

Broadside

A FEMINIST REVIEW

Toronto Women's
Calendar Inside.

Volume 3, number 10

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Elizabeth Thielen

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ARTS

Classics Revisited: Gender-based Terrorism

Andrea Dworkin's book *Woman Hating* was published in 1974. In this month's 'Classics Revisited,' Alexa de Wiel discusses Dworkin's early exploration into violence against women.

by Alexa deWiel

When Andrea Dworkin's book, *Woman Hating* was first released in 1974, I kept seeing it in prominent places, like people's fridge tops. At that time I was so repelled and incensed by its title I refused to read the book and repeatedly flopped it over on its front cover to avoid having to look at the blatant green and black letters, the colour of bruises, on white veneer. Because of this avoidance, the unread book has nagged like an unpaid bill and so finally, when asked to consider reviewing a feminist classic for *Broadside*, I chose Dworkin's. Although

Woman Hating is a lightweight in the feminist classic category, and certainly not as even or dense as Dworkin's later *Our Blood*, I have come to admire it for its uncompromising willingness to give evidence.

Woman Hating is about women and men, the roles they play, and the violence between them. Beginning with fairy tales which mold our psyche, the book goes on to detail literary pornography by using the examples of *The Story of O* and *The Image*, by Jean de Berg, then foot binding rites, the massive burning of witches and other borderless expressions of fear and hatred of women which travel through the pages like a razor's edge. Without stating it as a goal, Andrea Dworkin seeks to shake by its roots the question Juliet Mitchell asks at the end of *Women's Estate*: what scientific accounting is available to us to explain the longevity of women's sexual oppression by men? According to my understanding, the battle begins when the male sperm must fight tenaciously to dominate the naturally female state of the egg. If life at its kernel is indeed this bellicose, how far behind can the male's need for dominance and hatred of females be?

There is a word for hatred of all people: misanthropy. There is also a word for hatred of women: misogyny. There is no word for hatred of men. Apparently such a thing is inconceivable. The division is twisted deeply at the root of our power hungry, industrial, nature crushing, ambitious, structured, patriarchal, hierarchical world. When women resist, men throw up their hands in horror and scream in hatred and fear about man-hating women. In order for our female culture to blossom, let alone survive the omnipresence of the mainstream, it is necessary for us to understand how radical the phenomenon of women hating really is. Unpalatable though the evidence is, we have to be able to look at the bare face of history.

Take the Dark Ages, for example. It would be difficult, in Dworkin's words, to

give an idea of how dark the Dark Ages actually were. During the social and intellectual gloom of those centuries, the end of the world was believed to be imminent. For good Christians the preparations to depart this earthly abode included renunciation of all hedonistic activities, so called. Naturally, it was the lascivious Woman who led the normal man astray. Since nothing much was written about the interior lives of women in those days, one can only imagine what women, already conveniently rooted in sin, faced in order to be led astray themselves.

Going back and re-reading *Woman Hating* will not give the world weary reader of 1982 a new insight into the phenomenon of violence against women; however, I can't help but think that the graphic nature of this book could be a valuable consciousness raising tool in initiating discussions of the historical, structural and cultural values which perpetuate public sanctioning of violence against women today.

A dominant equation in the book is the notion that women's bodies and psyches ultimately become sacrifices in a male culture which worships death. Mary Daly was later to write about necrophilia too, as expressed in a world where god the father requires total subjugation to be relieved only through death. Marnie Pastnck, in her review of Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* in the May issue of *Manitoba's Herizons*, puts it well: "Bonding of women is the ultimate state of enmity in relation to the War State of patriarchy; it is the radical withdrawal of energy from the death march of males. Sisterhood exists precisely where women have found something better than the War State, rejecting the offered womanly ideal of self-sacrifice."

Women in general and in the movement in particular, have always had our strategic options limited by certain tactical skills, especially those required for independence, or for that matter, collaborative survival. Dworkin's strategy is to build on our latent "primal androgyny." She claims that since

"male and female psyches are mirror opposites to each other, their essential nature and values must be diametrically opposed. The dynamic model of relationship is characterised by conflict." Her answer? "Cultural transformation." The reader is told that one should no longer take refuge in the scenarios of man-woman violence which are society's regulators, no longer play the male-female roles we have been taught, no longer refuse to know who we are and so on. But we are pragmatists, are we not? Since there is no suggestion of process, merely wishful thinking, the strategy falls down. At a time when the women's movement is constantly urged to link up with various coalitions, we must be ever vigilant not to fall prey to false idols or imagery of androgynous idylls which are only words in the long road to human revolution.

I wonder how many of us, with the exception of the truly deranged, would want to actually kill, maim or psychologically abuse men as they, for centuries, have condoned or practised such abuse against women. My guess is that, despite our terrible collective anger, most of us would opt for peace rather than revenge. I think the question is important because the answers will lead to a more confirmed strategy as to how to face the woman-hating phenomenon. We may find after examining our own hate threshold, and maybe giving it a name, that we begin to understand the nature of the problem. This is not to say that we should all turn into shrinks. Women have taken care of men for too long to now "take care" of men's misogyny. But we must become even stronger and resolute ourselves, to turn Dworkin's psychic mirror inside out, to insist that men around us honestly name and rout their aggressions towards women, to accept no excuses, to call a hate-on a hate-on.

Alexa deWiel is author of the poetry collection "Conversations with Bibi," and currently works for the federal government in Ottawa.

Broadside

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LETTERS

Broadside:

All right, all right! You win, I'll renew my subscription only due to your persistence and the last couple of issues that were very worth reading. Thank you, dedicated ones.

Deborah Pinard
Saskatoon

Broadside:

For a couple of months I have been reading *Broadside* at the Sudbury Women's Centre. The August "centrefold," Andrea Dworkin's analysis on pornography ('No Judgements, No Politics,' interview by Kim Fullerton) has convinced me that I should have my own copy. Thanks also for the content article on Bill C-53 ('A Rape By Any

Other Name' by Lois Lowenberger and Reva Landau, August '82).

Please start my subscription with the August issue so I can have Dworkin's analysis.

Carolyn R Campbell
Sudbury, Ont.

Broadside:

As an athlete, I would like to respond to Barbara Halpern Martineau's article "Yearning for Glory" (June, 1982). I too am a lesbian mother. I took my 10 year old son to *Chariots of Fire*. He was mildly bored. I, though caught up in the striving for excellence, was uneasy about the politics, racism and patriotism portrayed. I know that these aspects of international sport are a reality in

this patriarchal society; but they are only ugly appendages which, as a woman in sport, I resent.

My 7 year old daughter asked where the women runners were...don't women run? (I am a swimmer.) My lover and I told her about *Personal Best*. She is most anxious to see it and is furious that the reason she can't is that women caress each other in it. She's seen women caress, she's caressed me and I caress her. She wants to see strong women athletes. She hasn't yet lost the joy of living in a female body. She hasn't learned to feel deprived and limited by it. I understand. I needed to see *Personal Best*.

Lynda Ruddy
Toronto



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Coming to Power - Bottoms Out



Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M. Edited by members of SAMOIS, a lesbian/feminist S/M organization. 240 pages, \$6.95.

by Mariana Valverde

If one were to judge by this anthology, it would seem that lesbians sado/masochistic (s/m) sex is super-powerful, ecstatic, out of this world, and indescribably orgasmic, every single time, over and over. Sound familiar? Yes, that's how lesbians used to describe lesbian sexuality, burying lust under a mountain of adjectives and enveloping sex in a cloud of superlatives. We used to go around telling the whole world that *they* (i.e. straight women) just hadn't ever had proper sex. The women writing about their experiences and fantasies in this book seem to be telling other lesbians and feminists that *they* (i.e. "vanilla" lesbians and straight women) just haven't lived if they haven't tried s/m.

The undoubtedly genuine experience that s/m lesbians have had of discovering a certain kind of sexual power is well summarized in the title of the book: *Coming to Power*. The power in question is found by un-repressing one's fantasies and learning to ask for, and get, anything that one's imagination can dream up. Or rather, not really anything, for there are certain scripts that these women all seem to repeat — but more on that later. For now, let me say that I am not so much discussing actual experiences of s/m sex — I'm a babe in the woods as far as that's concerned — but rather the arguments about power that are made in this book.

And on the seventh day She created sex

One of the women interviewed in this anthology says that she thinks Samois (the San Francisco lesbian s/m support group) attracts a lot of women not just because they're interested in s/m, but because in this lesbian group, sex is definitely okay.

Political lesbian feminists have been notorious for avoiding all direct discussions of sex, while endlessly analyzing the politics of sexuality. So, whenever any group promises to actually talk about sex, and better yet, do it, it draws hordes of hungry dykes. The problem is that you can't just open your mouth and freely talk about sex: we can't, by the unaided power of our lesbian minds, abolish centuries of women's oppression, decades of pornography, millions of sexist words, all of patriarchal history, and our own upbringing. What tends to happen when we "talk" about sex, especially in a group context, and even more so if we write it down for posterity, is that we reject one ideology only to fall into another. We are so busy backing off from feminine moralistic puritanism that we don't notice that we're falling into masculine one-upmanship. Do we have to go from cuddles and romantic monogamy to chains and leather? Aren't they both artificial systems for creating "girls" and "boys"?

There's no denying, however — and here's where many feminists have taken a wrong turn — that s/m is indeed a lot more *sexual* than the early-Michigan school of romantic lesbianism. Raw lust, an important ingredient in most people's lives, had no place in early lesbian feminist mythology:

s/m mythology reinstates this aspect of our experience, and s/m styles of writing use male forms of power that are a lot more active, aggressive, and fundamentally sexual than any feminine forms of behaviour.

Lesbian s/m is not permission to be a little rough in bed. According to this book, s/m among women seems to involve, almost always, considerable quantities of whips, chains, leather, lacy underwear, etc. These are highly ritualized sexual exchanges we're talking about, not explosions of raw lust. "Control" is in fact a key concept in lesbian s/m. The argument is that there must be an agreement as to how the sexual scenario is to develop, and there must always be control mechanisms so that the "bottom," or victim, doesn't get hurt against her will. "Controlled power" is the name of the game.

The advocates of s/m further argue that s/m is a "consensual exchange of power", and that s/m is compatible with feminism precisely because any power that the "top" has is based on consensus, not domination. These women talk about experimenting with power, about trusting their lover by willingly submitting themselves to sexual whims; they talk about "total" elimination of inhibitions, about finding their own power.

But what is the nature of the power exchanged, I kept asking myself as I read. It's obviously sexual or erotic power: but in a society that defines male power as somehow erotic (cowboys are, in our Hollywood universe, eminently powerful *and* erotic), is it possible to put on black leather and use a whip and yet avoid glorifying the phallus?

When gay men demand the right to have consensual sex wherever they want, with whomever they want, it's clear that they want to be able to use the male sexual power they have by virtue of being men. But what do lesbian feminists who are into s/m want? Surely they don't just want a ghetto with leather bars: as women they know that we need not only sexual power and the right to privacy, but also the social power and freedom to re-define the categories of sex, love, and eroticism.

Feminism and fantasies

Nothing in this book struck me as particularly offensive — except for Gayle Rubin's diatribe against feminism, which was especially offensive because Rubin was at one point in her life an extremely promising feminist theoretician. Rubin argues from a typically American standpoint of persecuted minorities demanding the equal rights symbolized by the Statue of Liberty. She condemns feminists for adding to the oppression of the s/m minority; and, while there may be feminists who have said ignorant things about s/m, Rubin does not help matters by saying ignorant things about feminists, and never acknowledging what the women's movement has meant for lesbians.

Another author in the book, Johanna Reimholdt, makes the claim that "feminism can be defined as the belief in the right of women to self-determination," then goes on to interpret this slogan in a very individualistic, liberal fashion. By self-determination she means one's individual right to do as one pleases without interfering with the freedom of others. Thus, since s/m among women is consensual and does not interfere with anyone's freedom, women ought to be encouraged to practise s/m and thus exercise their right to self-determination.

But surely feminism has content: it is not reducible to some abstract right that can be written into the constitution. Feminism gives us a vision of a world in which we would certainly be free to choose, but where the choices themselves would be far richer. To choose whether I'm going to put on this leather or that pink nightgown seems to me like choosing between Crest and Colgate.

Speaking of freedom: feminists talk about women's freedom to determine our own sexuality; but at the same time we also point out that in the land of pornography, the freedom to really determine our sexuality is bound to remain stunted and limited. The advocates of s/m claim that we learn what we truly want by letting our fantasies out of the closet, and that the key to freely creating our own pleasure is to simply act out our fantasies. But they never speak about how those fantasies got there, and they forget to criticize the social process by which certain images came to acquire erotic value. If one has a fantasy about playing a role of a tough army officer ordering people about, does

that mean that one's deepest nature is to be authoritarian? Or, to refer to another fantasy in the book, why would any woman say that she really wants to walk around in six-inch stiletto heels and a tight corset? (If the articles about dykes cross-dressing as "ladies" were meant to be ironic, they would be funny — but they are pathetically deadpan. Try being a secretary, honey!)

Surely none of these fantasies should be taken as indicators of one's deepest, most natural desires. These are socially created desires, instilled in us through all the paraphernalia of what we call "culture." They no more indicate "true" sexual desires than a "Mac attack" indicates a true need for food.

Lesbian erotica ... or B-movies?

There are some political articles in this anthology, but most of the material consists of accounts of real or imagined sexual encounters. I am sorry to announce that lesbian purple prose is no better, as prose, than the drug-store paperback variety. Occasionally there are creative touches — Pat Califia, for example, is a better writer than most — but even the most far-fetched scenarios, such as the sci-fi account of s/m lesbian sex across the planets and the species, bear an uncanny resemblance to the "Elsa She-wolf of the SS" drive-in stereotypes.

There is, however, an important political difference: in s/m lesbian erotic writing (and I presume in the actual practices) there is a conscious attempt not to humiliate the woman playing the "inasochist" role. And in real life, lesbians who play the role of "top" undoubtedly care about their sisters, unlike men who model themselves on the Marquis de Sade to act out their misogyny.

So there is no woman-hatred, but the aesthetic conventions of pornography remain. Most of the sexual encounters narrated resemble each other quite closely; and the plots and characters are mere excuses to get to the juicy parts. There are attempts to write poetically, but none is particularly successful. And the prose relies on all the clichés of heavy breathing, electric tensions, beads of sweat, deep and wet cavities, butterflies, waves crashing, and the rest. And we're led to believe that every single instance of s/m lesbian sex is the height of orgasmic perfection and emotional release for all concerned.

Lesbian s/m writing has a long way to go before it can claim to fulfill the erotic needs of dykes. It's not offensive the way pornography is, but it has not managed to give us real women involved in real situations; it reminds one of a lesbian comic.

What if there's a raid? Some strategic considerations

Some of the lesbians who are now discovering s/m are using an old lesbian political tactic: guilt. Lesbian feminists who are uninterested are labelled "puritanical" and "repressed." The claim made by this new group (which is not necessarily representative of s/m dykes) is that s/m lesbians are not just one more group within the community, but that they're our leaders, the sexual and political vanguard.

The fact that one's sexual practices are the most repulsive to the Moral Majority does not make anyone into a political leader. It's

again a mistaken American belief that the most marginalized groups are somehow the most progressive.

But their sexual practices do indeed make them most vulnerable to state repression, and if Samois were to establish a chapter in the province of Ontario, they'd probably be busted. What should feminists do in that case? My position is that feminists ought to give support — if not congratulations — to minorities engaged in consensual sex which is not aimed at hurting or humiliating any individual or group. It seems to me that insofar as lesbian s/m is indeed consensual, and does not humiliate women, I should as a feminist extend my critical support to them if they're being persecuted. But this does not mean we have to bow to Gayle Rubin's argument about the inherently radical nature of s/m. Guilt has never worked as a political tactic, and if those of us whose sexual practice is contemptuously described as "vanilla" (i.e. boring) are constantly guilted for "being part of the problem," then it will be very difficult to unite the lesbian feminist community — not to mention the women's movement at large — in defence of this minority.

More words about sex

When we want to talk about sex, we can't really talk about sex. We talk about socially constructed concepts by means of socially constructed concepts. Anything more than a whispered "I like that" in the midst of pleasure will be immediately surrounded by the ghosts of social roles, by hordes of moral injunctions, by armies of precepts, stereotypes, and judgements. Lesbian writing about s/m does not avoid this problem of ideological overload, despite its claim that by tackling the roles head-on their power is somehow neutralized.

The argument is that the conscious appropriation of a social role for a limited period is a lot better than unconsciously falling into roles while pretending they don't exist. This is true enough; but it avoids the fundamental question of why we have the roles we have, why we're driven from one social or sexual role to another in search of greener pastures, only to find that the new role is also constricting.

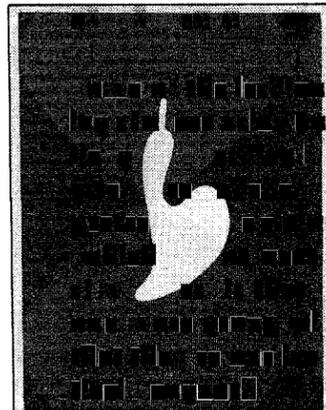
Talking about equal rights for sexual minorities avoids the issue of just who creates and who profits from the various sexual options from which we're supposed to be free to choose our favourite: the consumer model of sexual "choices" avoids looking at just how patriarchal capitalism puts these choices, and not others, on a shelf.

Of course, we all happen to live under patriarchal capitalism; we have to find ways to express our sexuality even if there is no truly free and autonomous choice. So we all try to enjoy our bodies as best we can. But, for Sappho's sake, let's not, any of us, claim we've discovered the perfect Lesbos.

(For information about SAMOIS, write: SAMOIS, PO Box 11798, San Francisco, CA, 94101, USA.)

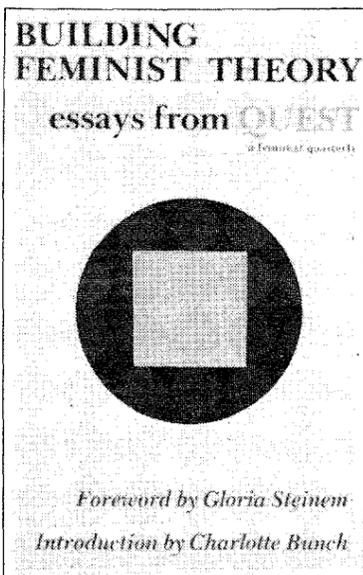
Mariana Valverde is a post-doctoral student of nineteenth century French socialism, a long time activist and member of Lesbians Against the Right (LAR).

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SEE BACK PAGE

A Quest for Theory and Practice



Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest New York, London: Longman Inc. 1981. Pp. xxiv, 280. \$12.95.

Building Feminist Theory is a collection of twenty-four articles from *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, a journal of feminist political thought founded in Washington, D.C. in 1972. *Quest* states as its goal promotion of the search for feminist ideologies and strategies, with emphasis on the exploration of differences and similarities among segments of the women's movement. *Building Feminist Theory* is a product of this search and admirably reflects the journal's intentions while providing a feminist framework for further theoretical activities.

The articles, culled from *Quest's* first three volumes, are organized under four central topics also based on these volumes. The four topics — "Power and Practice," "The Politics of Everyday Life," "Feminist Perspectives on Class," "Organizations and Strategies" — summarize the theoretical intentions of the *Quest* staff. They are, first, that feminist theory must be drawn from everyday life and as such must concern itself with issues of class, race, and sexual oppression. Equally, it must be directed "toward a workable strategy for the future" (p. xvii). Further, theory is evolving in a twofold sense: that is, theory is in a state of development, and evolution is a characteristic of feminist theory. As long as theory emerges from everyday life, it must pace itself to experiences as they occur. Theory is not static, nor does it dictate behaviour. Rather, it surfaces from immediate experience as a mode of understanding and clarifying that experience. As such, specific theories can only be moments in the multidimensional evolutionary process of feminist theory.

Guided by these principles, various writers address such topics as feminist approaches to political action; the relations of the public sphere of work to the private sphere of personal relations; the effect of class on the way women live, work, and theorize; the relations between patriarchy and capitalism, feminism and Marxism; and the practical problems in feminist organizations. Irrespective of subject-matter, certain concerns remain constant: the challenge to structures which define an inadequate reality for women; tentative moves toward describing women-centred realities; the emergence of women-centred structures. Though the articles date from six or seven years ago, questions raised are still relevant, and, certainly, the process of on-going analysis which the writers have consistently adhered to is not outdated.

Gloria Steinem, who wrote the foreword, introduces the volume with a sigh of relief: finally a book for the "old" and the "new" feminist. For the "old," a work that conveniently packages her thoughts and for the "new" a work that saves her from reinventing the wheel. How useful, and how dangerous.

Traditionally, the development of theory has been isolated from practice and so theory has been distinguished from and even opposed to its basis in everyday life. This development has allowed it to be used as a short cut to experience and as a substitute for lived experience. While abstract theorizing has taken many forms, one of its most common manifestations is rhetoric: the art of speaking effectively which may effectively have nothing to do with how one lives one's life. The transformation of meaningful theory into rhetoric is greatly aided by dissemination of texts removed from immediate, everyday experience. Although *Building Feminist Theory* does not advocate such a transformation, the temptation to effect that transformation is intrinsic to current understanding of theoretical activity. Therefore, when confronted by the written presence of theory, women must defy its tendency to authorize and overcome lived experience. Thus we cannot share Steinem's relief. If feminist theory is to remain alive, everyone coming to it must invent her own wheel and be prepared to do so several times. While we can build on feminist theory as we become more articulate in the face of our own experience, we have to ask how we can do so without establishing past theories and experiences as authorities.

In part, feminist theory itself responds to this concern by demanding "integrity of involvement" (p.xii) and by elucidating a more concrete relationship between theory and practice. Generally, *Building Feminist Theory* demonstrates how this is possible. However, Charlotte Bunch's introduction, as well as her article, entitled "Beyond

Either/Or: Feminist Options," most clearly articulates how theory can remain rooted in everyday life. The plan she proposes is at once simple and complex and underlies her concept of nonaligned feminism. "Non-aligned feminism," she says, "is political action taken according to an assessment of the particulars involved" and is informed by "every possible source of analysis." It is an open-ended process of political understanding that relies on "emerging feminist analysis of particular issues" rather than on "pre-established approaches to each issue" (p. 47). This last phrase is the key. As long as theory emerges from practice and is indissolubly bound to the particulars of everyday life, it cannot become a set of pat answers; it must remain alive to possibilities and change. Theory, like political analysis, cannot be overlaid on practice or political action, nor can it be a static behavioural code. Theory and practice, like political analysis and action, both emerge from particular frameworks and neither exercises power over the other. Establishing an egalitarian rapport between theory and practice also entails redefinition of power, another central theme in *Quest's* conception of feminist theory.

Recognition of women's oppression also means recognition of the oppressive use of power in political, social, and cultural constructs. Within these constructs, power has meant domination and authority; power over something or someone rather than the ability to act, as in the French meaning of *pouvoir*. The essays in this book work toward a perception of power as energy that fuels an effective interaction with the environment. This collaboration is consistent with integrity of involvement and reflects an authentic historical understanding of power.

These views, of course, generate their own problems, not least of which is the conflict between feminist ideals and the reality of living in a world still dominated by hierarchical ideologies and structures. This conflict permeates all levels of women's lives: How do we carry feminist ideals of collectivity into hierarchically defined work-places? How do

we empower ourselves in situations which actively deny that possibility? More crucially, how do we exorcise the patriarchal demons from our own perceptions and ways of working? Here also the *Quest* collection proves useful because it addresses the fact that we straddle two worlds and that for the most part women still rely on patriarchal institutions for their livelihood.

The writers who address these questions do not necessarily provide answers to the problems raised. Rather, they give accounts of personal and organizational solutions and of questions used to clarify and assess their own situations. The questions, not the answers, are most significant because they suggest how to clarify one's own problems without being forced into preconceived models. Questions can and do predetermine realities. However, they are less likely to circumscribe experience when they address an individual in the context of her own situation.

Above all, *Building Feminist Theory* does not presume to dictate *the way* or even to point toward *the way*. The various writers recognize the futility of such an endeavour without sacrificing the value of publicizing individual and collective struggles. *Quest's* rigorous dedication to open forums and to discussion and analysis, and its belief in open-ended process, offer a way into the diversity of experiences crucial to the development of feminist theory. The writers openly address questions that are bound to create dissension, not with the intention of making a neat theoretical package, but of responding to and working through as many levels of women's experiences as possible. They do not claim to be all-inclusive or to be investigating several levels of reality in order to choose the most attractive. Rather, they work from a belief that surface contradictions must give way to fuller and richer understandings of our lives which are not at the expense of one class, one race, or one sex.

Rachel Vigier is a translator and a resource person in integrated studies at the University of Waterloo.

The Apple and the Asp

Charlotte Bunch speaks on
Sex and Politics: A Lesbian Feminist
Perspective

Friday, October 22, 1982
7:30 pm
Trinity United Church
427 Bloor West, Toronto

Charlotte Bunch is coming to Toronto to speak on issues of special interest to feminists, lesbians, gays, and their supporters. The topic of her presentation will be 'Sex and Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective.'

Charlotte Bunch, feminist, author, activist, theorist, editor, teacher and public speaker, is a veteran of the civil rights and anti-war movements in the sixties, active in the Women's Liberation Movement in Washington D.C. and Cleveland, Ohio, throughout the seventies, and one of the founders of *The Furies*, a lesbian feminist newspaper and of *Quest*, a Feminist Quarterly.

Bunch is now affiliated with the Public Resource Center in Washington D.C., has served on the Board of Directors of the National Gay Task Force, is on the Board of the National Women's Conference in the States, she has taught in several universities and is active in the National Women's Studies Association.

Charlotte Bunch has edited six feminist anthologies including *Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest*, and has written for a variety of publications, including *The Washington Post*, *Off Our Backs*, and *Christopher Street*. She has travelled widely, has studied and spoken throughout the world, including Europe, Australia and the Pacific Rim countries.

Tickets: \$5 at door (students and unemployed \$4),
\$4 advance (available in October)

Everyone welcome

This event is sponsored by Broadside

Books to Note



by Elaine Berns

POETRY

Olga Broumas, *Soie Sauvage*. Copper Canyon Press 1979
Carolyn Forché, *The Country Between Us*. Harper, 1981
Myra Glazer ed., *Burning Air and A Clear Mind: Contemporary Israeli Women Poets*; Ohio Univ. Press, 1981.
Judy Grahn, *She Who*. Diana Press 1972
June Jordan, *Passun, new poems: 1977-1980*. Beacon Press 1980
Ursula K Le Guin, *Hard Words and Other Poems*. Harper 1981.
Denise Levertov, *Candles in Babylon*. General 1982
Denise Levertov, *Light up the Cave*. General 1981
Audre Lorde, *Chosen Poems, old and new*. Norton 1982
Muriel Rukeyser, *The Gates*. McGraw-Hill 1974

Alice Walker, *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning*. Dial Press 1979.

Canadian

Gert Beadle, *Rising*. Northern Woman Journal 1980
Elizabeth Brady, *Tin Type*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books 1977
Nicole Brossard, *Daydream Mechanics*. Coach House Press 1980
Bernice A. Lever, *Yet Woman I Am*. Highway Book Shop 1977
Susan Musgrave, *Tarts and Muggers*. McClelland and Stewart 1982
Phyllis Webb, *Wilson's Bowl*. Coach House 1980
Helene Rosenthal, *Listen to the Old Mother*. McClelland and Stewart, 1975.

(These books are all available at the Toronto Women's Bookstore.)

Alive! - Roots to Rhythm

by Deena Rasky and Nancy Irwin

Alive! is an all-women jazz quintet with roots firmly planted in feminist soil. The band started out as a trio, with rhiannon doing vocals and piano, Suzanne Vincenza on cello and acoustical bass and Carolyn Brandy playing congas and percussion. The three met at a women's music workshop. But soon, rhiannon wanted exclusively to sing, and the trio needed a fuller rhythmic drive, so they added Barbara Borden on drums and Janet Small on piano in 1979. It worked out well. Their first album 'Alive!' came out shortly after, and they subsequently made numerous tours and performed at women's music and jazz festivals. Today, Alive! is a permanent component of the women's music industry, with their second album from Redwood records, 'Call it Jazz,' performed live from their home base in San Francisco, and produced by the well respected Helen Keane.

Alive! doesn't mind their music being called jazz, even though it transcends this narrow description. Their collective sounds successfully combine rhythm and blues, rock, gospel, be-bop, folk and Afro-Latin music.

Womylny Way Productions brought Alive! to Toronto last May. The hall was sold-out (see review in *Broadside*, Vol. 3, June '82). Before hitting the road again, Carolyn Brandy and Janet Small spoke with *Broadside*.

Broadside: About your environment, did either of you listen to jazz as children? How did you get into that kind of music?

Carolyn Brandy: Both of us would have different answers. For me, I grew up listening to a variety of music. I was listening to a lot of classical music because I was playing the violin. I also listened to a lot of R & B. My era was the one that came up with Chubby Checker and Fats Domino, the Silhouettes (laughter), the Drifters, Everly Brothers, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder. These were my favourites. Stevie Wonder is a few years younger than me, so when he came out with 'Fingertips' he was 9 and I was 12. I also listened to dance music, the Beatles, and Jefferson Airplane, and then John Coltrane. I started listening to jazz when I was in high school. I also listened to R & B because we had dances every Friday night and that's what we listened to on the radio.

As to how I got started playing jazz... After high school I stopped playing the violin. I stopped playing anything for a couple of years. I went to Europe, travelling around for a couple of years in the late '60s, the time of Beatlemania and all that. That's when there was a big cultural revolution in the States which was prompted, in part, by the civil rights movement, and also by the Vietnam war, where all the students were demonstrating and people were taking their identity into their hands. There was also a lot of drumming happening, by Black people, Latins. Everybody was taking to the streets with who they were. It was the thing to go back to your roots. I got involved in drumming that way, at parties and on the street and in parks. For four years I played what we called thunder drumming (she proceeded to demonstrate on the table top). Then I got tired of that so I started studying drums. I later met up with some jazz players, Michele Rosewoman being one. I was in San Francisco for about a year when I met rhiannon, and we played a concert with Michele and some other women in the Bay Area. It was the first time I've ever played with all women. It was pretty earth-shattering. Then Vinny (Suzanne Vincenza), rhiannon and I were all in a workshop given by Michele and we started playing together. That's how it came to be, that's when Alive! started. So that's my Genesis. Now Janet has a whole different story.

Janet Small: Which is a bit similar, but I grew up in Southern New Mexico. I did nine years of instrument, growing up.

B: What sort of music did your family listen to?

JS: Classical. I played classical and also listened to AM radio — so I learned AM radio type music. I went to California to school and that was the first time I really got to hear FM music. There weren't even local rock bands. The dances at school had some middle aged guys performing, but it overlapped with jazz — a certain kind of jazz.

There were much fewer women playing — it never occurred to me to play. That stuff was just stuff on the radio — it was very distant. Eventually I wanted to play the kind of music I was dancing to. I started playing rock and blues in about 1971. But I ended up majoring in political science in college because I got involved in politics, went to Cuba and cut sugar cane, and worked for the National Lawyers Guild as an organizer. For about six months I was thinking about being a lawyer with my political science degree.

B: What about the others?

CB: rhiannon also was not so much into jazz when she was growing up. She grew up in the country of South Dakota and studied classical voice — sang in choirs, did school theatre. It wasn't really satisfying her so she went to New York and really had her ears opened up to jazz by the people she met, Black people. She taught theatre in a high school and they turned her onto lots of music. She did a lot of listening, but for about 10 years she worked as an actress and did not do any singing. Then she went through improvisational street theatre and got back into using her voice. Soon she was all the way back into singing. Barbara (Borden) is the one who's actually been hearing jazz all her life and grew up playing in big bands.

B: And Suzanne?

JS: Well, Suzanne played classical cello when she was growing up and it's my impression that her family didn't hear jazz. When she went off to school she got into playing the more avant-garde end of classical music — modern contemporary classical and some improvisational music. She also got involved in politics but ultimately came around to playing jazz when she joined Alive!

Actually, none of us really played jazz when we were growing up. That's one of the things we all have in common. Obviously, if that wasn't the case we wouldn't be playing together because our levels of development would be so different. Our kind of development is really similar — we played all our



Alive!'s Carolyn Brandy (l) and Janet Small.

lives — but nobody has really been doing quite what we're doing now. It's new for all of us.

B: That's why you've got a bit of everything in your music.

CB: Yes, that's what makes it unique. The odd variety of albums which somehow works — we hope!

B: What about role models?

CB: I think probably my biggest role model is a man named Markus Gordon and he's taught me a lot — not just the drums — but culturally, where the drums are coming from. He's a spiritual person. The drums come from that cultural place. A lot of drumming is done for calling the spirits — the ancestors in the spirit. He's been a pretty heavy influence in my life.

Women percussionists I know are pretty much my peers — they're not on the next level like Janet can find with piano players, because the drum's an instrument women didn't play too much. I'm sure they are there, but they're not out in a popular way. It's predominantly the men who drum.

B: It seems like with everything else, women

are starting to get into all the areas we've been kicked out of, which is almost everything.

CB: It's true. I think that Alive! functions that way as role model for younger women that are coming up, and that's something that inspires us. We like doing that.

B: When did you start getting involved with the women's movement?

CB: Originally in the later '60s and '70s, I was political but wasn't into the women's movement *per se*. I was doing Guerilla theatre and smuggling people into Canada (during the Vietnam war). I then moved toward working on collectives, organizing, being part of eclectic businesses and cooperative communities. I got into the feminist movement through going to the women's music festivals and being in the band. It happened really naturally. Before that I was involved with leftist politics, and the women who were involved with leftist politics, like Janet, had their own thing. But it wasn't feminist politics especially.

B: How do you find playing at a festival, compared to what you do at a concert?

CB: Festivals are exceptional for their women-only audiences — Michigan is, Champaign almost is, but not quite.

B: How did you like playing in Toronto?

CB: Womylny Way did an exceptional job of organizing and promotion and that's really what gave us a sold-out house. It's due to more than Alive!, because we can be Alive! and go to a place with no promotion and nobody will come.

JS: We did a gig in Philadelphia where there were a dozen people, eight of them were family. But at the end of the week at a concert there were 500.

B: Same town?

JS: Yeah. There was obviously a misunderstanding as to who was supposed to promote the club gig. Nobody advertised it, so it's not surprising that no one came. It was so graphically illustrated.

B: How do you identify yourselves?

JS: We define ourselves in terms of being people in the world with concerns that are the same as concerns of everybody, like the environment, or peace instead of war, survival — values that are a lot of times seen as women's values — nurturing, positive growth values rather than destructive ones. But for example, the Native American movement is really strong. They're also talking about the Mother Earth and there are a lot of guys in the Native movement who have these same values. So there's sometimes no dividing line between men and women but only what you believe.

CB: But then there comes the fact that we are all women, and we have supported all-women causes and we have supported the gay causes as well. That's not our only concern. We're human beings and we play music and we have a lot of concerns. I'm a mother, so I'm concerned about my child. That isn't particularly a lesbian issue. Lesbians separate themselves into little groups, so it's the same. Let's get real. We're in a big world. We definitely do not define ourselves as lesbian separatists. I mean I have a son. How could I be a separatist?

JS: Generally, our message is trying to find common ground rather than divided ground, trying to bring all these people and things together — "sisters and brother," trying to find how we can all be together in the world rather than separate. Although a lot of times going off and being separate produces a lot of strength.

CB: In fact some of us at different periods of time have been separatists and have found value in that kind of experience. I second what Janet says. One of our messages is "Come Together." We used to sing that song, "Come together, be together, pull together with respect to dignity." We're trying to bring all kinds of people together through the music. I think we're pretty much humanistic.

B: You play in jazz clubs as well as predominantly woman concerts. What have your experiences been in the male-run clubs?

CB: The hardest part is getting into the clubs because we're women and our credibility is questioned. We get a lot of men who come up to us after shows in the clubs who really love the music.

JS: I've had men come up and say "You're a lot better than I expected you to be

(laughter)." Because women traditionally have been in the home, with the exception of wartime, and because few women have been playing publicly, women aren't expected to have it together.

CB: Alive! is unique because we're an all-women jazz band. That's really something different.

JS: It's a matter of credibility. They look at us and wonder if we couldn't get any guys to play with us (laughter).

B: And to have two women percussionists is really exceptional. So many bands consist of all women except for the drummer.

CB: Drums have traditionally been a male instrument, and this is not in the last forty or fifty years, let me tell you. This has been going on for two thousand years. There are certain drums today on the west coast and if a woman touches those drums, the drums have to go through all sorts of cleansings and rituals. Those are pretty hard odds to be up against. But some people are stricter than others. Somewhere in your psyche there's the feeling: "Oh, I'd like to play drums, but in intimidates me."

B: You mentioned in a workshop that drums originated in Africa, then travelled to other countries, but while the male instruments and cultures were transplanted, the female-based drums and rituals stayed at home.

CB: Yes, that's an important point to make. The women in the older societies had a place but they just didn't transfer the way the male cults and traditions did. So we have a narrow-minded viewpoint of male dominance. Now, feminists are going out and rediscovering our roots. Women are finding out that we had rituals just like the male cults, only ours got buried for a while. There once were male societies and female societies working out side by side.

B: How do you manage financially as a band?

CB: It's hard to make a living.

JS: In fact some women's music is selling better than jazz albums. Everybody puts out their album and there's so much for the jazz fan to choose from.

B: Also there's a resistance to jazz so it takes a while for an audience to accept a band.

CB: Isn't it funny that a band that's been together for ten years is all of a sudden a new band that's been discovered. That's what probably will happen with Alive! All these women across the country have been supporting us, then the mainstream gets hip to us, and then we're the new thing. We joke about that sometimes.

JS: We wonder if they'll discover us the way Columbus discovered America.

B: How have you changed in the five years of being together?

JS: We haven't all been together that long. But things don't stay the same for long. Some things had to change because to stay in the same place would be like going backwards. Things seem to happen in cycles. You're thinking about different things from one time to the next. Different things come into the news. Different things have been happening in the world. There have been different focuses in the music over time. Then, for instance, Suzanne is playing electric bass which she wasn't five years ago. And with me and electric piano... We used it on the album but we couldn't carry it around on the road. That's just a musical example. We ask ourselves how well do we say what we want in our music. In the past we said things just because we wanted to say them and people were then saying "Yuck, how corny" or "How condescending." It was worse than not saying it at all. We didn't do it right. We have to be careful that we're not preaching. That's always a concern.

CB: We find that women have supported our growth throughout. As working musicians we are successful because we are working, and we feel very fortunate about that. And because we're not an overnight success but have grown step by step, we have been able to maintain our ethics.

We are but the tip of an iceberg
hopeful to be the reflection
of a many-sided rainbow
Aspiring toward a new dream...

The Women of Alive!
from a poem by Carolyn Brandy

E.T.: Extra-Terrestrial Ultra Mundane

by Susan G. Cole

Post World War II culture has spawned a new breed of creative personae called the Pop Genius. We couldn't have pop geniuses before the fifties; the media weren't mass or fast enough to deliver messages around the world with the ease that has made their innovators cultural Messiahs.

Pop geniuses are not to be confused with artists. An artist takes the kind of creative and emotional risks that challenge a listener, a viewer or a reader. The artist goes beyond what's popular in order to inform an often inhospitable audience. The pop genius, on the other hand, has his or her finger on the pulse of popular sentiment or malaise and won't let that finger wander away from the mainstream, tending instead to bring to light what is predictably pleasing to a mass audience.

So, for example, Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish filmmaker who eschews a fast pace in order to mount the most disturbing images, is an artist. Steven ("Jaws") Spielberg, though, is a pop genius.

Spielberg, boy wonder that he is, has been able to garner large scale appreciation for his efforts. His first film, "Dual," was according to critics promising. His second, "Jaws," was a roaring success. Pop geniuses create pop phenomena and influence the collective psyche of their audiences. Sure enough, in the wake of "Jaws," few folks could dunk their little toes into the sea without having a few doubts. Visions of sharks' teeth were everywhere.

Spielberg's next film, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" found the boy wonder going off into the nether regions of space, speculating on the arrival and influence of extra-terrestrial beings. Many people felt that Spielberg wasn't taking his audience with him. This would not have bothered an artist, as artists often thrive on the knowledge that they're ahead of their time. But to a budding pop genius it was a near disaster. Spielberg re-released Close Encounters, cleaning it up somewhat, but not enough to make it a hit.

He moved on to terra firma with "Raiders of the Lost Ark," a glorious adventure he directed in collaboration with that other cinematic pop genius, the creator of "Star Wars," George Lucas. Produced as it seemed to be with an enormous amount of good will, "Raiders" was a difficult film not to like.

But ever since he released "Close Encounters," Spielberg has insisted that the extra-terrestrial was the subject he wanted to pursue, that he hadn't quite finished yet and wanted to make a film that was a kind of sequel to "Close Encounters," a film that would recount the story of one of the creatures from outer space that had been inadvertently left behind on earth.

Now that, regardless of how the term has been abused, was promising. In spite of its occasional meanderings, "Close Encounters" was a film with vision and some important ideas. Spielberg toyed with the notion that specially "gifted" earthlings could have a special connection with extra-terrestrials. He explored the way in which our heretofore earthbound international language — music — could be, quite literally, a universal

language. And when in the last scenes, the extra-terrestrials appeared, unencumbered it seemed by mortal fears, spiritually aware and with decidedly feminine characteristics, it was plain that Spielberg had the right idea.

Well, he lost it somewhere along the way. And even though critics have made the claim that Spielberg has made the grand leap from pop genius to artist, "E.T.," the long-awaited sequel to Close Encounters, keeps none of Spielberg's promises and delivers instead a good deal of treacly pap.

As is the case with all of Spielberg's movies, the first ten minutes of "E.T." are breathtaking. The leader of the extra-terrestrials tries to gather the troops but E.T. doesn't make it back to the ship in time. For a few seconds we see the world from the diminutive E.T.'s point of view: the huge trunks of the trees that loom large between the creature and the ship, the thud of E.T.'s pursuers' feet, amplified and doubly terrifying. But from that point there isn't a single innovative moment in the film.

We move to a suburb where Elliott, a boy of around eight years old, lives with his older brother, his younger sister and his recently separated mother. The boys are hanging out with their friends when Elliott goes out into the yard where he has his first encounter with E.T. In spite of the hectoring of his brother's non-believing buddies, Elliott is convinced he's onto something, pursues the creature takes it in and with his now converted brother and sister, teaches E.T. about life on earth.

But trouble looms. The education of E.T. is interspersed with ominous sequences showing the bad guys (army? NASA nasties? we aren't meant to know) continuing first their relentless pursuit of E.T. and then the ongoing surveillance of Elliott's house.

E.T.'s a fast learner. When confronted with Ma Bell's gift to earthlings, E.T. decides he will "phone home" and puts together a kind of laser apparatus. Elliott smuggles E.T. out of the house on Hallowe'en, gets a flying lesson from the extra-terrestrial and arrives at the designated spot from which E.T. can send his message home. No reply. Elliott brings him back home but E.T. gets sick. The Bad Guys descend and capture E.T. Surprisingly, they don't try to destroy him but rather attempt to save him with the best of conventional medicine. Elliott, who feels and thinks everything E.T. feels and thinks, screams throughout the ordeal. Elliott's hollering is to no avail and conventional medicine (this is the message part) doesn't work. E.T. dies.

But wait. E.T. phoned home and his pals in outer space finally picked up the message and have sent the appropriate energies down to save E.T.'s life. E.T. lives. Now all that's left is to get him to the space ship that is coming to fetch him. This involves smuggling E.T. out again, capturing the truck, getting rid of whatever G-men are still hanging around, engaging Elliott's once cynical friends to help out and going through the ultimate chase scene. E.T. is gathered up by his space ship. End of movie.

This is not a movie without its charms. The scene in which Elliott tries to tell E.T. how the world works by showing the extra-terrestrial his toys is disarmingly moving. E.T.'s first friendly message, throwing back



Boy teenagers eye E.T.'s spaceship with awe.

the softball Elliott lobs in his direction, shows Spielberg as a real American charmer. But nowhere to be found are the insights into communication "Close Encounters" provided. E.T. teaches Elliott nothing and hence we learn nothing Spielberg promised to tell us about extra-terrestrials and human potential. Gone is the gentle and magnanimous feminine spirit of E.T. E.T. is a strangely ugly reptilian creature with life-giving powers he never shares or explains.

The moment Elliott's sister asks if E.T. is a boy or a girl, Spielberg misses the opportunity of a lifetime. It's a boy, says Elliott. Why? How could he know? What would an E.T. girl look like anyway? This movie is supposed to be about love and ends up being a fairy tale with mildly Platonic overtones.

Spielberg is the master of emotional manipulation. You may be irritated that Spielberg takes the time to tell us E.T. is a boy. You may knit your brow and wonder why Spielberg gives us a single-parent family including a mother who is flipping out because her ex-husband has gone to Mexico with his girlfriend. You may decide that by excluding a father-figure, Spielberg avoided having to deal with the crucial question of how the putative head of the household might have responded to his son's affection for E.T. You may find the drunken sequence misses the point (what kind of mind-altering drugs are extra-terrestrials into anyway? Presumably none) and is hopelessly slapstick and you will know that the death sequence is being milked to the point of absurdity. And still, this movie will make you cry.

That's not all bad. Many people go to the movies for the express purpose of being emotionally manipulated. But it makes for some insidious movie-making: Elliott has E.T. in tow in the basket on the handlebars of his bike. He has gathered up his older brother and his pals and the bad guys (now cops, the army, doctors, every authority figure you can think of) are in hot pursuit. The viewer is right there with E.T. and the youth of today. Sure enough, E.T. gives out

that special energy and Elliott and his phalanx of escorts fly into the air in the proverbial nick of time. Chances are you'll cheer with the rest of the audience.

But as everyone is oohing and ahhhing and whooping with joy and you wipe the water from your face for about the fifth time, take a look at the screen. You might not like what you see. That wasn't the youth of today. It was the American male youth of today, flying in formation to the rescue. Fans of "E.T." tell me that the film is about how much kids know and how little adults are tuned in. Today's female adolescents ride bikes with the rest of them. Where were they? They're obviously not a part of Spielberg's new fangled vision. If he was really celebrating the potential of today's kids, he shouldn't have left half of them out.

And at the end, when the light of the departing space craft illuminates the face of Elliott one gets heavy enlightenment vibes that in 1982 have no business being a male prerogative. Spielberg is so skilled at pulling heartstrings that one barely notices that this movie, which purports to challenge accepted values, in fact serves to perpetuate some of the worst in our culture.

Sexism doesn't necessarily render a film totally without value but it's particularly off-putting in a film that is supposed to be the big message movie of 1982 and which is supposed to fall under the rubric of art. Were this film in other respects a masterpiece, the sexism could perhaps be consigned to a footnote.

But "E.T." is not art, mostly because Steven Spielberg is not an artist who takes risks, but rather a pop genius content to go the easy, heartwarming route.

Remember that classic Walt Disney tear-jerker "Old Yeller?" Boy finds dog, boy loves dog, boy loses dog. Everybody cries. "E.T." may have cost twenty times as much to make but it really is just Old Yeller with bad skin. Frankly, I prefer "Old Yeller." It never pretended to be anything other than what it was.

The Bible:

In the Beginning Was the Cliché

by Judith Quinlan

In a letter to *Broadside*, Judith Quinlan wrote: "I know you are presently reviewing feminist classics, so this might not fit in with your plans! Anyway, here's my first ever review of a mainstream 'classic.' I figured it was time someone reviewed the world's most popular (and possibly longest) book. Hope you enjoy it."

The opening chapter of *The Bible* is familiar to most people. This is the part where Eve sins, and Man (in the racial sense of the

word) is thrown out of the garden of Paradise. This chapter basically sets the scene; by introducing Ma and Pa — the forebears in what may well be history's first dynasty epic, and by setting the original condition, which is one of general hardship and punishment. We know from the start that this will not be a utopian novel, and it certainly isn't a romance.

The next major scene in this rather ponderous saga is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. This event introduces the main ethical theme of the novel — the conflict of

man against man. The rest of *The Bible* explores this conflict from every conceivable angle. The murder of Abel by Cain is post-figured in a repeating pattern of variations on a theme.

We see, for example, the variation of Jacob and Esau. In this case the jealousy between the boys is blamed on parental favouritism. In "Joseph of the many-coloured coat," Joseph is not only his father's favourite, but is blessed by the hand of fate (played, in this story, by God). This more elaborate variation has the victim son not only surviv-

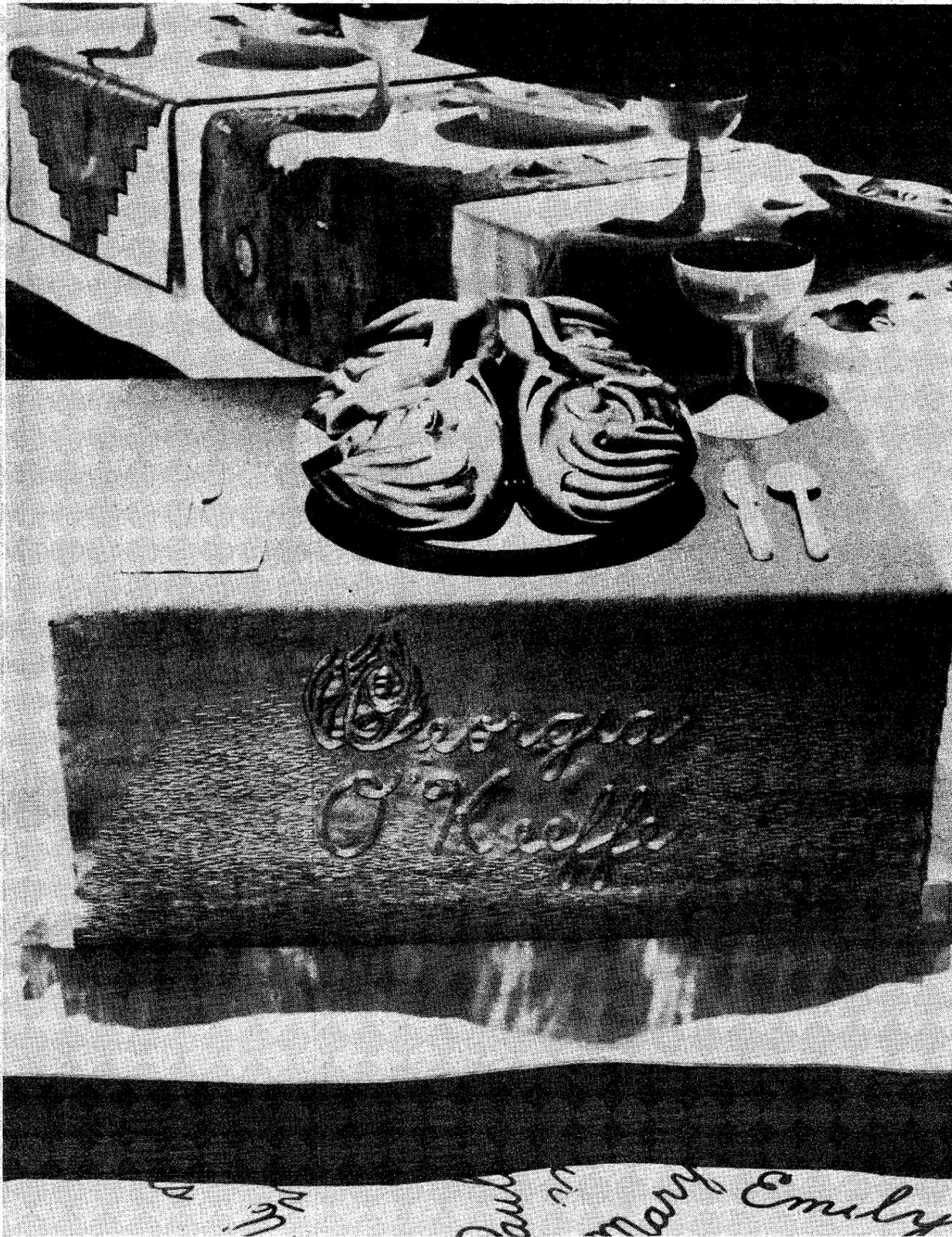
ing, but moving on to better things.

The story of Jacob and Isaac, a short cameo piece, is unusual for its delicacy and simplicity of line. Here the conflict is set between father and son, where God, the super-dad, not only saves the son from victimization, but is the one who orders the execution in the first place — a complex ethical examination of the duplicity of fate.

Often the conflict between Cain and Abel is echoed not by individual characters but by

• continued page 9

The Dinner Party: Indigestion for the Establishment



Mary McNally

Georgia O'Keeffe's plate: a monument to women's sex organs, or tasteless kitsch?

by Susan Crean

Judy Chicago's Dinner Party has been and gone. In Toronto and Montréal the turnout was extraordinary: 75,000 at the musée d'art contemporaine, more than usually come in a year, and 50,000 at the Art Gallery of Ontario whose Volunteer Committee brought in the show as a fundraiser. Although it had to cut back on the numbers admitted because people took so long filing through the exhibit, the Committee still grossed about \$200,000 and cleared \$65,000 for its art purchase fund.

There is much about the circumstances of the Dinner Party's appearance in Toronto worth criticizing, starting with the fact that a \$4 admission was charged (there was no charge in Montréal) and ending with the Gallery's failure to relate the show to the work of local women artists by organizing a companion exhibition of their work (as was done by Montréal's curator Louise Letocha). It was left to the community to make the connections, which the Woman's Cultural Building collective did by organizing a panel session to discuss the issues raised by the

Dinner Party (a transcript will be published in the next issue of *Fireweed*) and by leafletting the crowds waiting to get in to see the show. The collective points out that "the Dinner Party is not the culmination of women's or feminist art in Toronto — it is only one step... If high profile institutions such as the AGO are not responsive (to women's cultural work in the city), this doesn't mean these efforts have to remain invisible."

No one actually protested the coming of the Dinner Party, though the thought may have crossed several minds. When the show came to New York several years ago, a group of artists staged a mock dinner party called *Maria Manhattan's Box Lunch* and invited 39 guests "of dubious distinction," including Rosie Ruiz, Patty Hearst, Tricia Nixon, Betty Crocker, Lot's Wife, Lassie, Minnie Mouse, and Judy Chicago. Across the top of the Box Lunch brochure (in imitation of the Chicago catalogue's inscription) ran this legend: "In the beginning I was just another self-centred artist. And then I beheld a vision. And the sign said, 'Look, Maria, already you're in your thirties. You're a good artist, but recognition-wise you're on

the other side of the tracks. Capitalize on a movement! Jump on a band-wagon! And Lo, I conceived of the Box Lunch." A fairly devastating indictment both of the Dinner Party's middle class pretensions (this is not a show for working class people; while Chicago says she wants to reach non-art people, her catalogues still cost \$20 a piece) and of the large element of hypocrisy in the hype surrounding the event.

Perhaps a phenomenon like the Dinner Party is bound to bring out the cynical in people. Yet it is true that Chicago and her work display some very disturbing anomalies. Almost before it opened in San Francisco in 1979, the Dinner Party had become a *cause célèbre*. Very shortly after, two museums (in Seattle and Rochester) cancelled their bookings, so the Dinner Party had to be moth-balled. Eventually it was booked into Houston, Boston and the Brooklyn Museum where it continued to draw record-breaking crowds. Then came the savaging by the New York critics, especially the attack of the *New York Times*' Hilton Kramer who called it a vulgar monument to women's sex organs and a tasteless exam-

ple of kitsch. Here was a myth ripe for the making: feminist art dumped on by male establishment.

In fact, the reports of Chicago's assassination were exaggerated. Her single largest benefactor was the National Endowment of the Arts (for \$41,000) which is the US equivalent of the Canada Council. And the Dinner Party was not without influential defenders. Lucy Lippard wrote a long article for *Art in America* (not exactly *Mother Jones*) explaining that the art world found Chicago incomprehensible (that is, it defied categorization) but took her work as a challenge to its values and responded by dismissing her. Now it may be hard to imagine what, in this age of permissiveness, could possibly offend the American art world's sensibilities. Artists have wrapped sections of California highway in canvas, and painted the desert blue without anyone questioning their integrity as artists.

But what the canon of American art requires is that art be primarily about Art, which is to say, aesthetics and formalist experimentation. If there is too much content, or the message is too loud, it is considered propaganda not art. Chicago's second violation was taking traditional women's crafts (needlework and china painting) and elevating them to inappropriate heights. Says Lippard: "Inside the art world, art and life always seem to be in competition. Whenever life gets a hold on art it is called 'bad' or 'low' — a phenomenon challenged by the Dinner Party."

The reaction of the high priests of 'high art' was predictable, which is why I find it curious that Chicago was shocked and surprised instead of being thrilled that her aim at the art world's assumptions was dead on. She could have measured her success by the vehemence of her detractors. Moreover, there were many highly favourable reviews (including all the Canadian ones) and a vast and enthusiastic audience.

Once the rose coloured glasses are removed I find that the exhibit is fraught with contradictions. As a symbol of the lost and buried history of women, the history it recounts is buried in Chicago's elaborate iconography, and the significance of the 39 guests is lost on most of us unless we have the time (and money for the catalogues) to swat up before going. Another two bucks will buy Chicago's taped tour in which she introduces a few of her guests and lards us with more information which though interesting, doesn't help her story along. Most of us leave knowing as little about Artemisia Gentileschi, Hatshepsut and Natalie Barney as when we arrived.

The point is not to criticize Chicago for her choice of guests; nor for attempting to take in all of western civilization in her sweep of history. Obviously, she was bound to be limited by what historians have bothered to record about women's contributions, and naturally she would inject her own cultural standards. So, for example, nine of the 13 guests on the third side of the triangular table are American, and all but Sacajawea and Sojourner Truth are white, middle class artists and social reformers. The point is, however, that Chicago's politics are not particularly radical. Her visualization of feminism, rhetoric aside, fits right in with the trendy notions of 'liberated' upper class matrons.

In the same way, her talk about redefining the relationship between art and society comes with a mixed message, for she makes all the moves of someone who is playing for status and recognition with the establishment, and has even said she wants to be accepted by the art community: "I'm not attacking the art world, I'm making art." The real problem with the Dinner Party is the gap between what Chicago says it is and what it really is. Its most daring feature is the challenge to the art world, not its feminist politics.

Susan Crean is author of "Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture," and is on the editorial board of This Magazine.

Ashes to Ashes



by Judy Liefschultz

Recently, in Minneapolis, I was lucky enough to see a play by one of the few full-time, professional women's theatre companies on the continent. Like the adaptation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper" and Jovette Marchessault's "Saga of Wet Hens," the two inspirations of my theatre year in Toronto, "Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down" is about women, by women.

At the Foot of the Mountain, the play's producer, is an eleven member company now entering its eighth year. Visiting their office, I knew I was standing in a place where women worked and things got done. Phyllis Rose, the managing director said, "We're not funded by everybody, but we're respected by everybody. We're known for consistent, good quality work." She cited shame as one of the methods used to get corporate funding, and is convinced that the more controversial they are, the better. "When we do light stuff the money is harder to get," she said. "At least we give them something to talk about." And "Ashes," subtitled a "ritual drama about nuclear madness and the denial of death," is something to talk about.

The title is familiar to everyone as part of an old Mother Goose nursery rhyme. It dates back to a chant that was sung during the bubonic plague in medieval times. "Ring-a-ring-a-roses" described the rose colored rash of the plague. "Pocket full of posies" was

the sack of herbs worn around the neck to stave off the smell of the dying. "Ashes, ashes" was originally a a-tishoo, a-tishoo, the sound of the sneezing that occurred just before death. "We all fall down" was a description of the last steps of the 21 million who died.

Miriam, her two daughters, and her sister-in-law form a family. Miriam is dying. Together they remember the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. Slowly the women begin to acknowledge the spectre of nuclear war in the news. As Miriam finally admits to her family, "I am dying," and then looking at the audience, "We are all dying," the plot is woven.

Playwright Martha Boesing, artistic director of At the Foot of the Mountain, has written sixteen plays. Many, like this one, are in collaboration with the company. She talked about the response to theatre that deals with rape, drug addiction, crones, love among women, and now nuclear war: "It has been excellent. Especially in small communities we give inspiration to women trying to make changes in their lives."

"That can be good or bad," said Phyllis Rose. "Sometimes we're seen as the saviours. But the audiences see the plays without all the intellectualizing of the audiences here."

"We're done with the radical theatre of the 60's," said Boesing. "We're experimental but not elite. We're trying to be accessible, using formerly elitest techniques." Boesing is a long-time theatre artist and radical. She describes the company as "having no time for politics during production," but "made up of radical and political women involved in one way or another for a long time." She is disappointed that women of colour have remained with the company only briefly, for specific shows.

"Ashes" is as composite a piece of theatre as I have seen. I laughed as characters wearing suits and smoking stogies stood at a monopoly board, bargaining over third world countries and nuclear missiles.

"How much is El Salvador? I'll buy it."

"Cut food stamps. They're worth \$2.3 billion."

"A Trident sub, I'll take it."

And I cried as the women undressed and walked into the ovens. Later we mourned the death of their mother, all mothers, the mother of us all. From the loft above came original music and percussion.

When it was over the players handed out leaflets and talked with us as we filed out. The flyers named the Minnesota corporations with defence contracts, organizations working on disarmament, and actions that individuals could take.

• The Bible, from page 7

entire groups of people. The story-line of the Chosen People, which this book is built on, is nothing more than another variation on the favourite son. Of course, it is favouritism in the eyes of the father that counts here.

Throughout the book this endless examination of male conflict fluctuates in its complexity and style. It is clear that there were several authors involved, and the whole suffers from a lack of comprehensive editing. The unifying thread, which is a fanciful historical account, is generally thin. Perhaps this novel would have been better presented as a series of short stories on a common theme.

The story ends with the introduction of a secondary conflict. The problem raised is the one of male jealousy and aggression. Christ, himself a victim son, professes to have the answer to this question — brotherly love. Half the sons of Adam decide to follow this Abel-clone, while the other half remain unconvinced and decide to examine the issue further. This split, of course, brings us full circle to the beginning of the story, only now the combatants are the Christians and the Infidels, and nobody knows where that story will end.

The entire sense of *The Bible*, with its inconclusive ending (which was, even then, a literary cliché), suggests a naturalness or inevitability to male jealousy. In this way *The Bible* is similar to other popular literature, such as Harlequin Romances. Throughout the story there is an overriding assumption

At the Foot of the Mountain goes on tour with "Ashes" next April. In the coming year they will also do an eight-week theatre artists' workshop, during which Martha Boesing's adaptation of "Antigone" will be produced. Two other shows are planned so far, both being written by members of the company. The first is about a lesbian couple, one of whom is dependent on and must be cared for by the other. The next is about growing up Catholic. See them if you can.

Judy Liefschultz is a writer and activist who has moved westward to Victoria, BC.

that male jealousy is the motive force of history. This assumption becomes both the *raison d'être* and the justification for chapter after chapter of cheap sensationalism in the form of rape, murder, genocide, slavery and other atrocities.

What makes *The Bible* interesting to women is not the tedious chronicle of brothers fighting, but the complete misinterpretation of the original condition — Eve's sin. In the heat of action and sheer magnitude of this novel, it is easy to forget that it all started when Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge. In an anthropological sense, it was surely the endeavours of women that raised man from the bliss of ignorance to an awareness of his social milieu. Surely the biggest ethical question to be raised here is not why the boys fight, but how to stop them.

The secondary conflict that closes the book is a question of how man defines fate — or God. Half the boys submit to a god of love, and the others submit to a jealous god. However fate is represented, it was Eve, in the opening chapter, who proved that submission is not the answer. The authors of *The Bible* unfortunately missed this possible plot line. Perhaps we can hope for a sequel soon — one in which Adam finally eats of the Tree of Knowledge and puts aside his boyish ways altogether. Yea, then might he enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Judith Quinlan is a west coast writer, physiotherapist, filmmaker and regular contributor to *Broadside*.

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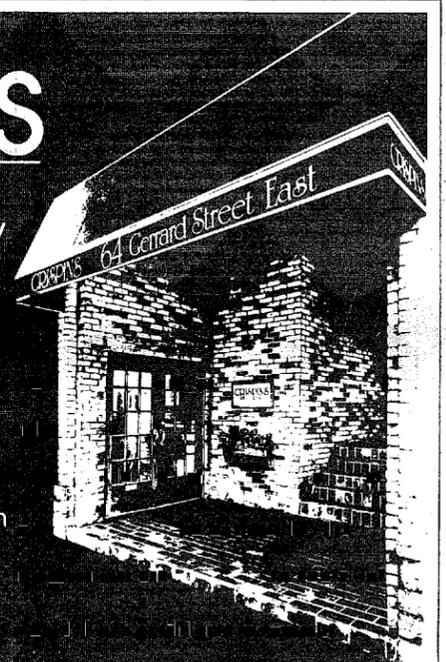
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MOVEMENT MATTERS

Women's Culture

Two groups of women, each with a style and approach of its own, are attempting to revitalize the notion of women's space and women's artistic opportunities in Toronto. The Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre, once plagued by debts and dissension has risen again, although whether like a phoenix remains to be seen. And recently another group, the Women's Cultural Building collective started to meet on the second floor of a Queen Street bar.

In the mid-seventies, a group of ambitious women negotiated for the old Toronto Morgue on Lombard St. and a \$1 a year lease, promising to provide a cultural centre for the women's community. But almost immediately the Pauline McGibbon Centre was beset with a serious identity crisis. The Du Maurier company (yes, the cigarettes) bestowed \$40,000 on the Centre's theatre, causing many women in the grass roots community to wonder whether the Centre could ever really be theirs.

The disaffection felt by many self-identified feminists (Pauline McGibbon's Centre's management always eschewed any political labels) toward the notion of Du Maurier or even the former Lieutenant Governor's titular association kept many of the women who could have benefited from the centre away. The Centre had always provided space for gatherings or meetings for a nominal fee. But it could not engage enough interest in the Centre's well-being to survive.

As it stands now, the administration is faced with the task of reconciling what needs to be done to support a large piece of real estate (which means serious fundraising) with the interests of a women's community not characterized by a great deal of wealth.

In the meantime, the Women's Cultural Building collective has been meeting in an effort to develop the close-knit artistic community that could bring vitality to a women's cultural centre. Their informational flyers read: "Women's Cultural Building — Building Women's Culture."

"The big difference between our groups and the McGibbon Centre," says Joyce Mason, "is that we don't have a building. 'Building' is a verb rather than an institution. We are a collection of cultural workers working to make social change."

The idea for the group grew out of what was thought to be the demise of the Pauline McGibbon Centre. Feeling that an opportunity had been squandered, feminists began to meet to find a means for feminist artistic expression and a way to put feminist work into a critical context. As well, the group is anxious to give attention to women's art on exhibition in Toronto. A call to (416) 534-1682 allows you to hear a tape providing information as to where women's work is being exhibited. If you hold on, you can leave a message indicating your interest in getting involved in building women's culture.

Women's Films

The National Film Board is co-ordinating screenings of films for departments in the Federal Women's Film Program, and is interested in knowing about films, video tapes and slide shows that are about women (women and work, women and health, etc.).

If you have such a film please send the technical information, a short description, plus distribution information to: Maureen McEvoy, Federal Women's Program, 150 Kent Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0M9.

Women and Words

A country-wide conference on 'Women and Words' will be held June 30-July 3, 1983, in Vancouver.

The conference will bring together women from all fields of literature — writers, editors, translators, booksellers, librarians, playwrights, critics, etc. — plus women involved in other media — broadcasters, producers and directors. In short, the conference welcomes *all* women who are working with words.

At the four-day meeting, it is hoped that the program will include an occasion to de-

velop professionalism among women, an exploration of our differences, an opportunity to increase our awareness of women's work in other fields, and a cross-cultural exchange of skills and knowledge.

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For more information, write: 'Women and Words,' PO Box 65563, Station F, Vancouver, BC, V5N 4B0.

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WOMEN'S CAMP: Thanksgiving Week-end; Thursday to Monday, October 7, 8, 9, 10. At Tapawingo, Parry Sound. \$65 for three days, \$85 for four. Send cheque to Susan Power, 52 Admiral Road, No. 2, Toronto M5R 2L5. For information and/or transportation, call (416) 921-4755.

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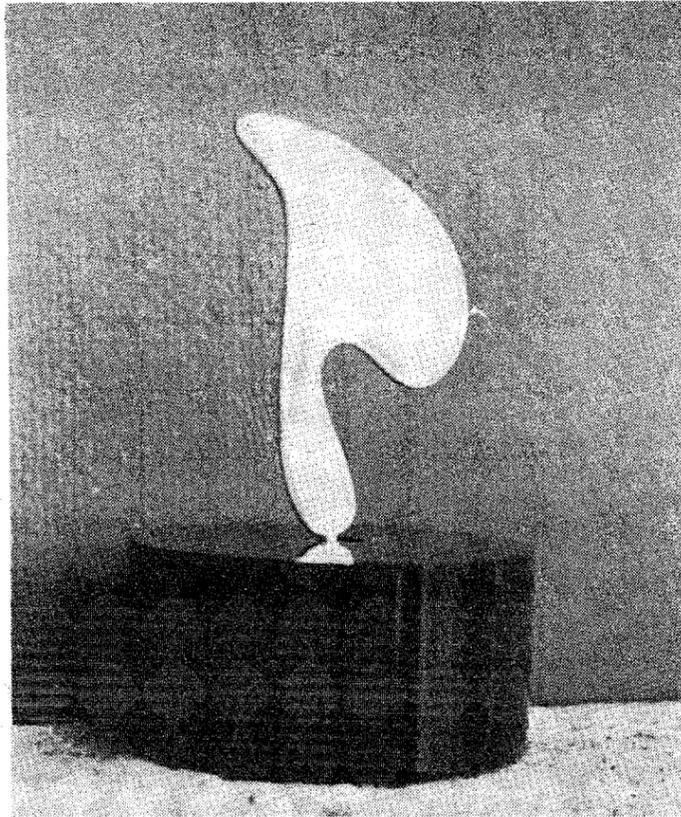
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