolently at
the disgusted thin people
and not care.

Elissa Raffa

Skinny Sisters

(The upstage wall is blank. There is a slide projector downstage right, which Elissa operates from stage and which can project an image onto the upstage wall or onto Elissa's body, when she steps into the beam. Music. Lights up on Elissa sitting in an overstuffed chair, downstage left, sorting through a box of slides, holding them up to the light. She wears leggings/long underwear, an oversized white t-shirt and a blue plaid flannel bathrobe. Photo albums, books and magazines are stacked and scattered by her feet. Other items on stage include a basket of unfolded laundry and an ironing board. A TV sits on the ironing board, the screen facing the audience. A continuous-loop videotape of images from diet commercials plays on the TV with no sound. Elissa turns on the slide projector. Music fades.)

(Slide on wall: Elissa with her grandmother, three sisters and the family dog)

1972. Grandma's eighty-fifth birthday party. I'm the chubby one in the long blue dress. Doesn't my grandmother look good? Let's see: that's the other fat sister, Gloria, hiding behind me. And my two skinny sisters, Maria and Angela on the left. The thing I love about this picture is how clear the rules are: fat girls wear granny gowns, only skinny sisters get to wear mini skirts. Or was that *have* to wear them? This rule wasn't particular to my family.

(Slide on wall: Elissa's grandmother with three other young women)

These are the three best friends my skinny sisters and I invited to my grandmother's party. As you can tell, the rules applied to them too.

I have only been skinny twice in my life. Well, I mean, I wasn't really skinny, but I felt skinny, relative to the other sizes I've been — or the one I am now. And both times I met with dizzying widespread approval.

(Slide on wall: Elissa in 1976, looking over her shoulder)

1976. My first skinny period, at age seventeen. I had mono. Every time I sat down, I fell asleep. I was completely inactive, but I was too busy sleeping to eat. Plus, I couldn't swallow. People told me I looked great: my sisters, my aunts and uncles, my teachers. Like I was doing something virtuous.

(Slide on wall: Elissa in 1986, blowing a kiss)

1986. This second skinny phase of my life — at 27 — is a little harder to explain, but I think I was in the midst of a brand new sexual infatuation. I was up all night almost every night, and then on top of it I worked a really demanding full-time job. Oh, yeah, and I biked 10 miles round-trip to work and back every day as long as the ground was dry. I guess I was sick a lot that year, too — from lack of sleep, maybe from neglecting my nutritional needs. So I started shrinking —

(Slides on wall: Elissa's face over different-size cut-out bodies)

— from size sixteen ... to fourteen ... to twelve. I even bought a size ten pair of pants, but — they were expensive pants. They would have been twelves at Target. You know that rich women's clothes are labeled a size or more smaller than inexpensive clothes? If you can pay fifty bucks for a pair of pants, you deserve to think you're a size ten.

The weird thing about this more recent skinny spell was the attention I got from certain lesbians. Not friends, but acquaintances, women on the edge of my circle of friends. Good, solid, politically aware, radical feminist, skinny sister dykes. This particular bunch of women had always struck me as kind of standoffish, a little snotty. And here they were, all of a sudden, with huge beaming smiles every time I got into line behind them at the coop.

(Slide on wall: a thin lesbian showing approval)

I didn't want to believe that they could be so shallow, but then I started growing again. This way. *(gestures side to side)* I don't know what happened. The sexual infatuation wore off. I started driving to work, instead of biking. I made it a priority to eat balanced meals and get a full night's sleep. I stopped getting sick. And these women — the dykes that had become friendly

overnight — just as suddenly, their smiles faded. Now when I see them at the co-op, they avert their eyes. Or they peer into my shopping basket to check out what groceries I'm buying.

(Slide on wall: a thin lesbian showing disapproval)

(Elissa takes off bathrobe.)

You know, I missed those approving smiles. For about five minutes, I actually thought of doing something — like dieting — to see if I could win them back again. I dismissed that thought pretty quickly. After all, I had my record to protect. I am thirty three years old, and I am proud to say that there are two things I have never done to my body: I have never dieted, and I have never shaved my armpits. *(shows armpit hair)* Not that I have anything against women who do; it's just when you've held out this long you don't want to blow it.

I *did* shave my legs for a while — in seventh grade. I was so sick of boys teasing me about being hairy, I begged my mother to let me start, first with that awful-smelling depilatory cream that lets you rinse off body hair and then with a delicate pink plastic razor. But by the end of that school year I had lost interest. It was 1971 in New York and there were all these really beautiful straight hippy women around. They were older than me and I thought if they don't have to shave I don't either. It just happens that I made that decision before I ever took a razor to my underarms.

(Slide on wall: diet ads with before and after pictures)

I don't think I *decided* not to diet; I think I just knew, instinctively, that it wasn't going to work. Oh, sure, I read the backs of magazines.

(Elissa walks into the projector beam so that the "before" image is projected onto her shirt. She imitates the slouched posture of the model.)

I was allured by the thought of changing from this —
(She jumps to get the "after" image onto her shirt, and imitates the corresponding coquettish posture.)

— to this. But my better judgment told me it wasn't worth the money or the effort. I could tell they were trying to make me think badly of myself.

(She shuts off the projector.)

I could smell a scam. So I didn't tinker with my body. ... Sometimes I feel like I'm supposed to apologize for that ... and for eating in public.

(Elissa begins to eat an apple.)

I hear women do it all the time: I'm just eating because I skipped both breakfast and lunch. I'm eating now because I won't get a chance to eat later. We're supposed to explain away our desires. Prove that we care about looking good. Pretend that we're really committed to controlling our bodies. As if that's possible — or desirable.

I remember reading a *New York* magazine in the mid-seventies with a big, splashy cover story about how medical research proved that 99% of the time reducing diets don't work. It was one of my skinny sisters, Maria, who showed me the article. Maria is a graphic artist and a tile setter and people underestimate her intelligence all the time. When we were kids she gave me a lot of shit about how my being fat was an embarrassment to her, but ever since she read that article about how we all have different set points, she hasn't breathed a word about me being "overweight." Not to me, anyway. The whole tone of the article was that this new information about the failure of diets would be quite a blow to women, but when I read it I felt sweet, warm relief. Here was official permission to live in my body, to not even bother to fight with it. To not see food as my enemy. Hallelujah.

Of course there were still a ton of rules about what was acceptable to wear. You know these rules, don't you?

(Elissa turns the slide projector back on, and steps into the beam of the "before" image. The next series of slides are patterns taken from everyday objects such as venetian blinds and projected onto Elissa's shirt.)

(slide) No horizontal stripes — *(slide)* — just vertical. *(slide)* No loud splashy colors — *(slide)* — a solid dark color is best. Oh, and if you're short, like me, never wear contrasting shirt and pants. *(slide)* It cuts you right here. *(gestures)*

(Slide on wall: Elissa's grandmother in 1950)

In the Italian neighborhood where I grew up there were all these old women around, wearing black for mourning. At least I thought it was for mourning. Maybe they were fashion victims too. My grandmother's husband died of a heart attack in 1944. She always wore blue and violet dresses with flowers and paisleys, never solid black. I thought she didn't wear black because she was too young to act like her life was over just because her husband died. But maybe she was intentionally defying fat sister fashion rules. Maybe wearing all those colors was her way of saying (*struts*) look at my curves. Or — why go out of your way to look like you're starving when you're not?

(Slide on wall: *Laina Pecora with her legs in the air. Elissa gets on floor and imitates the pose.*)

This is Laina Pecora. Isn't she pretty? She's a strong woman — principled. I read about her in *People* magazine. She was a rising star in the fashion model industry but she refused to give up eating. It says right here, she enjoys food too much to just pick at lettuce like the other models do. When she got *all the way up* to 155 pounds she got fired. Actually, she was given a choice: diet her way back down to 110 pounds or cancel her contract. She gave up a kabillion-dollar-a-year contract, just for the right to stay a size twelve.

But, the righteous are rewarded. It's not like she's not working, although she did suffer quite a salary reduction — from a kabillion dollars to a few hundred thousand. You know what she's doing? Modeling clothes for Lane Bryant, the women's clothing retailer that specializes in sizes 16 to 28. So whenever I go in there to check out what would look good on me in size 18, there are black-and-white pictures of Laina all over the store.

(Slide on wall: *interior of Lane Bryant*)

There she is in a plunging V-neck cable-knit sweater. There she is in stretch pants. There she is in a silk thigh-length tunic. I always wonder: do they make a special little size 12 version of everything they sell, just for her photo shoots? More than that I wonder: Why do they have a skinny sister modeling large women's clothes? Buy this imitation Navaho pattern oversized camp shirt and you'll look like Laina?

(Elissa shuts off slide projector and starts folding clothes.)

I have to stop trashing Lane Bryant. After all, how many places do middle class fat women have to shop? If you're poor, of course, it's worse. I mean check out how many size 18 or size 24 items turn up on the racks at the Salvation Army. Like one a year? But my problem is having the money I have for clothes burn a hole in my pocket before I find anything that looks good. This is compounded by the fact that I'm under five foot two and all the clothes in large sizes are designed for tall women. You know, "weight proportional to height" as those dykes who write personal ads are so fond of saying these days. So, being disproportional, I find a pair of pants here, a shirt there, once in a while, maybe once every six months, but before I know it, they're worn out and I'm looking again. I don't even have to dress up for work: jeans and a t-shirt are fine, as long as they're not ripped.

One day I was downtown and I caught myself ravenously staring at skinny women. It was sort of embarrassing. Then I thought about it and I realized: I *didn't* want to look like them; I *wasn't* sexually attracted to them; I was *jealous* that their clothes fit so well. (*holds up pair of jeans*) How's this for an energy drain? I am *constantly* thinking about what am I going to do when this pair of pants gets shredded from one too many trips through the washing machine. Don't tell me to buy another pair in the same style. The manufacturer has discontinued it. So in spite of all my righteousness about not watching TV or reading mainstream magazines, I do frequent large women's clothing stores. Frequently. And I know a lot about them.

(Elissa turns on the slide projector and begins a lecture about the 50% of U.S. women who are size 16 and up; the way clothes are marketed to large women; the minuscule percent of floor space in major department stores devoted to large women's clothes; the inane text in large size store catalogs; the kind of clothes sold in large sizes, and the quality; and about "the look" — contrary to the old rules it is now mandatory for large women to wear bright splashy prints and large metallic objects. She illustrates the lecture with more slides of everyday objects projected onto her t-shirt: floral couch fabric, a potted plant, etc. She pretends to be

trying on different clothes — asking “How do I look?”, tugging at the shirt, etc.)

(She steps out of the projector beam.)

I'd go to work naked if I could. I already hang around my house naked all the time so I don't wear out my few items of clothes.

One day I was in a fat woman clothes store and I was just feeling belligerent, so I asked the skinny sister sales clerk why they fold up pants on the hangers so they look really tiny and you can't flip through the rack fast and see how clothes are tailored. You have to waste time shopping that could be better spent on art or revolution. I see her sizing me up. Uh, oh, I imagine her thinking, here's another one of those fat-liberation-be-proud-of-your-body-type customers. The kind that doesn't appreciate how lucky they are to even *have* a store that caters to them.

I figure she's going to tell me about saving space and how many fewer carousels would fit in the store if they used bigger hangers. But no, she's got a better explanation. It's about keeping the clothes from looking all droopy on the hanger. Then she glances around, to make sure we're the only ones in the store, and she gets this look on her face like she's just eaten a frog.

Imagine, she says, how much fabric goes into a size twenty eight — and how *ugly* it would look drooping off the hanger.

(Slide on wall: a thin lesbian showing disgust)

I'm supposed to be grateful that I'm not a size twenty eight. I just walked out. I gotta save my energy for family get-togethers.

My skinny sister Angela thinks that “fat” is a dirty word, an acceptable insult to hurl at someone who has crossed her, like men on the street, or our oldest sister who really *is* bad news, for entirely unrelated reasons. Kind of like the word “Jew,” which is Angela's favorite slam against her ex-husband.

Don't say that, I told her, it perpetuates hatred. She didn't want a “politically correct” lecture, but she did stop using “Jew” around me. She never did use it around her Jewish friends, of course. Still she was really stubborn about giving up “fat.”

Don't say that, I tried again, it hurts me.

I don't think of you as fat, she said, which isn't even true.

But I have to deal with it in the street. Fat cunt. Fat bitch. Fat cow. Fat dyke. Ugly dog. Ugly pig. Fat is just a fact. It's not a character flaw. So why do you talk like it is?

We were screaming. Her boyfriend had to step in and tell her I was right. So, she cleaned up her act a little. But she still advises me to buy sweaters on sale that don't fit me because maybe I can put them away until I lose weight. She never read the famous *New York* magazine diet issue, or Fat Liberation pamphlets. She still believes fat is a tragedy, or at least a sign of psychological inferiority.

She thinks our oldest sister — the one we don't like — that her teenage daughters are fat because they're fucked up from living with their mother.

Do you think I'm fucked up?

No, she says.

Then why equate being fat with having psychological problems?

Well, she says, you have to admit that people eat compulsively.

But some compulsive eaters are skinny. And some fat people eat as little as you do.

We were sharing a plate of fried calamari in a Greek restaurant and I hoped to God I hadn't eaten more than my share.

Well, you have to admit that people gain weight when they start eating more than they used to.

Angela, I don't eat any more than I used to. Maybe less. If I gained weight in the past three years it's because I stopped riding my bike to work. Because I spend more of my spare time sitting and writing. So I get less exercise? That doesn't make me fucked up.

Well, you have to admit that people exercise because they care about their health.

People exercise because it's easier to join the Y than to change the world.

(To the audience) If I decided to really care about my health you know what I would do? I'd spend all my spare time doing research, writing letters, making phone calls and sitting in legislative hearings to try and shut down the garbage burner. I'd wage a one-woman war against industrial pollution and agricultural pesticides. And I wouldn't get skinny doing it.

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Susan and Susan at Let It All Hang Out Day, SF, 1989

photograph
Jane Philomen Cleland

Arl Spencer Nadel

6/29/92

She walks across the field
tall skinny gangly woman
someone I don't know
who I've known for 9 years
Neck held up by white brace
muscles too destroyed by the diet
to function.

Only reason I recognize her
is the brace and the ex-lover
by her side.
I can't look at her,
can't bear to see and yet not see
the casualty she's become.

Dieted to get that job
to end the endless hatred
of her body and her self
bought that leather jacket
got that tenure track position
had tachycardia
and her neck go out because her muscles were so eaten away.

I don't recognize the face without softness
nor the arms that look like skin
barely stretched over bones.

And what's hardest is I don't recognize the friend
I once held so dear.
What I recognize is the loss
and the aching grief.

What I understand
is in this world

my reaction is outrageous.

The world sees a woman who's finally won

won thinness

won a job

won at life.

What I do know is another beautiful fat dyke

has been lost

her life shortened

by who knows how much.

And my friend has lost most of herself

to feel able to survive.

And I am in mourning.

Kelly Jean Cogswell

Chronic Blues

I lose my body day by day.
I've watched it happen seven years.
My skin is torn with tattered rage.

My face begins to split like faces
stretched out queer with constant fevers.
I lose my body day by day.

Doctors fail like childish faith,
prescribe, pronounce, refuse to hear
my skin is torn with tattered rage.

I need protection — leather and chains?
Do blood cells die by what I wear?
I lose my body day by day.

I'll try a biker's jacket, snake
skin boots, a distant, careless, uncared for
look. My skin is torn with rage.

I'm sick of stethoscopes and plastic saints,
Take your pills, Overcome, Persevere:
I lose my body day by day.
My skin is torn with rage.

Chaia Zblocki Heller

i don't touch my breasts anymore

i don't touch my breasts anymore.
those impossible curves, too steep for my hands.
and all those oblong, invisible lumps
rolling along inside me like land mines.
all that searching and probing,
always scanning for a pebble, a tiny marble,
some sign that would send me running
with both hands flailing,
slipping across the blue tile of a laboratory
to pose in front of some gigantic, eyeless camera,
the broad creases under my breasts
smiling their last round of "cheese"
to the tired, pale faced nurse

the fear of some man
flashing his steel and cutting into me
as if into a stick of butter, slicing away
a whole portion of my life:
i spent my entire twelfth year
pumping my arms and praying
to fill the lavender leotard
i stole from my big sister's drawer

the part of me that most matches my mother,
those too familiar, rose-centered rises
softer and more wondrous
than any planet known to man.
i don't touch my breasts anymore.
i have surrendered them up,
pawned them off
for a small piece of mind.

Dion Farquhar

Left Us Talking

For Vivian and Gene

I've been on the wrong end
of every statistic
she said, trying to decide
among all the options
she knew meant no choice.
To shrink the tumors

on her spine. Radiation
in New York or an experimental
chemo combo in Houston
going for systemic
remission. They've got
a grant, she said,

they tell you straight out
it might kill you or
make you lose your mind.
Friends and parents
said fight for time
so not wanting to, she left

her city, went to Houston
leaving us to phone.
It's a cancer industry,
she said, there's a whole
building just for kidneys.
Always the same smart

snit and lip, tough voice
unchanged and the sound
of the strong suck
on the cigarette

exactly three days
before she died, an hour

on the phone. Tell me about you,
she said, not much to say
from here, before her fade
into sleeping pill slur
but insisting, Don't come.
I'll be back in a week.

Then her dying, talking in her sleep
in the motel where she spent
two days every week, out
patient with her mother
waiting for it to be over
to get home to New York



Woman in Red Cap
charcoal
Louise Gilbert

Angela Koenig

from *Meaning and Myth in Menopause*

Introduction

Nearly forty million U.S. women are about to go through menopause — what has been a private passage is about to become a generational journey. Menopause often signals a crisis in meaning for women who undergo the process in this European-derived culture that demeans women generally and mocks menopausal women in particular. Yet there is evidence for a lost heritage in European history and prehistory, for a time when older women were respected figures of authority in their communities. The following is a condensed chapter from *Meaning and Myth in Menopause*. I wrote this book to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about menopausal women, and I hope it will sound a note of encouragement, even of welcome, because there is ample reason to believe that menopause can be a time of renewal and revitalization. The medical industry, aware of the enormous profit potential, has targeted us but we need not become their market for drugs and intervention. Menopause can be a bridge from life as a personal quest to a time of communal purpose and engagement. This will surely be more fully envisioned in the next two decades as millions are changed by and change menopause.

from *A Lost Heritage*

A curious theory is often repeated during discussions of menopause: not until this century have women lived long enough to go through menopause, and this is why medical science understands so little about the process. This theory serves the patriarchy; it trivializes women's experience by suggesting a longer life is an easy price to pay for a little discomfort, and it promotes an image of the culture as benign and caring if given the opportunity. Very few physical conditions were "understood" before this century, and women have grown old in all cultures, and in all times.

There is a silence around menopause that feels strange, like a silence that tells a child she has come close to where a secret is concealed. Maybe this feeling can be explained by the reluctance of older women, in the past, to discuss physical matters with young women and girls, but I believe the silence is more charged.

Deliberate erasure and not neglectful ignorance caused menopause to disappear from public view within the European tradition. A long and extremely rich past in which older women were figures of authority in all spheres of personal and community life has been lost, and this is a past that began long before the classical Greeks and Romans.

The Neolithic is widely understood to have been a peaceful time. Nearly all who write about this time comment on the lack of evidence for aggression and violence. It is also a time when life on earth was understood through representations of goddesses. "The moon's three phases — new, waxing, and old — are repeated in trinities or triple-functional deities that recall these moon phases: maiden, nymph, and crone; life-giving, death-giving, and transformational; rising, dying, and self-renewing. ... The concept of regeneration and renewal is perhaps the most outstanding and dramatic theme that we perceive in this symbolism."¹

We lost more than stories when the goddesses and their meanings disappeared from our common and ready understanding. We lost a body of metaphors for self awareness, for growth, for connectedness, for metaphysical consciousness. I mean this phrase most literally: a body of metaphors. A woman's body. We use the phrase "body politic" and there is no doubt that the body meant is a male body. Think how differently we might relate to public life if this metaphor evoked a female body. Then we might have very different ideas of creativity, of civic responsibility, of connection, of purpose and transformation.

The menopausal body has the potential to signify renewal, rebirth and revitalization, but in our cultural context, these meanings are utterly denied. Menstrual blood was once thought to be the source of a woman's power; when we spoke of being related by blood, we meant the mother's blood. A menopausal woman was understood to be all the more powerful because

once she no longer bled, she retained her power for herself. Thus a woman, in effect, gives birth to herself at menopause, and I find a wonderful energy in this concept. "The original Crones of the matriarchal community," writes Barbara Walker, "were women past the age of menopause, in whom the blood of life no longer appeared outside the body.... [I]t was usually described as wise blood, and old women were described as the wisest of mortals.... [O]fficial opinion about witches included the assertion that their magic powers resulted from permanent retention of their lunar blood within their bodies."²

The crone as a mythological figure not only affirms the presence of older women in the past, but she also redirects and trains our ability to see women within the cultures where they were regarded with respect. The crone is not a single goddess, but many, and among her names are Kali, Demeter, Cerridwen, Baubo, Holda, Hekate, Erda — and each of these names, from a wide range of cultures, focuses on a different power. In our ancestral cultures, for example, measurement was a most sacred function, and it was the natural function of women; measure, month, menses, moon — these words derive from the same root. We may even have artifacts from the Paleolithic that measured the lunar cycle.

We do have an image of the crone in our culture, and she comes from much more recently than our Neolithic past. The figure of the witch, I believe, knows why silence surrounds menopause. The culture and communities of Old Europe, the name Marija Gimbutas gives to the pre-patriarchal lands, did not end with the Greeks and Romans. "There is no question that Old European sacred images and symbols remain a vital part of the cultural heritage of Europe. Most of us were surrounded in childhood by the fairy world, which contained many images transmitted from Old Europe."³ The continuity of tradition lived not only in symbols and stories but also in the arrangements of daily life. Carolyn Merchant gives us a sense of the life of Europe's peasantry: "The earliest agrarian communities ... have been called 'territorial communes.' Whereas each family farmed its own individual plot, all those living in the community's territory shared its natural resources: forests, pastures and water.

...Peasant jurisdiction and self-regulation of these common lands exemplified an interaction between individual needs and those of the group as a whole."⁴ Women were as central to these peasant communities as they had been in Old Europe.

A terrible gulf now lies between us and knowledge of our lost heritage as menopausal women, and this gulf is a centuries-long convulsion of terror. "History" calls these centuries the High Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation, Age of Discovery, Age of Reason, and most ironically, the Enlightenment, but in women's history these are the Burning Times. When they began, the pagan, goddess-centered, woman-honoring traditions of the Old Religion were still strong and vital in the daily lives of rural people. Nine million people were murdered for being witches, and almost seven million of these were women. When the Burning Times ended, a Christianized patriarchy had uprooted an ancient and generous culture, and sown in its place fields of ignorance, selfishness, cruelty and fear.

The Burning Times were a complex exercise of woman-hating, power politics, religious persecution and class warfare. "In 1585," Carolyn Merchant reports, "two villages in the Bishopric of Trier in Germany were each left with only one female inhabitant. ... Not only were the majority of accused persons women, the victims were primarily people in the lowest social orders, even though witchcraft beliefs were popular on all levels of society."⁵ Greed also played an important part since the property of the accused witch was shared out to the accuser and public officials. Still, there can be little doubt that the older woman was the primary target of the persecutions. The popular culture figure of the Halloween witch is presented as a deeply frightening caricature of evil — the crazy, ugly, wicked and dangerous old witch. This hag is what became of the wise woman of the older cultures. Patriarchal propaganda and terror erased our memory.

Jean Shinoda Bolen makes the connection more explicit between the persecution of the Burning Times and the silence about menopause: "[F]or a period of 300 years, just about every eccentric old woman was burned as a witch. Any woman who was a midwife was the first to go. And if you weren't a midwife, but you were an herbalist, if you were looked to by anyone as

having knowledge, you became a threat and the Inquisition would come for you. ... So we have that in our collective psyches, a recollection of what autonomy and wisdom and eccentricity might bring to you as you become older ... a death sentence."⁶

Thought of in generations, this women's holocaust did not take place so very long ago. I estimate it possible that my grandmother's grandmother might have known people who witnessed the burning of a witch. Alice Miller has written that inter-generational communication does not need to be explicit, that fears and silences masking deep feelings can be communicated implicitly. Body knowledge is often passed on even though the reasons are lost, and a mother would have kept silent to protect a daughter: the Inquisition burned children and animals if they were thought to have been corrupted by witchcraft. After the witches were burned, the murderers wrote the history books. The persecution of Europe's wise women seared the soul of Western peoples, and patriarchal power was consolidated through a reign of terror that still leaves women stunned.

Menopause has been used by a woman-hating culture as one more channel through which we can be demeaned. Let us, instead, look to menopause as a time to revitalize and inform images with meaning and renew our sense of purpose through community.

¹ Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 316.

² Barbara Walker, *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom and Power* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 49.

³ Gimbutas, *Language of the Goddess*, p. 320.

⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁶ Jean Shinoda Bolen, "The Wisewoman Archetype: Menopause as Initiation." Audiotape, Sounds True Catalog, Boulder, CO, 800-333-9185. From the University of California Berkeley Extension Symposium: "Women's Lives: The Quest for Self," San Francisco, March 16, 1991.

jill falzoi

dying to

I sat on a wooden swing and kicked up my legs like when I was a kid, trying to swing over the bar and wrap around it. I thought I was going to die very soon, so when I kicked my legs up I put all my life energy into that swing. I let the wind untie the ribbon from my hair and then my hair was all over the place, sticking to my face and flying up around my head like a tornado.

I felt my back throbbing after a while, and I stopped pumping my legs so hard. Then I stopped pumping at all, leaving them straight out in front of me so they wouldn't drag on the ground. As the swing carried me gently on smaller and smaller arcs, I could feel the heaviness of my body against the wooden seat. I leaned into the chain until eventually the swing swayed to rest. Then I sat still and thought about my mother.

My mother is always talking about death. When she gets mad at me she doesn't yell, she just says something like "you'll be the death of me," or "what are you trying to do, kill me?" And then she won't talk to me for a day, or a week if I've done something she considers really bad. Like the time I cut off all my cat Miniow's fur.

The strange thing about my mother is that I think I already have been the death of her. She told me that when I was born she looked at my father and said, "oh, what a big fat baby girl." And now all she ever says is "oh." She says "oh" to everything that happens whether it is bad or good. When I got moved up a grade in school she said, "oh, well, I guess you'll have to work harder, now." And when my rabbit, Fredricka, got run over she just said, "oh, that's how it goes." Sometimes it makes me really mad and I yell at her, but she never responds then either. Or she says, "you drive me to drink," or something.

Maybe I am the result of all the pain inside my mother just welling up and bursting out in the form of a baby. Does she want

me to jump back in? My mother looks at me and sees her pain and she can't put me back into herself because all she can do is make that circle with her mouth and say "oh." I want to comfort us both, but I don't know how.

Then there is my father. One night she was talking in that whisper-mean voice she uses when most people would have been bellowing like an inferno — "You're just a killer in the bedroom, aren't you? That's what women think. That'll be the night, when you kill me in the bedroom. Maybe some night I'll just be stone-dead for you. Or maybe just stone-dead." My father didn't answer, or if he did, I didn't hear the response. I think, actually, my mother was just stone-drunk.

Anyway, that happened over two months ago, and I push my desk in front of my bedroom door at night. My mother says it's a fire hazard. If there was a fire I would jump out the window, I told her. It's a quicker way out than through the hallway. She said I'd probably break a leg that way. But I said a broken leg is better than being burned up. She just said, "oh," as usual. But really, I just don't want my father to kill me in my bedroom.

When I stood up from the swing I thought it was all over. The ground took a terrible tilt to the left, and my legs just gave out beneath me. I fully expected the ground to open up and take me, but as I sat there I felt the ground shift back, and my legs begin to pulse with life. The pulsing began in my feet and then pulsed all the way up my thighs to that empty pained place in my belly. I felt my belly shaking like my soul was in there, trying to kick out. I just sat there and the feeling passed.

A group of public school kids walked by with their teacher. They were loud and didn't walk in a straight line like we were taught in Catholic school. One boy was even kicking another. I recognized him. He lived on my street and always sneered at me. I hated him. The teacher didn't do anything. If Sr. Mary Francis were there she would have whacked them both. I sat frozen, waiting to be discovered and ridiculed for my uniform, but they were already gone. No one noticed me.

I wondered if I was already dead, and thus invisible. I wanted to cry because I felt so lonely and the pain hadn't even

gone away. I could imagine all the invisible dead people now trying to reach inside me and take my soul away with them. My body felt too heavy and wanted to sink right into the ground. And I felt the ground wanting to cover my body up.

I forced myself from the ground and went to the cheese, which is a small cement cave with several holes in it. I didn't want anyone to see my dying and then take the experience away from me. Like my mother saying oh. If anyone found me and said, "oh, you're dying," that would just kill me.

From inside the cheese my whole body felt like an infection. The cave seemed to press and swell around me, and I was definitely getting heavier. When I had an infection in my foot last year from stepping on a nail my foot felt heavy and swollen like this. My mother put hydrogen peroxide on it to kill the infection and it felt like she was burning my whole foot off. I was screaming like a wild horse. My father had to hold me down, and he hit me because I kicked my mother in the face with my living foot.

I wonder if death is that painful.

I feel my underwear full of blood. It is seeping through my skirt and soaking into the dirt underneath me. It is warm, wet and sticky between my legs. The blood is coming out of the same hole that opened on my mother to say "oh" and pop me out. But I'm not saying oh, and I know because I will never, ever, ever say "oh" to pain, whether it is my own pain, or the pain of anyone else. My hole is heavy and swollen and bleeding. I fold my arms over my chest and wait.

I dream I am walking along a river and it is dusk. There are boats passing by with strange sails that are shaped like cartoon characters. I see Mickey Mouse and he waves at me. Suddenly there is an army tank in the river. Then I notice all the boats are really army tanks disguised as cartoon characters. The characters look mean, now. They have guns.

I hear air raid sirens and I run along the street looking for my school desk to hide under. I cannot find it, I cannot even find my school. I don't recognize the streets.

There is a light-brown cat in front of me, and I pick her up. She has spiked fur, but it is very soft. She starts purring, and her

purr is like a motor which lifts me off the ground. I hold the cat in front of me and she flies me over the water where the ships and tanks are.

When I hear shots I know they are trying to shoot us down. I hold the cat close. Every time she is shot she swells and carries me higher over the water. I am scared because the cat is a bloody mess in my hands and the bigger she gets the lighter she is and the more blood and I am afraid she is going to die and I don't know how to fly by myself.

Then she bursts and I fall out of the sky with blood spraying all around me. I land on a mountain, there are people watching me. I realize I have lived here before. That I went away and forgot to come home. How could I forget, I wonder, as I am surrounded and embraced by so many loving faces?

I see someone standing apart, and I know it is my mother. I remember you, I remember. I begin to sing in a strange and familiar language and although I do not know what it means, I know the song by heart. My mother smiles. I think I have never seen such a beautiful and ancient woman. I want my face to crease like hers.

My mother's arms enclose me. She speaks softly in my ear, but I do not understand her words. Her breath is warm and I am soothed by her voice. Then I hear her turn the words to my child language, "I have loved you always in pain, child." I see myself in her eyes, wet and melting. When she kisses me straight on my lips I am laughing, relieved to die.

Then as though I am being attacked, I wake to swords piercing through my left side. My body feels as if someone is pressing me into the ground and I am ready for the ground to shift, make a space for me, and then cover me afterwards. I want to go back to my real mother. To the beautiful woman who doesn't say "oh," who kisses me instead.

I reach my hand for the blood — "Elisabeth, I anoint thee." I smear the blood into a cross on my forehead, "full of grace," I make a cross on my lips. "Blessed art thou," I make the cross on my throat and reach for more blood, "among women," I rub a circle onto my left palm. "And blessed is the fruit," a circle in my

right palm, "of thy womb," under my blouse, a circle on my heart. I press both hands into the blood and raise them to my lips — "Elisabeth."

I taste my salt-and-blood soul slipping through my fingers. I am leaving my dying body, my aching dying body, with blood upon my tongue and my hands. My lips are light but my soul is pulsing, filling, dropping lower and lower until it will burst through the opening that will never say oh, will never have a chance to say oh, and I am glad. I am glad to die bleeding, rather than die from a stopped up soul. I want my death to be beautiful.

It hurts. I start to cry. I think I am being wrung out from the inside. Soon there will be nothing left. I cannot take it anymore. I want my death to come, please, please touch me. I want my mother.

I stumble my way home. It is dark and I can hardly see for the tears. When I reach my street I am running, and I burst into the living room. My mother is sitting, nursing a drink and doing a crossword puzzle. My father is reading the newspaper. "Where were you?" she asks without looking up. I stand still, not quite believing I am there.

"What happened to you?" I hear my father ask, and then, "Greta, you'd better take care of her." My mother looks up.

"What'd you do, kill someone?"

"Greta, take care of her," my father says again, his voice sharp as a knife.

She takes me to the bathroom and washes my face and hands. She doesn't say anything, not even one caustic remark. She just takes the washcloth and scrubs me hard. I stand wincing from the cold cloth, but other than that I feel totally numb. Even the cramping seems far away. All I can think of is how cold the tile floor feels beneath my feet. How I thought that by now I could have been under that cold ground.

"Here," she says, pressing a white rag into my limp hand. "That goes down there. Between your legs."

I put it there and feel the spasming again. "It hurts."

"You bet it does." She reaches into the cabinet for a bottle of aspirin. "Here," she says, shaking two into my hand. There is

still a streak of blood on my hand which she wipes away with the washcloth.

I take the aspirin with water, cupped in my hands from the faucet. I don't say anything, because I am not sure anymore what to say. Am I dying, or not? Does my mother know?

"This is it," I hear my mother answer. This is what it is to be a woman. This is the curse of being a woman."

I open my mouth to say something, but nothing comes out.

"The curse," she continues. "You'll get it every month now. You learn to live with it."

But I didn't want to live with it. I wanted to die with it. What was happening? I do not believe my mother. I do not believe it is not my soul crying out inside me, bleeding and throbbing in the lonely pain of my body, wanting to get out, get free, fly away home.

I do not hear her as she accompanies me to my bed, telling me about boys and men and pregnancy and sluts. I do not hear her because I want only to hear my own voice, the voice from underneath. It is pulsing with life life life life and death confused in the life and I want to be alone to sort it out.

My mother kisses me good-night on my forehead. Then she leans over and says in my ear, "Don't tell your father, but I'm glad you've been born a woman. I'm proud of you, girl!"

I nod, knowing another voice more powerful than hers. I hear my own voice saying dying to dying dying to and like my heart beating, I feel my soul beating, stomping, screaming, and I know the pain will never well up inside me like a baby, because the pain is bleeding out, will always bleed out of me because I am dying to live through it.

Connie Meredith

Wild Woman

I am reading about Wild Women
and smoothing my
lady mustache some
twelve hours
after making love when
my clit twitches
because her juice
dried in knuckle folds.
I pause
to agree: wildness is a force
I cannot live without
and inhaling,
pick up her scent.

Julia (Dolphin) Trahan

Queen of the Girls

My mother says I was born masturbating. All mothers embarrass their children by telling of some adorable act or endearing habit. But my mother talks about my inherent sexual narcissism at dinner parties. She tells it to my friends, says it in front of my sister's boyfriend. She even told our real estate agent.

I've asked her to stop. She just giggles merrily. I have such a cute mom. I love her very much. I figure she can't help herself.

Actually, I don't mind that she publicly talks of what is usually considered a private act. She's making a political statement. My grandmother the Baptist told her people with disabilities — survivors of traumatic accidents and chronic pain — don't have sexualities. My grandmother said, "It's such a shame. She was such a pretty girl."

My co-worker tells me people born with a leg too short don't think about wild fucking in the back of pick-up trucks or chasing a beloved, naked in a field or holding the hand of a lifetime lover, trembling in fear at a scary movie. He says if they think these things, it certainly shouldn't be said out loud. And, he says, desires are disgusting to act upon if you are hideously disfigured. Such as having one leg too short.

All sorts of people think about sexuality. Trust me. They do. Take me, for instance. Hit by a truck at age eleven. Mangled and mutilated by a truck. Lost a lot of things: 20/20 vision, the use of my left side, the ability to speak or swallow. Even lost my life and rose from the dead, just like Jesus Christ. But that good ol' ever-flowing life juice, erotic sexuality, never left for a moment.

Being born masturbating saved me. A girl needs to have control of her body if she wants to survive in this world.

As a toddler, my parents tell me I'd masturbate everywhere: in the kitchen, the living room, the park. My favorite story is how,

at age two, the evening of Neil Armstrong's moon launch, I snuck champagne sips from grown-up's glasses and put on a show in front of the TV. My parents scooted me into another room saying, "That's a private act."

Older, and less exhibitionistic, I'd rock on my bed at night dreaming elaborate fantasies. The usual theme was, I, Queen of the Girls, and my favorite Knights had been captured by renegade boys trying to conquer our majestic empire. We'd be tied up, spread-eagled and fucked in every opening, every way my eight year old mind could imagine. All the boys wanted to fuck me 'cause I was Ruler of the Kid World, the fastest, the smartest and the strongest. Only the boy Kings and Lords dared to fuck me, and I got fucked the most, the longest and the hardest.

When satiated by enough sucking, fucking and Shakespearian drama, I and my band of merry Knights would easily overthrow the boys. Then, dance back to the girl's camp. We'd dance and sing recklessly, eat and make love in glorious celebration of our divinely female victory. We never took prisoners. Who would want them?

I spent fantastic childhood nights this way. Sometimes, after school, I couldn't wait for dark. I'd sneak down to the basement, lie on my belly next to my sister's waterbed rocking gently, hands between my legs. Until she interrupted.

"What are you doing!?"

She was in junior high school and masturbation wasn't cool. After that I took cold showers in the dark. I loved that moment when ice hit skin. My body spasming and squirming in painful euphoria. My heart tangoed. Leaving the world of a spinning, slightly moldy, metal shower stall. Entering a world of brightly lit blackness. Underwater no one lied, and freedom was possible.

This sacrament proved that I was rightfully Queen of the Girls. I was tough. I knew what mattered.

When doctors told my mother across my hospital bed that I wouldn't recover this or that, or at all, I knew they were mistaken. I was Majesty of the World, Queen of the Girls. I'd escape victoriously when tired of being fucked by boys.

Being born masturbating saved me. Sometimes pain from crushed bones — head to toe — was too much. Orgasmic energy made my body bearable. Waves of electricity washing and soothing my overstimulated burning nerves. My temperature 104 day after day. Only certain thing was, if I didn't die from internal bleeding, time would pass, painfully. Masturbating I'd ward off panic. Pass the time by shooting my psyche into worlds where I valiantly rode blue stallions on untouched ocean shores.

My hormones didn't slip out on wasted blood. I learned egotistical doctors pay attention and answer questions when flirted with. Nurses and therapists, objects of passionate crushes, made me classical music tapes and hot tea, tucking me into bed extra carefully, if I stared adoringly into their eyes.

I wasn't aware that I didn't have or wasn't supposed to have a sexuality. The three female nurses that stuck fingers and washcloths up my vagina and anus, pinning my dying body still, the Urologist who stuck his cock-level fingers in the same holes, staring lustfully into my little girl eyes, the teenage nurse's aid who rubbed my breasts while I lay immobilized, recovering from my twelfth surgery — these people knew I had a sexuality.

A disposable sexuality, like used snot rags. The user is remotely aware that used tissues are infected with human waste and can be tossed away without remorse. Aware enough to be disgusted.

As cruel as the package given me, at least I was allowed a sexuality.

As a teen, when not in the hospital, I went to Catholic high school. Devoutly against Catholicism, and not being Catholic, I felt comfortably alienated. Proudly spoke of my bisexuality. My streetwise cigarette buddy, Jolie, tried to rip my shirt off, her knee in my crotch, my wheelchair waiting patiently outside the bathroom stall. I joined the Catholics, repressing my sexuality.

Freedom!!! Eighteen, grown-up. Had learned to walk and talk and swallow well enough to be considered worth fucking by men. Doesn't take much. I fucked and fucked. Wore men out while living in San Francisco Art Institute's spray paint room. Fucked their friends. Asked for it. Begged for it. Only got raped once. He didn't use weapons. I told myself it didn't count.

While fucking these men, I thought how good it felt to touch my little girl's body under the blankets, safe, in the dark. Only that touch made my pain go away.

When I touched women it was different. With women I made love and fell in love. Sex was supposed to be like this. Melting into my lover, endlessly, when I kiss her lips. Liquid whether she drove a red sports car, liked to dye my skin blue with food coloring or smoked too many menthol cigarettes.

Jane, twice my age, curly blonde hair, serious blue eyes reflecting mine. She liked the way I plunged fearlessly into snow catching a bird's expression on video. I liked the way she sat in the back of class, legs outstretched, head held proudly. Obviously, she knew more than the instructor.

Floating on foreign dinners of exotic foods and silly stories of mature lesbians, I didn't understand everything she'd say.

"*You're too independent,*" she sexily accused. I was stepping out of her van into a freezing Minneapolis winter. Thought she meant I was playing hard to get. So I shut the van door and kissed her.

"*I'd like to take you home, but I'm uncomfortable with your age and your handicap,*" she whispered, my hand held tightly between her knees. Slapped from my intoxicated infatuation into reality, I saw our relationship's end before it began.

"Uncomfortable with my handicap." An honest statement. But what does it mean?

I am more normal looking now. I walk with a cane. I'm white. Blonde. Blue eyes. Large breasts. Fairly tall. I've grown accustomed to ordinary hideous men and women wanting to jack off. In my cunt.

But falling in love with Natasha, with Jessica, with Beth, with Antonina and with Racael, I've noticed a pattern. It is not just them I love, it is their sweetness, their love of human meekness. Their comforting hands and tender words give me life as I forge ugliness into fiery dreams and watery fantasies.

I hold my lovers tenderly when they cry, in awe of their tears, grateful they want me to be with them. When my lovers cry I

often feel they cry the tears I can't. More flexible, they express pain that I can not bear to see.

Preciously, I kiss my innocence on their faces. The innocence I traded for survival. The innocence murdered in me by those who know only how to jack off.

I read in a magazine that one is abused or one is an abuser. How boring.

My mother says I was born masturbating. And she should know.

I live my masturbatory life for survival. There are those who would jack off on my dead body. I see them. They are predictable. I am no longer frightened.

I live my life concerned with my thoughts of a perfect world. Taking sex, taking emotions. Putting them into words. Words I'm not supposed to say, words I shouldn't be thinking. Shuddering at my own courage, knowing I can dance through nightmares. My cunt glistening with power as I rock to get the words out.

My mother is right. And I am coming and coming and coming and coming.

Barbara Ruth

The Writer in the Mirror

She blinks
She misses something
She dreams
She neglects to write it down
So much is lost
Because her gaze
Faltered
Because her mind
Wandered
She's a lazy girl
She has other things to do.

Her hand
Cannot
Hold
Her pen
And her labia
At the same time
— Unless she writes the words
on the walls of her vagina
And what passersby
Will read them there?
Who is
The intended
Audience?
The ideal
Reader?
The woman
Who understands
From the inside

The womon
With her nose
In my book

But how far in
Do I really want
To be read?
I like to make the words
But when it comes to doing it
I equivocate

I used to set up mirrors
Used to arrange the lighting
So I could watch the blood
Seep through my os
Used to contemplate
The secret place
The opening
Between
Outside
And inside
The corridor of birth
Used to watch
In wonder
The pooling of my blood
Where there was no injury

Now
My cervix is removed
The opening
Sewn up
If I bleed
I'm wounded
And if the blood
Pours from my cunt
It's an emergency

Now
I learn to close

My other apertures
Without the scalpel and the catgut
I learn to look inside
With mirrors more luminous
With lightsources
Of higher frequencies

She braids her hair
The white and black together
Soothes her lungs with chamomile
Rosemary for remembrance
She adds a purple stone
To the gris gris
Twixt her breasts

She changes point of view.
She concentrates
She learns to write
With either hand.



Cheryl J. Moore

Black earth, white, the sky

You're a person, aren't you?" Cre Wright reflected as she buttoned her shirt and slipped into her loafers. Her room was still gray with a misty morning. E-4 was a corridor of rooms and a lounge in Wellesley Hospital, south of Newark.

The subdued dining room doubled as a physical and occupational therapy area. Yellow, soft walls, curtains and the earthlike carpet gave a home touch to the psychiatric ward.

Cre and the other patients lived three to a room. Cre's bed, nightstand and closet faced within the room she shared with Diane and Gale.

Cre's anxiety attack was a low level of uneasiness after three days on the ward. She was hospitalized in speechlessness. The booster shot of Valium didn't hurt at all, and she slept a long night and late into morning.

She lived alone, perhaps too long, but she made rugs in the evenings and sold them to buyers she met through women friends. Her work as a claims representative countered her craft, but kept her in contact with responsibility.

The rugs were balm, yet some nameless anxiety crept into her soul as she went deeper into therapy, all as if by accident. Her work began to seem ill-fitted. The anonymous co-workers encroached on her view of herself.

"I'm afraid to go to work." It wounded Cre as she told Mrs. Sage, her counselor.

"Can you get to a hospital?"

"Yes."

"I'm sending you to Wellesley," Mrs. Sage said, "to Doctor Woods."

Cre's eyes opened wide, but she had a destination.

My blackness is my mettle, these black eyes, dark skin, these fingernails, my white palms, the moons in my eye and steady gait. I can walk miles. Vise of thighs, long arms, fists, fists on hammers, logs, on drums within my breast, me and good. Good. It saves my life.

A light beam settled on the silent television as Cre sat with a borrowed book. She read a paragraph, scanned the cover and sat the book aside. Breakfast was over.

The orderly was unlocking the ward door. He led in a docile woman with free hair. She looked at Cre and walked into the room. James showed the woman down the corridor.

Cre wandered into her room and took another shirt off a hanger. Physical therapy began at ten. Cre felt dazed, yet the whisper of the tree outside the window comforted her. Summer green was near its height.

Cre ran a pick through her hair and went to the lounge.

The patients played mock volleyball with a blue balloon that floated out of reach. Everyone tumbled about together.

Diane reached across Cre and slapped the balloon to the net as Cre tried to shake herself.

Cre called, "Why do we have to play when I'm in a daze?" The patients laughed and the game continued with banter. Cre said to Diane what she could.

The afternoon was quiet. Dr. Woods listened for an hour, bored, yet he kept his eyes on her. Cre noticed the quiet, but she couldn't stop talking. Dr. Woods left the chair in the middle of the floor.

Cre sat to herself at dinner, but the woman with free hair sat down beside her and began to prepare her cup of tea. Patients with hospital trays drifted to the big table. No one wanted any music.

Cre opened a little tub of butter and noted the yellow swirl, yellow yet white and smooth. She buttered her potato and cut into her roast beef.

The woman's hair was brown but blonde and gray. She must have been slightly older than Cre. She had light eyes and long lashes.

They ate in thought. The woman's docility abated a little. As she finished eating she said, "Would you like a cup of tea?"

Cre said, "I'd like that."

"I'll get the hot water."

The woman went to the hot plate, brought water and poured.

"What's your name?" Cre asked.

"Elizabeth Case."

"Why are you here?"

"I pitched a fit." Elizabeth took the water back and returned to Cre. They sat waiting.

"What kind of fit?" Cre asked.

"I went berserk. All over the place."

Cre forgot her daze and sipped.

"I'm Cre Wright. What do you do?"

"I fly small planes. To Columbus, the midwest.""

"I like to fly," Cre said, "any kind of plane."

"What have you flown?"

"In a glider."

"That's good flying," Elizabeth said.

"It was a long time ago, but I'll never forget." Cre shifted. The light was soft, delicate.

"It was a 20 minute flight," Cre added. "I could see New York about 50 miles away. The flight strip was always ready down there, but the ride was everything."

"How was the landing?" Elizabeth smiled.

"A dream. Slow motion."

Elizabeth stood up. "I must go to my room, but let's talk again."

"I make rugs," Cre said.

"Yes, I want to hear about it. I'll tell you."

Elizabeth walked off and Cre put the trays on the dinner cart.

"Cre is protective," Elizabeth thought.

The next afternoon Dr. Woods sought Cre out and asked, "Would you like a therapy session?"

Cre said, "No. Not right now." She left him standing in the door of the ward. She would have left even the orderly standing.

Cre found Elizabeth watching the news. There were patients sitting about, but the lounge was quiet. The low overstuffed chairs were silly but comfortable. The plants needed water.

"What's the news?" Cre asked.

"Sit down. There's war, of course."

"You say that lightly."

"Not at all." Elizabeth settled back and then sat forward.

"How do you find it here?"

"I don't mind staying."

"The staff leaves one alone," Cre said. "Therapy passes the time."

"It's mostly talking," Elizabeth said.

"Is that all?"

"Oh, yes."

"I get anxious," Cre said. "I can't figure it out."

"What's it like?"

Cre paused. "It's endless, bottomless, hollow."

"Sounds like a place."

"Messed up into a state of being, I think." Cre laughed quickly.

"I guess it's all anxiety."

"Even a fit?"

"Absolutely. One is as if obscured." Elizabeth drummed a hand and flipped it.

"What am I working out?" Cre felt a desperate lunge in her.

"Perhaps nothing."

"What?" Cre sat up.

"Nada." Elizabeth winked.

"I wish I could pitch a fit."

"Think about it," Elizabeth said and she sat silent.

Cre watched Elizabeth's hand slapping the handle of the chair. She had a slender woman's hands. Elizabeth stilled and Cre looked away, but she looked back. They talked on lightly in contrast to the voice of the television. It was mere hot presence to distract in the room.

"My rugs remind me of the earth." Cre paused. "The weave. The itness."

"Do you work fast?"

"No. Quite at a pace for most of a day."

"Your craft is the hook." Elizabeth smiled.

"It relaxes me."

"You're not listening."

"Good."

They released each other, looking at television. They went on into late afternoon and Elizabeth said, "Tell me more later again." Cre looked up at her.

"Think about yourself," Elizabeth said.

"What?"

"Go ahead." She walked off.

But I want to think about your stillness, the relief of your instinct. I'm not anxious about color. Your hair amazes me. I love the difference. Yet our hands are the same. I want to hold you. You fly, your hair flies. You're in the sky where I want to be and it's frightening. Yet we're the same. Or are we not?

They met in the lounge the next morning. A nurse smiled to them. No doctor came near.

"Elizabeth, what is your angst?" Cre was full of concern.

"It's white."

"Where?"

"In my spirit." Elizabeth frowned and said, "I am separated from something ancestrally."

"Elizabeth, you have your ancestors' blood."

"Too austere."

"Yes, I'll say," Cre said, "but you pitch a fit."

"I try to let it out," Elizabeth nearly gasped.

"What?"

"My love."

"Elizabeth, your love is primitive, too, a tribal first naiveté. It goes back to hidden forests. Reverent." Cre looked at her. "Not wild, holy. We're all mortally primitive."

"But it's a fit. It's violent."

"And it's sometimes absurd too, but it's not bad to feel." Cre nearly cried.

"Spirit's all the same, isn't it."

"Some are more reflective than others." They laughed.

"We've got the same malady."

"Yet I am of the earth," Cre said. "You are sky."

"Oh, but many of us are of the earth," Elizabeth whispered.

"That's the fit."

"Even now we are being passionate."

"The dynamic is thrilling," Elizabeth said.

"You had to say that." Cre looked at her.

"That won't make it go away."

They sat after breakfast with coffee.

"Don't move."

"I think I'd better."

"This is new to me," Elizabeth said.

"You are new to me."

"It's like dying. One falls."

Cre laughed. "I don't want to understand it."

Elizabeth touched Cre's hand and a bolt went through her. She bent down in need.

"It's an open room," Elizabeth said.

"Let's talk."

Cre took a breath. "Is the sky so high?"

"Absolutely," Elizabeth said.

"I don't think I can talk."

The floor resident gave them day passes and Cre drove Elizabeth to her apartment. They bought fruit and yogurt and juices. They bought milk. Cre's VW beetle chugged contentedly.

Her small apartment spoke of an abundance of chairs, rugs, pictures on the wall. Cloth and wood. The bedroom was of the barest essentials.

Cre couldn't start slow. They rushed and rushed again, but the morning enfolded their new want. The light bathed them. Cre was Cre and she was Elizabeth and Elizabeth was one. The bed tumbled.

A mystical air slowed them. Something haunting, very deep and clean. They found their woman's beat, each in the other, being in the quietness. Nursing.

Their healing was in degrees, day by day, in Cre's apartment. Elizabeth brought flowers and jewelry. She had a basic wardrobe, some books.

Every orgasm was another. The differences surprised Cre and stilled Elizabeth. The stark ones scared them. Love triumphed.

They don't know when they finished. They never finished. Cre lost earth. Elizabeth's sky descended.

The afternoon.



"This was the first day I let people see my body,
including my lovers, including myself."

What We Do With Our Bodies Series, #12: Mud Lady

photograph
Cathy Cade

Sonja Franeta

My Violin Loves to Play

1

I've been in bed all day. This is very unusual for me. I'm in a lot of pain. I have no idea where it came from. And now my father's face begins to flash before me. It's been ten months since he died. Various events in my life have kept me from thinking very much about what his death means to me. Now suddenly I'm caught in this excruciating neck pain. A live muscle pulls my left shoulder to my neck so taut that when I try to turn my head the pain screams in my ear. I get nervous when the image won't go away —

His mustache is trimmed the same way I liked when I was two. I listen for his whistle when he comes home from work and love being picked up, kissed hard, and held real tight. His mustache is bristly, yes, but I love it, his pride in it, his love of me for loving it.

He was a big man, tall, strong and solid. He became hostile, for some reason, the older I got. The beating when I was sixteen was not the first time he laid a hand on me, but it was by far the worst.

I push and tread in my dark bed.

I'm glad he died. We were at least rid of him. Now, as my neck and shoulder throb, my father's face won't leave me alone. In my pain and stiffness I feel unexpectedly drawn to him. His skin is smooth, his lovely cheekbones high, a burst of capillaries between bone and skin — olive and oily in texture. I want to touch his face so much. His eyes look in the distance, at his own suffering during World War II, perhaps, not at me and my neck pain.

My father was violent. The day I went to my first prom with Tony, my first real romance, I was sixteen and thrilled. Tony came to pick me up and my father was decidedly cold and abrupt with him. Dad told me earlier I was not to come home after midnight. My mother plotted with me about how she would cover for me, reminding me to be very quiet when I came home. I left my anxieties behind as I stepped out in my new evening gown, on the arm of the handsome and attentive Tony.

When Tony dropped me off it was late. We spent some time making out in the car, before I crept into the house. Every sound seemed to echo. After awhile I heard my parents' arguing voices. My heart was pounding, I expected an explosion. I got into my nightgown. All of a sudden my bedroom door swung open. My father was inside, cursing me in his own language, swinging his belt and coming toward me.

He began to beat me. There was a terrifying passion in those blows; he looked lost. I remember screaming and falling to the floor to ward off the blows with my arms. My only weapon was my words: "Go ahead and kill me." My younger sister witnessed the whole thing from her bed. My mother whimpered in the background meekly asking him to stop. (I never could understand why she stayed with him and didn't protect us from his chronic raging.)

I was afraid he was going to kill me. Suddenly, my aunt who was almost his size and living with us at the time, came in and yanked him off me. He kept calling me "whore" and "bitch" as he left the room.

The next day I was lying in bed swollen, wanting comfort from Tony or my best friend, anyone not in my family. My mother came to me tearfully, told me not to tell, to keep the beating, his brutality, a secret. My shame was too great anyway.

I wanted to die. My body began to turn wooden then — stiff, asleep, scarred. I had to forget.

So what do I do now?

My neck is killing me.

I call my friend Susie. She tells me how to treat my neck. She'll be over soon. Asks if I can rest with the image of my father — accept it, not fight it — and understand the pain as truth. I really have no idea what she's talking about, but I know she's an important friend and teacher at this juncture of my life. She says this could be a memory of the beating, an injury I got when I fell, and my body can no longer store it away.

In a few days my neck pain does get better. I feel my body has communicated something to me. I run my hands along my hurt left shoulder, grabbing my neck where it had hurt so bad, then slide down along the rest of my body.

I love the violin — an amazing possibility of sound held in a stiff yet womanly instrument. Wooden, I begin to speak of the anger and pain. I admit feeling relieved that my father has died. Waxing my bow, I begin to see that he will never leave my psyche.

2

Susie and Jean took me out to lunch to celebrate my birthday about ten days after the pain stopped. My father was still on my mind. Jean also had problems with her father. Susie helped the conversation along because she knew both of our stories. I learned that Yugoslavian fathers and Cuban fathers had some things in common. And that Jean fought hard against her father's possessiveness as well.

But there was a charm about these men. Susie liked Jean's father and got along with him. I always felt that my father was sweeter to my friends, embarrassingly flirtatious too. He was so hard and distant with me, perhaps afraid of himself around me. I was glad for this conversation and felt a closeness with Jean.

When we got home, I had to get ready for work — second shift at the aircraft factory. I really didn't feel like going. Susie called me into the other room and said, "You don't have to accept, but Jean and I would like to give you a special gift. We'd like to make love to you for your birthday."

My eyes widened. Looking away I said, "What about work?" She laughed, "Call in sick." I shook my head seriously, my heart pounding within me like it was another person. "Think about it," she said.

How could I turn this down — a dear trusted friend and her attractive lover. It was too good to be true, and I hadn't had sex in awhile. I went upstairs, got into my work pants and flannel shirt. Then I dialed work.

We laugh awkwardly at first, my waterbed rocking us around. Susie's laugh is full and free, her eyes glisten. Jean is a strong and dynamic woman. She knows women well and seems much better at giving her lovemaking than receiving. I know Susie loves sex with Jean, and I enjoy experiencing their intimacy as

well as their pleasure with me. They undress me and kiss me gently, I begin to relax with their gift.

I feel an excitement and looseness in my body that I have never felt before. As if I were swiftly coming alive after a long sleep. A fluidity with their focus on my body, both women caressing me, my vagina opening wider than I ever felt, unabashedly wanting more than I ever wanted. The tips of my breasts seem to be drawing out some very deep part in me.

I love the complexity of our attentions. Their making love to me turns into Jean and Susie loving each other. I touch both of them with such tender affection I want time to stop. So when Jean turns to me alone with her virtuoso energy and prowess, Susie leaves the room, angry and jealous at being excluded. I don't want to face this conflict just now — the pitch between Jean and me is high. So Jean and I go on alone.

We wrangle. She can be rough and gentle at the same time. She is utterly patient with my rhythm and yet pulls my hair, insistently wanting to reach my mouth. I feel like thanking her, but I just give myself to her capable hands, and enjoy.

We take a rest and woo Susie back to bed — she loves us and even loves the chance to cry. I get to watch the tenderness between them, as Jean coaxes Susie's frustrations out, tears and all, I feel I shouldn't be there, that perhaps there is something very private going on.

They begin to make love. I ask if I should leave. Of course not. I hold Susie as Jean makes love to her. Slowly, coaxing with words, Jean makes Susie come. I am witness to a powerful and sacred act. My dear friend is glad I am there, I feel her softness and warmth. I myself cry, moved by the emotions and intensity. We are close and open with each other. My small room is about to burst.

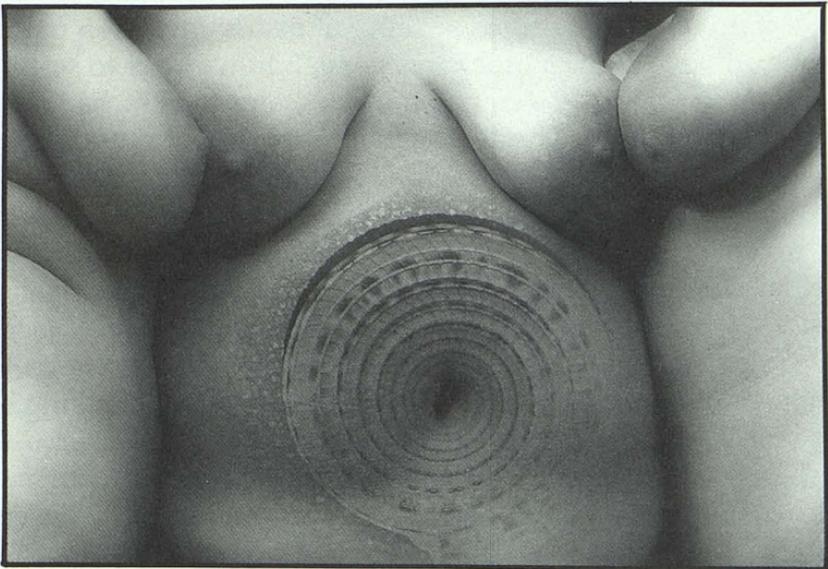


For days after this symphonic night, my body trembles with a hum at my very center. A tuning fork I never knew about, its tines vibrating and sending the sounds of my surviving spirit throughout my body, newly aware. But it also seems that I could easily fall apart — structurally, that is — I am so loosened. I

remember reaching, stretching, holding, pulling, forgetting all responsibilities and obligations, listening to some preverbal, prehistoric sound inside. I let the hands of my friends hold my deepest nook and their arms hold me so tight I cry.

I feel the wood of my body ease into music. Can I survive like this. This body that I set aside with the beating, this body that held onto all the complex emotions about my father, still wanting to win him and yet hating him for such cruelty.

Straining my senses tonight, I release some of the pain, the tightness that took the place of my adolescent romance. Loved with such abandon by Susie and Jean, I lose the need to touch my father's face. My violin has its own music.



Three bellies with shell

photograph

JEB

K. Linda Kivi

Moonriders

When the moon came up over the hill beyond the pasture, it glowed like a round eye looking for the places we call home. My home, your home — why, I wondered, leaning over the sill of your grandmother's bedroom window into the salty lavender breeze, could we not have found *our* home beneath this shared sky? My bare skin puckered remembering your hands and I sighed, forgetting everything except a nostalgia for that blessed year we spent before the ocean separated us.

It was there, in your grandmother's bedroom, as the moon came up that you slipped your fingers inside of me from behind. I gasped, nearly lost my grip on the wooden sill, almost pitched through the gaping windows into the garden of poppies and forgotten mint below. I pulled your fingers inside of me, held you tight in my depth, felt the warming of nearly forgotten places. I was glad your grandmother was gone, I didn't have to stop myself from crowing to the cows who, warm and content, had chosen to moonbathe and spend the fragrant french night outside.

There was clover in the air, a touch of Mediteranean salt on my tongue, and we smelt of passion, of the juices you beckoned by the pulse of your hand in my vagina. I wanted to hold on, I wanted to let go, I wanted to turn around and throw you onto the fat feather bed that we had just risen from. I wanted to roll in your juices, smear mine across your cheeks and belly, lose myself in the folds, fill the entire house with the song of that creaking bed.

Bed song, my song, I chanted a litany of yeses to you that night, one yes tripping over the next, drawing you further and deeper into me, making the world forget that we had chosen to part, each chosen the familiar woods of our separate lives over the lust and passion that drew us together.

Bed song, my song, our bodies rocked so fiercely that, for a moment, I believed we would not have to part again, that we could throw ourselves into this passion and remain there.

"If you throw yourself into something well, with thought, practice and belief," you told me, pressing your lips onto the nape of my neck, "you will fly on your own to the places you dream of going. If you let fly, you will land only there where passion lives."

You murmured these words from behind me, pressing your lips, your body, your fingers into me, but it was as if the moon was speaking. You murmured again and I forget to be afraid. I wanted you all — words, flesh and spirit — to infuse my skin. I hung onto the windowsill as though it were possibility itself. I hung onto the moon.

When was it that you threw me back onto our symphonic bed? That you took me in mouth and hand, and made love to me? My vagina grew wider, longer, bigger until it was moon sized and moon strong. I grew until I was so large that I could see everywhere in those hills of your grandmother, of your childhood. Everywhere.

I saw the bolete mushrooms, as big as our furled fists, pushing up out of the needle carpeted forest floor. Below the surface of the gleaming pond, where one lone cow had gone to low at the ripples, I felt the fish who nibble on secretive toes and flash silver quick. In the vineyard, I plucked the grape laden vines and covered you in purple juice.

Oh take me.

Take me again.

Like you did. On the fat slab of kitchen table that is of a wood so old no one remembers its tree, the salt shaker and pepper grinder clamouring as we rocked to all four seasons of Vivaldi. In the train, your face buried between my thighs, under the veil of my skirt while stony towns and wind tipped cypresses parted the way. While dancing barefoot across the dark wooden floors of your grandmother's house, Cointreau and butter soaked Breton crepes leaving trails of stickiness around us.

I want to be that me again.

Like I was.

I put lipstick on — red — and you threw back your head and laughed, your dark curls shimmering down your back. I slathered

myself in perfume from an unmarked but pungent bottle on your grandmother's dresser and you swooned at my feet, begged me to take you. I covered the swell of your belly in red kisses, ran the soft tuft of my pubis over your thighs, entered you when you could say nothing more than *s'il te plait, s'il te plait* over and over again.

I cupped your body from the side so that I could hold you while you came. I made you keep your eyes open. I held your eyes with mine while you squirted, squirted and squirted into my cupped palm until your cum overflowed onto the Louis Quinze carpet. Until your eyes turned glassy and your dark curls exhaled with heat. We had so little time, my Marseillaise. It was over so quickly. Again. But I don't want to think of that now.

We stole a bottle of champagne from your grandmother's wine cellar, pushing back the cobwebs and dust to find the oldest, the richest, the most forgotten elixir in that dim cave under the house. I carried it up to our room and we drank straight from the uncorked bottle. And then we made love again.

Love me harder, deeper. The breeze and the ghosts of your grandmother's house urged me on, opened the armoire doors and snuck out to watch our pleasure. That was the night the moon stole me from our singing bed. I was drawn out as if my skin had disappeared and I faced the night with my bare, bare flesh fully exposed.

You fucked me so well. "*La lune! La lune!*" I cried out when I came and you didn't miss a beat. Only the cows paused to watch, the madwoman who had come to live in your grandmother's house. Lunacy had taken hold.

Later, we lit the fireplace in the faded kitchen and roasted onions in the coals. You fed them to me layer by layer, pulling each one back, one at a time. There are no tears in a cooked onion you reminded me, only sweetness and a caramel tinge where the embers have touched hot. Because you could not keep me from rubbing the soft, warm onion flesh all over you, over the mound of your belly, your buttocks, your calves, we ran the bath.

Fire into water, water into fire.

That house of your grandmother's has a tub with the taps in the middle, as though it were designed for love. But whose? Your

grandmother's? Or only ours? We climbed in, leaned back, played with each other's nipples and labia with our steamy pink toes.

And the bowl of dried rose petals on the shelf above the tub made a gift for us. The parched red petals flowered again when they touched the hot water. They spread, opened up, even seemed to find their true colours. One lone petal floated while the others sank. It crossed the momentarily still waters. Where would it go? Would it sink too?

I am drawn to you, my fine french lover. But the ocean is such a tremendous tub, too large, too cold, too rough to let the petals fly and float, even if the same moon shines on both sides.

Come, I wanted to say, but left with only a kiss and more memories.

So I'll say it now. I'll say it here between these lines of passion and love.

Come to *my* grandmother's house.

Come to Amerika where bears and deer nibble on wild purple berries and coyotes ride the moon. Come here to the heart of cedar forests where the snow falls so gently that the winter hare leaves its trail across my yard. I can hear the pileated woodpecker calling, knocking and calling and knocking again. It is your turn now, your turn take wing and find me in my home.

Let fly, *ma cherie*, let fly.

Laura Hershey

canyon

Left and right I divide
my surfaces falling away
under your trickle

already you are like centuries
of spring runoff
coursing fingers finding

a route between my banks
creating first a stream
then a river then

a canyon
I deepen with every gush
widen or narrow to hold your eddies

your circuitous irresistible current
your slow melt and your occasional
delightful rapids

I teem with chasms of air
rock and hungry birds landing
searching for nests

if some summers the river
seeps a dusty trace my shores unwet
still the canyon lives

Reviews

Rewriting the Lesbian Body

The Lesbian Body by Monique Wittig, trans. by David LeVay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975)

I go over to you entirely, I explode the small units of m/y ego, I am threatened, I am desired by you. (p. 98)

It's been almost two decades since Monique Wittig wrote *The Lesbian Body* (hereafter, *TLB*). Nobody has broadened the lesbian imagination, has forced everyday language with such violence in the intervening years.

TLB is marketed as high literature, discouraging many from reading it. It is not a novel with a beginning, a long middle, and a surprising (hoped for, or clever) ending. It is without a describable plot and it doesn't seem to have characters. It works like a time bomb. To write about it has to be done in the form of a personal journey:

First, *TLB* gave me nightmares. Then I got angry. "Why does Wittig have to write everything so ugly?" I read it again, for a class, sometime later. That's where I acquired the argument that it was sadistic, violent and murderous, a text-book of patriarchal destruction. Later I wondered. The figures in the book do (physically) impossible things to each other: they suck bone marrow, they slice, dissect and eat each other, but neither of them dies. Conversely, in some scenes (or novel segments) someone is being reassembled, in ways as physically impossible as the dismantling. The result was always life. That's when I understood that to intervene in language, to create a new imagery, a new history, is a violent undertaking. In *TLB* Wittig created a language for my fantasies so I can feel and understand them.

To un-domesticate women is a radical act. I used to get ulcers. Now I want to murder your vindictive ex-husband, maybe cover his body with black widow spiders and red fire ants and then watch his eyes when he realizes what is happening. Instead of shame I now feel anger, and powerful rage.

TLB is not easy to read. Just as viscerally effective as destruction, Wittig lets desire and love become a tangible, sometime painful reality.

I've been missing you for an eternity. My day took me to places you've never been. Now I've come back to you and I don't know you. I can't imagine how I've ever touched you naked.

I have no recollection of your arms your shoulders your back your belly. I am unaware that your hair when licked has a delectable taste. (p. 63)

Finally I kiss you and your breath against my lips reminds me that we've been here before. After you're undressed and willing me to discover you, I remember that Wittig knows how skin can acquire eyes with which to see.

the eyes of your body are fixed attentively on the different autonomous parts of m/y body in their actions in relation to one another (p. 134)

It is strange to make love to you with someone else's words in bed with us. But I have no language as alive and as evocative; and so I keep falling back into Wittig's dreams.

the tiniest grain of sand between your belly and m/ine can separate us once for all ... *I begin to throb in m/y eyelids, I throb in m/y brain, I throb in m/y thorax, I throb in m/y belly ...* (p. 51)

TLB is not just naming/inventing a sexual reality. Not only do the interacting characters not die, they recast culture, history and Western literature. Wittig talks not just of personal body-space, TLB is a body of literature, a body politic. TLB rewrites The Bible, Greek mythology and *Alice in Wonderland* (to mention a few). The figures, the interacting "I" and the "you" metamorphose through monster, animal, stone woman, into goddess/muse and historical/mythical figure.

One of the most powerful re-writings is Wittig's version of the Orpheus and Eurydice story. In the traditional narrative, Orpheus will be allowed to bring Eurydice back from the underworld under one condition: he may not turn around until he is above ground. On the way up he doesn't hear her step and she does not answer him (she is not allowed to speak). A few feet from daylight, he turns around to see she was right behind him

all along. So back she goes, into the underworld, after almost having reached the land of the living.

But Wittig tells it thus: On the way to the surface Eurydice frets, thinking of all the reasons Orpheus won't love her anymore: she is rotting, she stinks, she is invaded by worms ... Once there, Orpheus turns to Eurydice who says "looking into your eyes I revive with prodigious speed." (p. 20)

This makes me think: Why did we accept the idea that the world's great love stories always have to be tragedies, particularly for women? It is as though Wittig pulled the fog from my (cultural) eyes and removed the calluses from my nerve endings so I can make love to you with unknown intensity.

I will never again be quite as tractable, as good a citizen, as ashamed a lover. Wittig has given us all a language and a powerful lever: The Lesbian Body!

— Magdalena Zschokke

Keeping It In the Family by Judy Freespirit, a novel on tape read by the author (1992, Freespirit, P.O. Pack #254sw, 1678 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709, three cassette tapes running 3 hours 28 minutes, \$31.95 post. paid)

This fictionalized autobiography exists in a unique format: on tape only. One reads with one's ears rather than one's eyes, an experience unusual to sighted readers. Not all writers have the acting skill to justify the purchase; Judy Freespirit does. Her voice is as finely developed for creating characters as k. d. lang's is for singing. Both the writing and the performance are strong enough to do justice to the material. The unfamiliarity of the medium quickly becomes irrelevant.

Keeping It In the Family unfolds as a series of short stories. Malka Windsinger, a fat, disabled, middle-aged Jewish Lesbian, sets about to understand and try to heal from her early sexual abuse by writing. As Malka, Judy Freespirit's alter-ego, explains in her introduction, this requires remembering and, where one can't remember, inventing.

A child's incest story begins well before her birth. This one starts in 1902. Incest is a history lesson, a way of transmitting unspeakable knowledge. Naming it incest, showing how and why it works, means finding words for the knowledge. In *Keeping It In the Family*, incest appears as part, often the most loving part, of family life. The family is a base for and seems a refuge from economic struggle. But the refuge is illusory; incest mirrors and transmits the violence of poverty, the consuming effort towards upward mobility. The unnamed reality: sex is a commodity, family life full of lies and exploitation. Sex becomes the price of everything: fun, security, affection.

All the ancestral scenes here are imagined in painful but precise detail. If written and read with less skill, they would be tempting to skip. For a listener of Ashkenazic American Jewish descent, it seems almost a desecration to picture such things about our sepia-tinted ancestors. How much safer to keep them at a soft-focus distance. The act of imagination is a kind of incest itself, or counter-incest; intellectual violation in reaction to physical violation.

Malka's own story begins with an expanded version of the already published *Daddy's Girl: an Incest Survivor's Story* (Diaspora Press, Langlois, OR, 1982). Embedded in the story of Malka's remembering are her parents' lessons about sexuality.

Both teach secrecy. Malka's incest survivor father, Howard, teaches what his father taught him: this is our special secret. Malka's mother, Hannah, emotionally cut off from her child by the unsuspected incest, tries dutifully to breach the silence and explain about "men-stroo-a-tion," a painful and embarrassing secret, but one shared by all women. When Malka gets her first period, she confesses to having cramps. What she doesn't tell Hannah is that they remind her of the feeling she gets when Howard puts his fingers up her. Hannah says without irony, "Now you know what it means to be a woman." She wants to teach about sex, shame and secrecy, but it's too late; Malka has already learned, from Howard.

The lessons contradict each other, and the contradictions become part of Malka. She unwittingly betrays secrecy, when she attempts to french kiss her first boyfriend the way she kisses

with Howard. This loses her the boy's friendship and gains her the reputation of a whore. In one daringly honest scene, the adult Malka, turned on by writing about Howard's molesting her, stops work long enough to satisfy herself. She has to consciously replace his image with that of a woman lover. It's the best she can do with the excitement — which, like all desire, follows its own rules.

The humor that suffuses so many of Judy Freespirit's works is for the most part absent here. This story calls instead for irony. Humor seeps in only in the final few stories, those in which the carefully-woven secrecy unravels for one family member at a time. The characters are middle-aged and old, many of them far older than the author was when she wrote them. Their voices ring as true, to this middle-aged reviewer, as those of the earlier stories' narrators. Only one disappoints: in a book of strong, individual points of view, the weakest is Howard's in his old age. His personality comes through much more strongly in the parts written in Malka's voice.

In the story most in need of reprinting, Malka talks with her adult son about incest because "I want it to stop here." Every incest survivor who becomes a parent has to face the possibility of passing on the tradition, the challenge of trying not to. However I know of no other published stories on this subject: talking about it with one's grown child who is on the verge of becoming a parent.

Part of Malka's son's answer: he shared sexual feelings with his mother and didn't feel molested. He raises a question for all members of passionate families: the feelings are there. Where and how do we draw the line around their expression?

Humor finally takes over in a story incidental to the plot, which exists only to give a voice to a minor but comic character. Aunt Ruby, the queen of creature comforts, exquisitely and minutely selfish, puts considerable energy and imagination into getting everything she wants. If *Keeping It In the Family* were an album, Ruby would deserve to be released as a single.

Many incest stories cover the experience of one molested child. *Keeping It In the Family* extends the the problem and the recovery through 100 years and four generations, providing a

depth absent in even the best of individual accounts. It is suspenseful, believable, and thought-provoking, and will undoubtedly serve as a model for other explorations of incest as a family tradition.

— Rebecca Ripley



By Word of Mouth: Lesbians Write the Erotic, edited by Lee Fleming (1989, 114 pages, gynergy books, Box 132, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, C1A 7K2, Canada)

Eroticism is not a matter solely of the body; what is erotic to each individual depends as much on quirks of memory and emotion as on physical sensation. In *By Word of Mouth* "erotic" encompasses genital sex and a great deal more. The working definition in this selection of 45 pieces by 31 authors seems to be: whatever excites desire.

No definition of "lesbian" is given. The stories and poems are lesbian not because they all concern sex between women but because all the authors are willing to be called "lesbians." Editor Lee Fleming's desire was not to define anything, but to "sample ... some lesbians' erotic experience" — and to evoke desire in the reader.

Every story or poem in *By Word of Mouth* can evoke desire, because all were inspired by lust and written at least competently; a few are masterpieces. The subject matter covers a wide range: wet clay, fish, one's own hand, a stranger in a public bathroom, a flirtatious straight woman at work.

Some pieces evoke a mood while telling no obvious story, for instance Susan Windle's "Song for a Chorus of Women":

In the sultry room
the plums are singing
the weather is hot the women
succulent and cool

Other stories are quite clear: Ruth's "The Three of Us (a fantasy in progress)" blatantly invites a particular couple to include her — at least just once. Some pieces hint: Kathy Anderson's "Where

We Go" calls sex a "dark and fearful place" successfully explored together. Is the underlying story one of recovery from incest?

A Canadian anthology, *By Word of Mouth* contains one bilingual poem in English and French, "French Kiss" by Sue Shine. At least half the contributors are Canadian, and the rest who indicate a country of origin are from the U.S. There are a few reprints; however most of the work is original, some by writers not previously published.

The introduction speculates that *By Word of Mouth* will "challenge ... us to experience other lesbians' erotic truth," and "help break the silence." Which silence? I would guess: the silence about what women who call themselves lesbians really do or really like. This silence helps fuel the futile debate about what those who call themselves lesbians should like. The silence also helps make lesbian identity so fluid it sometimes trickles away. Consider the current debates: Can bisexuals be lesbians? Can lovers of castrated men? Lovers of surgically-altered women? And there are older debates: Can celibate women be lesbians? Can married women who have never been with a woman? The label can best be defined by those who claim it as an identity; part of the definition is sexual. Creating a forum for erotic writing is thus a political act.

The erotic truths in *By Word of Mouth* vary. In Oriethya's "Spirit and Flesh," each lover's soul is shared by two bodies, human and animal; Sanne's "Sensational" realistically describes a paraplegic lesbian's one night stand with an able-bodied stranger; Ellen Thompson's "Lesbian Love" describes how two formerly-het women work out a style of love-making that includes humor, and doesn't at all resemble what they did with their husbands.

The anthology is limited in only one sense: it specializes in nice, role-free sex between nice, role-free girls. This limitation is never stated, but the content makes it obvious. Pat Califia's or Dorothy Allison's stories would be out of place here. Risk, where it exists at all, is downplayed: Louise Harrison's "... She Was There Again," the volume's single s/m fantasy, concentrates on the mysterious stranger's promise of delight; the possible risk of letting her in never becomes real. Joan Bridget's "Exile" is an exquisite evocation of longing that threatens to disrupt a friend-

ship not yet declared; however the tone is gentle and lyrical, the future as much promising as dangerous. In neither story does the threatened disruption occur.

Joan Nestle's evocations of femme/butch eroticism would also be out of place. Those roles are irrelevant to most of these stories. Some, such as "Painter's Rain" by Linda Scarrow, read quite differently depending whether the imagined narrator is femme, butch or androgynous. Others (Marah's "Raspberries and Cream," Carolyn Gammon's "Cafe, 2PM," Cecilia Lockwood's "From Kimono Series") concern unnamed femme-on-femme desire. Brenda Brooks' elegant but earthy poems celebrate both butches and femmes, though never so labeled. Roles exist only the same muted way as risk. Is acknowledging them too risky? By admitting that there are lesbian genders, a writer introduces the question of what gender has to do with being a lesbian — a discussion fraught with anger.

The sex in *By Word of Mouth* seems intended to be healing. Only one piece presents an uncompromisingly disruptive erotic force: Jess Wells' "The Succubus" raises the specter of mother/daughter incest in the person of a supernatural being — the only character in the book who is definitely not nice. However, her purpose turns out to be the end of denial, the beginning of healing.

What's healing is as individual as what's erotic. We are all erotically damaged due to being raised in a woman-hating world. Some erotic art can make the damage worse; glorifying rape, for instance, only encourages it. On the other hand, rape fantasies are a welcome or unwelcome part of many women's, many lesbians', erotic life. Acknowledging the attraction of even violent fantasies is part of exploring both the damage and the underlying desire. In *By Word of Mouth* only "The Succubus" bears witness to this truth.

Even undamaged eroticism can be disruptive, therefore threatening. I think this would be true even in a woman-loving culture. Would everyone really greet a lover's new flame with benign tolerance, recognizing that it's "time to let go?" This is as unrealistic as the idea that all "adulterous" passion can be successfully stifled. Would all women be so wise that nobody would ever be hopelessly stuck on the wrong person? Or so kind and

trustworthy as to painlessly deflect such crushes? Passion, by its nature unpredictable, pulls people in all kinds of directions. A woman-loving culture would be better at guiding decisions about acting on passion — but could not eliminate its inherent danger. It is this danger that *By Word of Mouth* avoids.

There is a contradiction between challenging readers with other lesbians' eroticism and providing only intentionally healing material. This contradiction makes *By Word of Mouth* seem curiously limited despite its variety. Had the limitation been stated rather than implied, the variety would have been more evident. All editors have standards. Searching them out forces one to read any book as a mystery. I prefer them to be explicit.

Despite this flaw, *By Word of Mouth* is well worth reading and rereading. It contains plenty of sexy good writing and furthers the desperately-needed honest discussion of what we mean by "erotic" and by "lesbian."

— Rebecca Ripley

Books Received

About the Books Received List: We list (almost) all the books we get in the mail. Unfortunately, we never have room to review everything we think should be reviewed. I tend to list books here by books/authors/presses I think are important (although all books from one press are listed together), with an emphasis on lesbian-owned presses. If I've read all or part of a book I may add subjective qualifiers like "read this." While the presence of adjectives can be interpreted as editorial endorsement, the absence of them only means I'm going by the publisher's press release — Elana.

Running Fiercely Toward a High Thin Sound is my favorite lesbian novel of 1992, funny, deep, Jewish, resonant, a book worth talking about with your friends, by Judith Katz. 1992, \$9.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

We Say We Love Each Other — Minnie Bruce Pratt's 1985 wonderful and classic collection of poems, reprinted. 1992, \$8.95, Firebrand.

The Issue Is Power — Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance — essential, accessible, passionate writing — if you ever read non-fiction, read this important collection of Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's. 1992, \$9.95, Aunt Lute, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

Visionary Voices — Women on Power — Conversations with shamans, activists, teachers, artists and healers, 19 interviews with lesbians and straight women by Penny Rosenwasser. 1992, \$9.95, Aunt Lute.

Hot Chicken Wings — compelling short stories exploring Jewish, female and lesbian experience by Jyl Lynn Felman. 1992, \$8.95, Aunt Lute.

Willful Virgin — Essays in Feminism 1976-1992 — anyone even remotely interested in lesbian-feminist theory should check out this new, long-awaited and rewarding collection by Marilyn Frye. 1992, \$12.95, Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019.

Call Me Lesbian — Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory — a dyke who reminds us of who we are and shows the road ahead is a treasure, as is each of these essays by Julia Penelope. 1992, \$12.95, Crossing.

International Feminist Fiction — an unusual collection of 24 stories by women from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin and North America, the Caribbean and the Antipodes, edited by Julia Penelope and Sarah Valentine. 1992, \$20.95 (cloth), Crossing.

Sexual Harassment — Women Speak Out — and fight back, as the many here testify; edited by Amber Coverdale Sumrall & Dena Taylor, with intros by Andrea Dworkin & Margaret Randall. 1992, \$10.95, Crossing.

Lesbian Love Stories, Vol. 2, 26 varied dykes present themselves in this lovely bedside collection edited by Irene Zahava. 1991, \$9.95, Crossing.

Women's Glibber — State-of-the-Art Women's Humor, the sequel to *Women's Glib*, full of cartoons, stories & light verse, lesbian & straight, edited by Roz Warren. 1992, \$12.95, Crossing.

Life Savings — an engaging novel wherein a group of 40-something dykes invest in a Berkeley fixer-upper, setting themselves up for a host of hot issues while the protagonist tries to commit to a new S/M relationship, by Linnea Due. 1992, \$10.95, Spinsters, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

The Two-Bit Tango — hard-boiled S.F. P.I. Nell Fury finds her first plot, by Elizabeth Pincus. 1992, \$9.95, Spinsters.

Stage Fright — Jane Lawless, restaurateur and sleuth, in her second case. 1992, \$9.95, Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Ste 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll — Gillian G. Gaar covers the role of women as producers, performers and writers in the music industry through four decades of pop and rock music. 1992, \$16.95, Seal.

Forbidden Subjects: Self-Portraits by Lesbian Artists — a fantastic collection of multi-cultural, resonant images and words by lesbian visual artists, edited by Caffyn Kelley. 1992, \$8.95, Gallerie Publications, 2901 Panorama Dr., North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7G 2A4.

Tuesday Night: poetry and fiction by Valley Lesbian Writers Group is a lovely, eclectic collection of nine dykes' work, edited by Janet Aalfs, Sally Bellerose and Susan Stinson. 1992, \$10, VLWG, Box 433, Northampton, MA 01060.

Of Angels and Survivors — luminescent, clear poems in a limited-edition, beautiful chapbook, by Janet Aalfs. 1992, \$8, Two Herons Press, 39 Old Town Road, Amherst, MA 01002.

Locked Down — A Woman's Life in Prison is an engaging page-turner about Mary (Lee) Dortch by her lover Idella Serna, both of whom are serving life sentences. 1992, \$8.95, New Victoria, POB 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

The Earth House — two Zen Buddhist lesbians build a packed-earth house, one of them dies of cancer; a contemplation on connections by Jeanne DuPrau. 1992, 14.95 (cloth), New Chapter Press, Old Pound Rd., Pound Ridge, NY 10576.

On the Road Again: The Further Adventures of Ramsey Sears, a dyke reporter's travels and road romances, by Elizabeth Death. 1992, \$9.95, the first fiction from Madwoman Press, POB 690, Northboro, MA 01532.

That's Ms. Bulldyke to You, Charlie! cartoons with a little something to offend everyone, by Jane Caminos. 1992, Madwoman Press.

The Hour of Pan/amá, experimental, playful, demanding new poetry with a complicated lesbic world-view by Nuala Archer. 1992, \$10, Salmon Pub., Auburn, Upper Fairhill, Galway, Ireland.

The Lavender House Murder is the second appearance of African American lesbian sleuth Virginia Kelly, by Nikki Baker. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Love Zena Beth appears to be a fictional account of a young dyke's getting it on with Rita Mae (and was picked up by the Book of the Month Club, no kidding) by Diane Salvatore. 1992, \$18.95 (cloth), Naiad.

Morton River Valley — lesbian life in a troubled New England town, Lee Lynch's latest novel. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.

A Tiger's Heart — a new Caitlin Reece mystery by Lauren Wright Douglas. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.

Introducing Amanda Valentine — a new sleuth tale, set in New Zealand, by Rose Beecham. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.

Paperback Romance — a complex intrigue of lesbian loves, complete with a famous, passing conductor, by Karin Kallmaker. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.

- Uncertain Companions* — husband loses wife to lesbian and the moon-goddess Devana, an erotic fantasy by Robbi Sommers. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.
- Delia Ironfoot*, denied tenure in archaeology, goes to live among her Ute relations in this lesbian adventure by Jeane Harris. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.
- Sticks and Stones* — a tale of ordinary lesbians battling homophobia, by Jackie Calhoun. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.
- Passion Bay* — romance, mystery, intrigue, money and weather mingle in the South Seas, by Jennifer Fulton. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.
- The Erotic Naiad: Love Stories by Naiad Press Authors* — 19 stories, edited by Katherine V. Forrest and Barbara Grier. 1992, \$12.95, Naiad.
- Dead Certain* — the fifth detective inspector Carol Ashton mystery, with "outing" dramas, by Claire McNab. 1992, \$9.95, Naiad.
- Mosaic of Air* — 16 lesbian short stories "trace political and emotional realities across time and space," by Cherry Potts. 1993, £5.95, Onlywomen Press, 71 Great Russell St., London WC1B 3BN, England.
- Gay Games III, Vancouver, Canada: THE WOMEN* — large-format photobook of buff dykes doing daring deeds, by Cheryl Traendly. 1992, \$24 pp, Cheryl Traendly Productions, POB 68, Eldridge, CA 95431.
- Collateral Damage: The Tragedy of Medea* — a rare play, reworking the Medea story with a lesbian/feminist sense of humor, to be acted entirely by women, by Jackie Crossland. 1992, \$9.95, Press Gang, 603 Powell St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6A 1H2.
- Paper, Scissors, Rock* — a first novel, peeling back layers of family interaction with a feminist sensibility, by Ann Decker. 1992, \$12.95, Press Gang.
- sing me no more* — a straight addict's story, moving through the circles of urban hell to sobriety, by Lynnette Dueck. 1992, \$12.95, Press Gang.
- The Adoption Papers* — poetry, in the voice of the birth mother, adopted mother, and daughter — a black girl adopted by a white Scottish couple — stuffed with image and powerful phrase, by Jackie Kay. 1992, \$13.95, Bloodaxe Books (US dist: Dufour, Chester Springs, PA 19425-0449).
- Susie Bright's Sexual Reality: A Virtual Sex World Reader*, in which Susie Bright continues her quest to smash the institutional state of mind. 1992, \$9.95, Cleis Press, POB 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.
- Grandmother of the Light — A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook* is a collection of stories from the native peoples of North America, a series of sources that feed the mythic hearts of women, by Paula Gunn Allen. 1991, \$12, Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.
- Red Creek: A Requiem* — a lesbian poet searches through the silt of attitudes and memory that comprise her Georgia home town, by Margaret Robison. 1992, Amherst Writers & Artists Press, POB 1076, Amherst, MA 01004.

- Six of Cups: A Circle of Stories* — an unusual collection, focusing on disability, teaching, lesbian life, and other themes, by Swiss-born Erika B. Makino. 1992, \$8.50, Earth Books, POB 740, Redwood Valley, CA 95470.
- Language Unbound: On Experimental Writing by Women* — a study of six 20th century writers by Nancy Gray. 1992, \$12.95, Univ. of Ill. Press, 54 E. Gregory Dr., Champaign, IL 61820.
- All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography* — examines the theoretical and historical dimensions of biographies on women, by Teresa Iles. 1992, \$15.95, Athene Series of Teachers College Press, Columbia Univ., 1234 Amsterdam Ave., NY, NY 10027.
- Living By The Pen: Early British Women Writers* — a series of essays on a wide spectrum of women, edited by Dale Spender. 1992, \$17.95, Athene.
- Families We Choose — Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, an investigation into community-by-choice/necessity, by Kath Weston. 1992, \$13.95, Columbia Univ. Press, 562 West 113th St., NYC, NY 10025.
- Weenie-Toons — Women Cartoonists Mock Cocks* (dyke and straight) in a comic chapbook edited by Roz Warren. 1992, \$4.50, Laugh Lines Press, Box 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004.
- Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom: Homosexuality in books for young people* — short reviews of the literature in English (Australian, Canadian, English, U.S.), edited by Laurel A. Clyde and Marjorie Lobban. 1992, ALIA Thorpe, 18 Salmon St., Port Melbourne, Victoria 3207, Australia.
- Mother, Not Mother* — a challenging series of probes into many kinds of mother/daughter/female (& occasionally male) relationships in very poetic, very feminist tones by Di Brandt. 1992, \$11.95, Mercury Press, 137 Birmingham St., Stratford, Ontario, Canada N5A 2T1.
- The Cracks* is an experimental, "arts scene" first novel by Montrealer Anne Dandurand, trans. by Luise von Flotow. 1992, \$11.95, Mercury Press.
- Court of Appeal — The Black Community Speaks Out on the Racial and Sexual Politics of Thomas vs. Hill* — 41 essays, 20 by women, edited by Robert Chrisman and Robert L. Allen of The Black Scholar. 1992, \$9, Ballantine.
- Everything You Have is Mine* — a lesbian P.I. tracks down a rapist in the mainstream, by Sandra Scoppettone. 1992, \$3.99, Ballantine.
- Buffalo Woman Comes Singing* — an individual quest and a Native American sourcebook, by Brooke Medicine Eagle. 1992, \$12.50, Ballantine.
- An Alchemy of Genre: Cross-Genre Writing by American Feminist Poet-Critics* — examines the writing and literary "place" of many contemporary writers (inc. many lesbians), by Diane P. Freedman. 1992, \$12.95, Univ. of Vir. Press, Box 3608 Univ. Station, Charlottesville, VA 22903.

Victorian Women Poets — Writing Against the Heart — essays on eight women by Angela Leighton. 1992, Univ. of Vir. Press.

The Gypsy-Bachelor of Manchester — the Life of Mrs. Gaskell's Demon — a new-view biography of the 19th century author by Felicia Bonaparte. 1992, Univ. of Vir. Press.

Second Thoughts Over Bourget — modern European history and a sense of the absurd co-mingle in this interesting poetry collection by Laurel Speer. 1987, \$5, Geryon, Tunnel, NY 13848.

Women's Mysteries: Toward a Poetics of Gender — a humanist, academic text, by Christine Downing. 1992, \$19.95 (cloth), Crossroad, 370 Lexington Ave., NYC, NY 10017.

Eve's Daughters: The Forbidden Heroism of Women is a psychological, humanist text centered on the real heroism of women's daily lives, by Miriam F. Polster. 1992, Jossey-Bass, 350 Sansome St., SF, CA 94104.

Asphodel, the first complete publication of H.D.'s 1920's novel of expatriation and bisexuality, edited by Robert Spoo. 1992, \$12.95, Duke Univ. Press, 6697 College Sta., Durham, NC 27708.



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Writing by women of color welcomed

Contributors' Notes

Alejandra Laurenz: born in Buenos Aires, Argentina (1949). A literature professor and translator, she has been widely published. Her books include: *The anonym* (short stories); *Forbidden for big people* and *The guests* (drama); *Atthis's daughters*, *Greediness of dark territories* and *Splendors* (poetry); *A different woman* (fiction); *Somewhere* (songs) and *Eagerness* (script).

Angela Koenig is a european-american writer, currently menopausal, who is interested in exploring how the specific aspects of our lives can guide us to opportunities for making communities.

Arl Spencer Nadel: My identity lies somewhere in a list of labels longer than my size 11 men's shoes: I'm a feminist/anti-imperialist activist, fat Jewish dyke, poet/writer, partner to Janet, mother of two catties, and 35 year old daughter of a gay father and a mother who was killed by lightning. I'm in the process of reclaiming my identity as a writer and getting an MFA in creative writing at Goddard College.

Barbara Ruth: My poem "The Writer In the Mirror" can be found in a slightly different form in my book *Past, Present and Future Passions*, available from HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 94061. I've been surgery-free for over five years. Kinehara.

Caroline Halliday lives in London, England. She has been writing for many years and has published poems, stories and articles.

Cathy Cade has been photographing lesbians and feminists since the early '70s. She lives in Oakland with her two sons and is working on a book on lesbian mothering.

Chaia Zblocki Heller lives in Hatfield, Mass. where she just completed her poetry manuscript, *What Amazes Me Most*. Her work is published in several journals and anthologies, including *Calyx*, *Sojourner* and *Sister Stranger* (Crossing Press). She is a clinical social worker and teaches eco-feminism at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont.

Cherie Bowers is a 30-year-old, Midwestern, white writer of poetry and short fiction whose work has appeared in *Common Lives*, *The Evergreen Chronicles*, and the anthology *Ride the Wind*. During the day, she labors in public service and remains alert for inspiration. At night, she writes.

Cheryl J. Moore: born in 1947 in Georgia, I have been writing since 1980 and have written a manuscript of poetry called "Waterpaths." My BA is in English. This story and my poetry were written while working as a librarian.

Connie Meredith: I wrote poetry in adolescence, derailed in my 20's by two marriages and two divorces; raised a daughter, came out, began recovering from various addictions in 1982, and currently attend college at ECU here in Richmond, Kentucky.

Deborah: I am a 30-yr-old first generation Peruvian-American. I am also an art historian, masseuse and earth lover. I struggle every day to love my body and live vibrantly and fearlessly.

Dion Farquhar is a poet, prose-fiction writer and culture critic in New York. Her work has appeared in *Sulfur*, *boundary 2*, *Cream City Review*, *Red Bass*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Fiction International*, etc. She teaches political philosophy and feminist theory at Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, Mass.

Donna Tanigawa: I am a 26-year-old yonsei (fourth generation) dyke of Japanese ancestry from the sugar mill town of Waipahu, Hawai'i. It is difficult to locate myself — 4 feet, 11 inches and 98 pounds — in the context of a larger (and taller) lesbian community. Even through writing, I struggle to locate a sense of self. I am exploring the language of my childhood, Pidgin English, in order to heal myself and "come home" to my *chi-i-sa-i* (petite) body.

Elissa Raffa was born in the Bronx in 1959 but has lived half her life in Minneapolis. She writes prose and plays, teaches at an alternative high school, is an activist for disability rights and the rights of young lesbians.

Elizabeth D. Ross is a visual artist living on a farm in Mendocino County. A Jewish red diaper baby, she thanks her parents for their vision and love, and she blows kisses to her lover and lesbian family for helping her stay alive through and with it all.

Happy/L.A. Hyder is founder and director of LVA (Lesbian Visual Artists). She has been photographing and practicing in an eclectic spiritual bent for many years. Her favorite place of peace and power is Point Reyes National Seashore, California.

Jamie Lee Evans is a feminist writer, thinker, rough theorist and marketing director in Oakland, Calif. She's 26, an obvious Capricorn and has been called "crass" by her lover on more than one occasion.

Jane Philomen Cleland: I am a dyke photographer living and working in San Francisco — photographing the lesbian and gay communities (such as they are). I will be having a big photo show at Josie's Juice Joint (Market & 16th, SF) May 1-31. Please stop by.

Janet Mason lives in Philadelphia. Her work has been published in *Sojourner*; *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* and many other journals. Her poetry and short fiction is also included in a half dozen anthologies. Her chapbook of poetry, *A fucking brief history of fucking*, is available from Insight to Riot Press.

JEB (Joan E. Biren) loves women's bodies and has been photographing and videotaping gorgeous lesbians for over twenty years.

Jill Falzoi: I am twenty-five and a Ph.D. student in the dept. of Performance Studies at New York Univ., Tisch School of the Arts. I am studying feminist theory and criticism of performance. I want to be a writer.

Juarez Hawkins is a second-generation artist of African-American descent, happily freelancing in Chicago. Computer graphics are a natural outgrowth of a dual passion for computers and art. Recent graphics credits include *The Joy of (Safe) Lesbian Sex*, and her work is featured in a new card line, CardThartics.

Judith Anderson: I think of my etchings, full of symbolic meaning, as icons of women's emerging spirituality and a renewal of our bonds with the earth. Reinterpreting various religious traditions, myths and legends, I want to express the sacred nature of ordinary experience.

Judith P. Stelboun teaches Literature and Women's Studies at the College of Staten Island, City Univ. of NY. Since 1980, she has been director of an organization which develops and administers programs in higher education between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China. She has written poetry, essays and short fiction, and is presently completing a novel, *Past Perfect*, which details the influence of memory on erotic experience.

Julia (Dolphin) Trahan: I'm a 26-year-old, white writer, video/performance artist who is semi-settled in San Francisco. I'm working on a book of fictional short stories, *Dolphin's Hell*. I want my work to separate the attitude of disability from the reality of individuals' physical differences.

Julie Finn has had extensive training in theatre, singing, photography, video and computers. She has finally found a meaningful and challenging way to synthesize her various skills as the Fundraising & Events Coordinator for The Video Project, a non-profit video distributor specializing in environmental, peace and human rights issues.

K. Linda Kivi: I am a rural BC writer of Estonian-Canadian heritage. My stories dealing with the erotic, the sensual, the sexual and the political have been published in various journals and anthologies including *Getting Wet: Tales of Lesbian Seductions, Rites*, etc. My first book, *Canadian Women Making Music*, was published in 1992 by Green Dragon Press in Toronto.

Kadeth Pozzesi: The night wind brings me spirit messengers, these times most of all. Kadeth, white, alone but for my cats and spirit helpers. Lesbian always, strong as best I can be. Peace.

Kate Berne Miller: I am a mixed-blood Cherokee/Irish lesbian living in Seattle and working at Red and Black Books. I have been published in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* edited by Joan Nestle, and *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* edited by Joy Harjo. I am co-editing an anthology of writings by women who are multiracial with Jamie Lee Evans.

Kathleen DeBold (KET): works for the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund in Washington, D.C. Her cartoons have been published in *Women's Glibber, Common Lives/Lesbian Lives, Amazon Times* and *Lesbian Contradiction*. She lives with her lover of 18 years, Naiad novelist Barbara Johnson.

Kelly J. Cogswell: I am a queer, disabled native of Louisville, Kentucky, and a current, if somewhat reluctant resident of NYC. My hobbies are sorting through disability and social services paper work and cross-country skiing (not). I've been published in the *Cincinnati Poetry Review, Wayne State Poetry Review, The*

Khumba Times and *Now and Then*. My fondest desires are to publish a collection of "sick" poetry and art, and to meet Dorothy Allison.

Laura Hershey: I am a Denver poet, activist and writer. My poems have appeared in *The Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *Disability Rag*, *Plainswoman*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Candle in the Window* and *Slipstream*. Last summer I did a reading tour of the Northwest to promote my two poetry tapes, *The Prostitutes of Nairobi* and *You Get Proud By Practicing*. I also write a monthly column on disability issues for the *Denver Post*.

Lisa Edmonds: I am currently a senior English literature major at Cal State Univ., Long Beach. I have recently started to submit my poems and have been published twice by *Sheila-na-Gig*.

Louise Gilbert was the assistant to Anton Refregier on the Rincon Annex P.O. Mural in S.F.; has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in S.F., the Legion of Honor, Michaels Gallery and in New York; received two purchase prizes from the S.F. Art Commission.

Magdalena Zschokke, an ex-sailor turned student, recipient of the 1991 Astraea fiction award, is working on her dissertation about lesbian literature at UC Santa Cruz.

Naja Sorella: I'm a 41-year-old Aries (but ruled by Aquarius) Lesbian separatist, severely disabled by immune system illnesses. Frieda, my wonderful, deliciously round Jewish lover of almost 9 years helps make life with a devastating illness more bearable. The other loves of my life are painting, writing, reading, collecting stones/crystals, and talking with other separatists.

Peg O'Connor: I am currently a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Minnesota. It is my deeply held belief that humor and laughter can be subversive.

Rebecca Ripley — Chronologically: boy trapped in girl's body; pregnant corpse trapped in fat girl's body; faggot trapped in anorexic girl's body; disembodied; frigid androgynous lesbian; femme bottom; frigid femme bottom; incest survivor; woman; dyke incarnation of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth. Ethnically: descendant of Moses' brother, Aaron, the high priest. Other: Who I'm attracted to is personal, but not a matter of choice; acting on it or not is the only choice.

Sauda Burch is a writer, an activist living in Oakland.

Sheila J. Packa is a poet and social worker living in Northern Minnesota. She has received a Loft Mentor and Loft McKnight award in Minn., and has published her work in *Sing Heavenly Muse*, *Hurricane Alice* and other places.

Sonja Franeta: I write poetry and stories based on my family and past experiences. I also enjoy translating Russian women poets. I live in San Francisco.

Suzanne: I am a strength-identified African American currently snowed in at a cabin in the mountains, awaiting great notions at my typewriter.

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ESTO NO TIENE NOMBRE, REVISTA DE LESBIANAS LATINAS EN MIAMI, is a new quarterly creative forum for latina lesbians with a Miami twist. Open to all forms (Spanish, Spanglish, English), \$10 per year (checks to: Tatiana de la Tierra). Guidelines, subs to: 4700 NW 7th St. #463, Miami, FL 33126.

MAIZE, A Lesbian Country Magazine. \$10 per year (4 issues). Single issue \$3.50. MAIZE, POB 130, Serafina, NM 87569.

FRONTIERS: A JOURNAL OF WOMEN'S STUDIES has changed its address to: Room 2142, Mesa Vista Hall, Univ. of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131

WE ARE HERE — national resource guide for lesbian and gay youth, pub. by the Gay Youth Comm. Coalition of the Bay Area, \$5 (to We Are Here) from: 2215 Market St., #479, SF, CA 94114.

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TEEN VOICES — by, for & about teenage and young adult women, \$2 for a sample to: Women Express, POB 6009 JFK, Boston, MA 02114.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

ASIAN PACIFIC LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN'S anthology seeks writing and artwork. All genres. Unpublished writers encouraged. Deadline May 25, 1993. Questions, special needs or submissions plus SASE: Sister Vision Press, POB 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 4E2.

Call for submissions by *BATTERED LESBIANS.* SASE for guidelines. E. Hodge/J. Malott, Univ. of Cincinnati, ML374, Cincinnati, OH 45221.

LESBIAN MYSTERIES anthology — short stories, lesbian content, to be pub. by Seal Press. Deadline June 1, 1993. Send mss. and queries to: Irene Zahava, 307 W. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850.

MULTICULTURAL LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS anthology. First-person, tapes, interviews O.K. Topics include: racism in/outside relationships; having/raising children; socializing/friendships; language differences; what works & doesn't, and? SASE to Rene Dawson & Terri Jewell, POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909.

MOMMA SAY: ALL THOSE THINGS THE WOMEN WHO BROUGHT US UP TOLD US — any form, any subject ("My Nana said: Force it and it will always break."). Include name, place of birth, age. Deadline June 1, 1993. SASE to: Terri Jewell. POB 23154, Lansing, MI 48909.

TRIVIA: A Journal of Ideas, Issue #22 is "A Journal of Rejected Ideas" — material rejected because of content (send rejection letters too, if available). Deadline August 1, 1993. POB 9606, N. Amherst, MA 01059-9606. (Note: this is a new POB number!)

LESBIANS RAISING ADOLESCENT BOYS anthology, past or present, any capacity, any form. Queries to: Leah Moussaioff, 2836 South Dakota, Seattle, WA 98108.

DANCING IN THE HEART OF WONDER: Women Exploring the Mind/Body Relationship anthology. Deadline May 15, 1993. Queries, mss. to: Arachne Stevens, 50 Pleasant St. 9E, Brookline, MA 02146.

RISING TIDE PRESS, a new lesbian publisher, seeks full-length lesbian novels. For guidelines, send SASE to: Rising Tide Press, 5 Kivy St., Huntington Station, NY 11746.

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LESBIANS OF COLOR PROJECT of the NCLR (National Center for Lesbian Rights): legal advice and counseling, publications. Frequent S.F. intake hours, English and Spanish. For more info: NCLR, 1663 Mission St., 5th Fl., S.F., CA 94103, 415-621-0674.

HER STORY — a flyer project: write up and post lesbian/womyn's history everywhere. Send a copy of yours, or get samples from: Her Story, POB 1073, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

AUSTRALIAN LESBIAN FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE, Oct. 1993. Write POB 985, Fremantle, Western Australia 6160 for info.

INTERNATIONAL MARCH on the UN to Affirm Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People, June 26, 1994, called by the International Lesbian and Gay Assoc. (ILGA) & U.S. organizers Stonewall 25. Info: Stonewall 25, 208 W. 13th St., NYC, NY 10011-7799.

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WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS — desperately needs money to continue, as well as volunteers to read and type. WBP provides over 750 titles to blind, partially sighted and print disabled women, and publishes a great quarterly newsletter. Tax-deductible donations, queries to: WBP, POB 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408, (612) 872-4352.

SHE — Sister Homelands on Earth has purchased its first two acres — Saguaro Sisterland — to primarily provide accessible space for lesbians with mobility/or allergy/chemical sensitivity disabilities and low-income wimmin. Money and support services are critical to SHE's survival — write to SHE at POB 5285, Tucson, AZ 85703, inc. SASE for reply.

WHIPTAIL WOMYN'S COLLECTIVE is trying to organize a womyn-only dyke-identified, drug-smoke-alcohol free space in S.F. & needs all the help it can get. Send \$, questions, energy to: 3543 18th St. Box #29, S.F., CA 94110.

THE LABYRIS PROJECT: Helping Lesbians Heal from Incest — wants a safe home for all lesbians having trouble surviving due to incest memories, as well as a meeting place for local survivors. Community-based, holistic, realistic, feminist healing. Send checks or SASE for info: New Mexico REEF/Labrys Project, POB 40097, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

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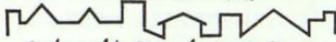


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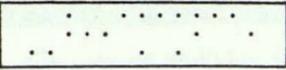
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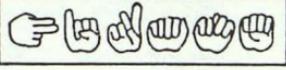
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Upcoming Issues

#50 Lesbian Ethics: what they are, how they translate into our daily lives, how we meet our ethical challenges. Editors: Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch. Out in August.

#51 Open Theme: if you've been wanting to send us work that hasn't fit our recent themes, now's your chance! Any form or style. Deadline is June 1, 1993.

#52 Allies: The words are easy: "none of us is free until all of us are free," "an injury to one is an injury to all." Are these true statements of our community ethic? How do we enact that ethic in our lives in both daily and exceptional ways? Do we "walk our talk"?

We understand oppression as the systematic, institutionalized perpetuation of misinformation and mistreatment of a group of people. This doesn't just happen "out there," it happens among us. Our liberation lies in the unlearning of attitudes, assumptions and behaviors. How, as a community, as individual dykes, do we live out our commitment to each other, how do we articulate the politics of being true allies? What do we require of our allies? What do we offer as allies? How do we respond to each other's oppression? Do we actually experience another lesbian's pain as an injury to ourselves? How do we acknowledge and use our privileges? Do we take initiative to intercept oppressive behavior when it's in our faces? Do we understand the difference between (cultural) sharing and appropriation? Do we, as allies, use what we've learned from our own oppressions without ranking or generalizing ("I know just how you feel") that experience? — These are just the beginning of our questions. We say we're a community that wants to fundamentally change attitudes about race, class, age, ability, size, appearance. As allies, how are we making that happen? Deadline is October 1, 1993.

#53 Tentative theme: Old Dykes, details to come. Deadline is February 1, 1994.

#54 Tentative theme: Lesbians and Religion (or: fuck xmas), to be edited by lesbians raised in other than christian cultures. Deadline: June 1, 1994.

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arms, fists, fists on hammers, logs, on
drums within my breast, me and good.
Good. It saves my life.

—Cheryl J. Moore

the lesbian body wet wet wet can't cope
with this word, so petty for something
exquisite and slippery and sensual.

—Caroline Halliday

Being born masturbating saved me. A girl
needs to have control of her body if she
wants to survive in this world.

—Julia (Dolphin) Trahan