

Linda Russo

THE 'F' WORD IN THE AGE OF
MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION:
AN ACCOUNT OF WOMEN-EDITED
SMALL PRESSES AND JOURNALS*

I: "ON THE 'FLY'": WOMEN PRINTING, WOMEN PUBLISHING,
AND WOMEN POETRY-EDITING

"I do not think there is any other business from which a woman can derive more satisfaction than that of printing. It is like music to me to hear the click of the type as it falls into the stick, and the buzzing sound of the old press as she turns her papers out on the 'fly.'" —Rena Challenger, forewoman of the *Manistee News*, 1897[†]

"these girls have written a distinctly national product." —Ezra Pound, "Marianne Moore and Mina Loy"

IN 1980, ALICE NOTLEY, in a lecture titled "Dr. Williams' Heiresses," imagined a mytho-poetic lineage of American poets that would explain the situation of contemporary "descendants." It begins with a goddess, impregnated by Edgar Allan Poe, giving birth to Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. These siblings, since "they were half divine" and "could do

* See Appendix: Women-edited (and co-edited) Little Magazines and Presses. Although there are several indices of small press activity (such as *Herstory*, the *Alternative Press Index*, *Women's Periodicals and Newspapers*, Len Fulton's *Small Press Publishers* and Loss Pequeño Glazier's *Small Press: an Annotated Guide*) none is comprehensive. And though the feminist and avant-garde presses in the latter half of the twentieth century have been well-researched, women-edited journals of innovative poetry have fallen between the lines, often remembered but generally not a focal point of discussion. In most cases crucial information has only been available through the generosity of poets who shared experiences with me through personal correspondence and interviews. Since this essay was written in 1999, Lynn Keller, Linda Kinnahan and Ann Vickery have extensively about topics here. I am grateful to each of them for inquiries that, during my initial drafting stages as now, have opened new territories and piqued my thoughts.

[†] Biggs 1980, 431.

anything they wanted,” together begat William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. With a few more goddesses and Gertrude Stein thrown into the mix, a third generation — Frank O’Hara, Philip Whalen and Charles Olson — arrived. “Anyway,” Notley continues, “it was striking how there were no females in this generation” and that the children of Olson and his brothers were all male. That is, until O’Hara and Whalen, “the male-females,”

produced a second wave of children of which there were many females. These females could not understand how they came to be born — they saw no one among their parents & brothers who resembled them physically, for the goddesses their fathers mated with were evaporative non-parental types. As a matter of fact these females couldn’t even believe that their fathers *were* their fathers. (Notley 1980, n.p.)

In several ways, Notley radically revises standard genealogies that circumscribe possibilities in the poetic field.* On the one hand, in following a lineage transcribed in Donald Allen’s 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry*, which introduced O’Hara, Whalen and Olson to a larger reading public and introduced a rift into a more or less codified tradition of American poetry, Notley renews that lineage; by 1980, the genealogy that ran like a backbone through poetry workshops across the United States was more apt to acknowledge Lowell, Berryman or Bishop. On the other hand, Notley’s lineage relates a generation of women to the alternative small press practices that had, in the previous two decades, made not only their appearance, but that of their immediate “ancestors,” possible. Further, this generation of emergent, “newly formed” women poets in the second wave of the mimeo revolution serves as an allusion to the crucial role of women poet-editors (for example, Lyn Hejinian, who published Notley’s talk on Tuumba Press, or Notley herself).

In 1980 such an observation was historically acute. Throughout the 1970s, the Women’s Movement, the rise of feminist scholarship, and a first wave of post-War women poet-editors had changed the American (family) tree of avant-garde poetry. For the first time, it came to include many women and not just one or two. A few of them uttered the ‘f’ word, but to others it signified the populist, voice-oriented feminist poetics of the Women’s Movement which were incongruent with “inherited” experimental practices. Notley’s observation was clarifying; a situation where women poets were primarily understood in relation to a populist feminist poetics made its formulation and publication necessary. With

*The notion of the field, a spatialized notion of poetic production, is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* (NY: Columbia UP, 1993).

the feminist project, mastered by critics such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, recovering an exclusively “female tradition” in literature just then underway, the existence of an alternative lineage available to women poets could introduce new poetic possibilities and provide another way of conceiving the shape of American poetry.

In 1980, finally one could look back and ask: was there a peculiar ‘feminine weakness’ that Dickinson and Stein, prolific and persistent, and in print through their own devices, overcame? Or a peculiarly ‘masculine persuasive force’ to be reckoned with? As for example is evident in the critical work of Ezra Pound, who in the space of a few paragraphs (confusedly? purposefully?) refers to Marianne Moore and Mina Loy as “women” and “girls.”^{*} For the first time in the history of this lineage, one could look back and, seeing that literary history had been predominantly a history of men’s writing and publishing activities, see also that the absence of women writers was not due to a lack of women writing, but a structural effect of institutions that produced poetic activity as male.

Women in the United States have always labored in the *trade* of typesetting, participating in family-run printing shops and, later, when custom (and law) would allow, working alongside men as professional type-setters and, eventually, editors and publishers.[†] But with few exceptions women’s work was subsumed to a masculine order of production. This was true also in literary communities, where women’s contributions to the textual productions — poetry, criticism, manifestoes, etc. — of avant-garde movements had been limited or only partially visible. Feminist scholarship since the 1970s has rectified many elisions, revealing a range of activities that regender literary-historical landscapes. But it is the contemporary production of poetry, as through selection and mechanical *re*-production, the making-public — a sort of engine (like the kachuking mimeograph machine) that works on the poetry individuals produce — that offers up to archivists, readers and scholars the lay of those literary-historical landscapes. Editing, as an act of insertion and assertion, makes visible affiliations and dialogues, and redefines the legitimate and the utterable, the individual and the community — all that occupies and constitutes fields of literary production. Since literary historians look largely to (and selectively through) written documentation, recognition amongst one’s contemporaries without representation in contemporary print production is tantamount to erasure. And those documents that often represent the smallest gestures — such as chapbooks, broadsides, postcards and little magazines — mere ephemera in the eyes of custodians of literary history, are easily effaced.

^{*} Both were most decidedly women, and well on their way to becoming established poets.

[†] See Biggs 1980.

Increasingly, women poet-editors have occupied the field of poetic production, constructing through their work a productive relation to innovative poetic discourses. Since 1953 — when Daisy Aldan began co-editing *Folder*, a major outlet for New York avant-garde poets and artists, with Richard Miller, and continuing through the sixties as Diane di Prima, Margaret Randall, Rosmarie Waldrop, Anne Waldman, and Bernadette Mayer co-edited little magazines and small presses (usually with a husband or lover) — women poet-editors have started over 70 such ventures devoted to innovative poetry, almost half of these since 1990 alone.^{*} Looking back, one might say that post-war women poet-editors have done well to rejuvenate an occupation dormant in the United States since *The Little Review*, founded in 1914 by Margaret Anderson (and edited with Jane Heap since 1921), and *The Dial*, which had been under the editorship of Marianne Moore since 1925, both published their last issues in 1929[†]; or since Margaret Fuller co-edited (with Ralph Waldo Emerson) *The Dial* (1840-44) and Harriet Monroe founded and published *Poetry* (1911-25). But as Notley's lineage suggests, such a connection is deceptively simple. Claiming these women as feminist foremothers is problematic, for though they catalyzed poetic discourse, “for the most part these were editors who happened to be women” (Biggs 1983, 4). Moore's allegiance, for example, was to the magazine as an institution rather than to the possibilities poetry presented to other women poets.[‡] But with a shift in both centers and ideologies of poetic production and a concurrent increase in the concentration of women in the role of poet-editor, the phenomenon of poetic change takes on new significance.

Women poet-editors pose a challenge to extant mechanisms of poetic production. They can't simply enter a field of production structured on their exclusion. Through experiments in writing, editing and publishing, women don't take up a position in the field but enter by opening and changing it. Thus, for example, it is not simply that more women publishers will enable more women to write and publish poetry, but that fields of production are themselves transformed to become inclusive of what might otherwise be unrecognizable or unacceptable as poetic production. Women poet-editors effect not a quantitative expansion (reconfiguring the ratio of male to female writers) but outmode mechanisms that traditionally define the field — the labeling, for example, of women as “girls.” Aside from shedding

^{*}This figure includes small presses equitably co-edited with men. See timeline.

[†]Perhaps not coincidentally, this date marks the end of an era of literary journalism and the consequent academization of poetry by the New Critics. See Golding, chapter 3, “The New Criticism and American Poetry in the Academy.”

[‡]See Jayne E. Marek, *Women Editing Modernism*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.

light on the backward glance of literary history, the innovative small press circumvents belittling *re*-presentations by enabling the presentation of various figures in the poetic field.

It is difficult to realize the extent to which contemporary poetics are shaped by the small press when one looks at recent innovative works such as Kathleen Fraser's *il cuore : the heart, Selected Poems 1970-95* (Wesleyan UP, 1998), Alice Notley's *The Descent of Alette* (Penguin, 1996), and Susan Howe's *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (New Directions, 1996), to name but three contemporary poets published by established presses.^{*} These poets were initially small press poets, and what we now call innovative poetry was at its inception 'unpoetic' in the eyes of the majority in the field of poetic production. These poets, partly because they experimented, but also because they were women, found receptive and critical communities in the small press. Notley first published sections from *The Descent of Alette* as "from an untitled long poem" in *Scarlet* (1990); Fraser's work had appeared with a variety of presses, from Tuumba (*Magritte Series*, 1977) to Em Press (*Wing*, 1995); and two early works of Howe's, *Hinge Picture* (1974) and *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978), were published with Telephone Books — all works produced and re-produced by women. Of course, as Notley's lineage reminds us, men did/do this too, and male-edited presses did/do contribute to proliferating work by women poets.

Nonetheless, there is a history of women small-press editors that may reveal a thing or two about the 'production' of contemporary innovative poetics. And the fact of "more women" remains — there *are* more women writing, editing, and publishing. Undoubtedly the increased involvement of women poet-editors since WWII constitutes a making "wild" of the culturally domesticated relationship of woman and machine. She reconfigures and de-privatizes this relationship: from the confidential secretarial communique of dictaphones, typewriters, intercoms and the domestic intimacy of clotheswashers, vacuum cleaners and televisions to the public/a(c)tion of editing and printing. Thus engaged, women poet-editors enter avant-garde practice and production as agents of change rather than as its unchanging object — 'Woman' — a status which Stein and Dickinson, persistent and in their own ways *in print*, defy.[†] The absent fathers to whom Notley alludes in her genealogy become the 'fathering' of texts and the furthering of poetic practice by a generation of un-domesticated women — "half divine" and able to do "anything they wanted."

^{*}A commercial, university, and a larger small press, respectively.

[†]For example, Surrealist fetishization of the female body. Particularly pertinent are Man Ray's 1933 photographs of painter Meret Oppenheim, naked and ink-besmeared, next to painter Louis Marcoussis' etching press — not to operate it, but to be operated on by it. In one photograph Marcoussis is forcing her into the rollers, as if to make a print of her.

II. "WITH A PRINTING PRESS A REVOLUTION" :
A SHORT MIMEO REVOLUTION HISTORY UP TO ABOUT 1968

"One of the beautiful things about mimeo is the sense of community. People collated and stapled and took copies to hand around." —Maureen Owen on *Telephone*

"Probably the most important thing about the summer of '63 in San Francisco wasn't so much going down to Gino & Carlo's but seeing the books that were coming out, the White Rabbit Press books. Books like "The wood climb down out of . . ." by Harold Dull and George Stanley's "Pony Express Riders." And I remember Steve Lovi taking me to the Auerhan Press, and meeting Andrew Hoyem and Dave Haselwood, and looking around and realizing that a community of poets could exist through the actual writing and publishing of the work, and that the social scene — the back of the bar — was secondary to this other activity." —Lewis Warsh*

"If the invention of the printing press inaugurated the bourgeois era, the time is at hand for its repeal by the mimeograph, the only fitting, the unobtrusive means of dissemination." —Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

THE COLD WAR IN AMERICA was an epoch of technical advancement, energy, and, for some, optimism, for others, ideological embattlement — and textual proliferation. For fledgling small press publishers, revolution was in the ink. It was the mimeo revolution, that post-Second World War moment when print technology zoomed on — the photocopier replaced the mimeograph, offset replaced letterpress — and outmoded production machinery freely or cheaply available enabled left-revolutionaries to produce and distribute their own texts, and to demand and prepare for (sometimes quite coincidentally) a transformation of the existing political and social order — including that of poetry (Fulton 25). As a sort of palimpsest, on the very machines that were worked to produce exclusive (and exclusively

* Interviewed by Ed Foster in *Talisman*8 (Fall 1998: Lewis Warsh Issue).

male) histories — including literary histories — new possibilities were written into the field of poetic production.

In the early sixties . . . the quotes from printers were completely unaffordable, but we found we could buy a small letterpress for \$100. We [Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop] had stumbled into a moment of technological development when offset printing had proved cheaper than letterpress, so printshops all over the country were dumping their machines. And more and more small presses sprang up, not all using letterpress, but in the early days a good many [did so] because this particular technology was accessible (as is now computer typesetting). I remember a bookseller in Ann Arbor whose eyes lit up when we told him about the press: “With a mimeo you can start a party, with a printing press a revolution.” It is not quite a revolution, but it very quickly became more than just a few kooks printing little books. (Waldrop1990, 62)

Whether spawned by mimeograph or letterpress production, the collective effort of small press editors has come to be called the *mimeo* revolution, connoting the machinic aspect of the period. But it was also a *basement* revolution — a revolution of place and of foundations. A crucial aspect of both machines is that they are relatively small and operable manually (in someone’s basement, say). Where friends assembled materials were assembled. Annabel Lee, for example, started Vehicle Editions “as an enthusiastic cottage industry,” using the printing press at the nearby Center for Book Arts, binding books in the kitchen and storing them under the bed (Clay & Phillips 225). For the independent small press editor, every decision is geared toward keeping costs low. At a time when the copy shop didn’t exist and there was no xerox-in-the-workplace, another cost effective option, when there was no established distribution network such as Small Press Distribution and The Segue Foundation,^{*} poet-friends who helped with assembly helped circulate the mimeo-zine hand to hand. If mailed, a magazine might be accompanied by appeals for postage stamps and other such donations, unless one was able, as many were in the 1970s, to secure a federal or state arts grant. “Subscription” doesn’t seem to have existed in the small press lexicon of the time and would’ve been a bit of an albatross anyway; the small press didn’t run on guarantees but on promises, and presses and serials were subject to short lifespans. But for all its privations, in “a time where contemporaneity meant everything” (Fulton 31), mimeo

^{*}SPD was established in 1969 and The Segue Foundation in 1977. See Appendix for more information

production disseminated new work *fast*. It was a mechanism primarily for the community of writers, and vice versa: the community functioned together to keep their inspiring duplicating fluids flowing.

Though distinct machines and mediums (mimeo, letterpress, xerox, offset, desktop publishing and the internet) produce distinct products, they are interchangeably referred to as “small press,” an elision which publisher and historian Len Fulton refers to as a “liquidizing (not liquidating) of traditional boundaries between genres and media” (25). For poets disinterested in the demands of New Criticism, then the prevalent strain in literarily high-minded academic quarterlies,^o the mimeograph was “the most important modern technological development for writing and reading . . . enabl[ing] ‘literary’ and other writing a relative freedom from constraints” (Bernstein 1986, 354). As an alternative to professional, out-of-house printshops it introduced various editorial freedoms. (Imagine Ed Sanders, for instance, contracting a printer for *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*.) Throughout the 1950s and 1960s in New York, in Chicago, at Black Mountain College, and in San Francisco (male) poets edited *Yugen*[†], “C,” *Beatitude*, *Big Table*, *The Black Mountain Review*, *Caterpillar*, *Open Space*, *Contact*, *The San Francisco Review* and *J*, to name a few. These little magazines often published new poetry alongside informal commentary and criticism, staging “a redefinition in [the] process [of] . . . the austere and isolated scholarship of the university” (Fulton 25). Along with small presses (such as Corinth Books, Totem Press, and The Jargon Society), they cultivated the “New American Poetry” figured in Allen’s influential anthology, catalyzing the “anthology wars” that signified a rift in formal understandings of American Poetry. As Alan Golding notes, “the book’s tone and contents assailed the walls of the academically established canon, eventually broke them down”(32) as poets like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley were admitted.

These, however, were almost exclusively *men’s* battles. A woman’s odds for inclusion were slim.[‡] The battles of the revolution were predominantly fought against censorship, contra McCarthy-era conformity to a status quo represented by quarterlies. In the fall of

^oSuch as *The Kenyon Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *The Southern Review*. According to Daisy Aldan, “there were [in the mid-fifties] about forty-two literary magazines in the whole country” (264).

[†]Hettie Jones served as the assistant editor for number 6-8. but such a byline inadequately depicts the extent to which Jones worked to help produce the “new.” See my essay “On Seeing Poetic Production: The Case of Hettie Jones,” *Open Letter* (11th series, number 1, Spring 2001).

[‡]Four women (out of 44) appeared in the anthology, and two (out of 22) on the “New American Poetry Circuit” of 1967 that developed as a mechanism for distributing the new poetry through managing individual readings on college campuses. For a list of authors on the ill-fated circuit, see ads in *Caterpillar* 10 or 11 (1967). See “Anthology Wars” in Rasula (pp.223-247) for contemporary responses to Allen’s anthology.

1959, for example, an issue of the *Chicago Review* featuring a chapter from William Burrough's *Naked Lunch* and "two brief but significantly articulate letters about the Beat movement by Allen Ginsberg," had been castigated as "filth" by a columnist of the *Chicago Daily News*, effectively forcing University of Chicago overseers to demand the cessation of Beat literature publication under their auspices (Michelson). The following spring editors Paul Carroll and John Logan resigned and independently published the first issue of *Big Table*, featuring "The Complete Contents of the Suppressed Winter 1959 Chicago Review," as the cover prominently announced. And in October of 1961, co-editors Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones of *The Floating Bear* were indicted by the FBI on charges of mailing obscene material. In yet another "man's" battle, Jones defended their publication of his homoerotic play *From the System of Dante's Hell* and Burroughs' *Routine*. Di Prima provides an account of his heroic performance: "he brought in a ton of stuff that had one time or another been labeled 'obscene' . . . he read for hours to the grand jury, and they refused to return an indictment" while di Prima's lawyer, taking advantage of her barely perceptible state of pregnancy, "went rushing around insisting that clerks move out of their offices so [she] could sit down and rest" (di Prima xv). This example serves as a reminder that though grassroots activism and federal initiatives were then reconfiguring women's relationship to such power structures,* in the battle over what could and could not be in print, a woman still occupied her traditional place off to the side.

In an era unprepared to address difference, when the battles turned to address gender (though they seldom did), the results were notorious. In January 1958, Denise Levertov, making a guest appearance at San Francisco State University's Poetry Center, was greeted with Jack Spicer's reading of "For Joe" ("People who don't like the smell of faggot vomit/Will never understand why men don't like women"). Though hardly indicative of the larger poetic community ("all present felt implicated in Spicer's misogyny" [Ellingham & Killian 124]), which included Helen Adam, Joanne Kyger and Madeline Gleason, and came to include Levertov herself, his public 'name-calling' (the poem included the lines "The female genital organ is / hideous") remains notorious among contemporary poets.† Men *did* vastly outnumber women in poetic communities of the 1950s and 1960s, and where individual subcultures and coterie encouraged and have preserved women poets in name, image and deed, scholarly biases have mislabeled and misplaced women of a generation, subsuming

*Such as the founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW), the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) and Federally Employed Women (FEW), and the Kennedy Commission's 1963 Report on American Women.

†See Ellingham & Killian, pp. 124-127, for a contextualized reading of Spicer's misogyny.

them under the imagined identity of the “woman beat.”[¶] It is easy to imagine that women of that period remained somewhat insular, absorbed in their work and the work of their male peers, as there is as yet little ground from which to recognize the existence of women’s poetic practices as such. Were she encouraged to write and publish, she could find no courage in her circumstances to be contrary; she could not support herself as a university lecturer (as did Spicer, Robert Duncan, and Charles Olson, for example) or with her female beatnik charm.

The gender exclusive nature of the poetic field influenced editorial practices. *The Floating Bear*, tireless and vital, and for long stretches published by di Prima solo, brought only about 16 women into print.[‡] It seems to be impossible to come to anything but a near-estimate of the number of women writing and submitting work at a time when women’s work was rarely published. In *Folder*, for example, “some [women] gave themselves male names or used initials.” Women’s work may have been published, but beneath the mask of the masculine it would not be recognized as such. A woman who wished to enter the public space of print did so at the cost of the imprint of gender. *Folder* “published many women,” enough so that Aldan “actually made a list of women poets for an intended anthology, which [she] never accomplished” (a fact that the contents of *Folder* won’t attest to, though Aldan does [Aldan 269]). The suppression of writing marked “female” by Aldan, a woman editor aware of contemporary prohibitions, reflects the lack of urgency — or agency — to promote a body of work that would reflect the extent to which women were developing writing practices. Even more incomprehensible would have been the development of a poetic particularly concerned with writing by women. Though Aldan published women, “It was not that [she] wished to take up the standard for women. It was because the work of many fine women poets came to [her] attention, and good women poets were among [her] friends, and [she] felt they should be published” (269).

Throughout the 1960s, the mimeo revolution was changing the face of American poetry written by men. The infamous Berkeley Poetry Conference of 1965, a “gathering of the poetry tribes,” brought together for the first time poets, poet-editors, and publications that had been until then more or less distinct geographically and aesthetically. The atmosphere was still exclusive: “women in general were not given much to do at the Conference, except to host parties, take photos, have sex with the poets, and make up the majority of the audience”

[¶]See my essay “On Seeing Poetic Production: The Case of Hettie Jones,” *Open Letter* (11th series, number 1, Spring 2001).

[‡]Though a tally of female names could hardly be said to reflect the actual number of women contributors as many published under pseudonyms — often for fear of not getting published. di Prima’s Poet’s Press, which produced 12 books between 1965 and 1968, including one by Audre Lorde and five by herself, was similarly weighted toward literary output by men.

(Ellingham & Killian 345-46). Anne Waldman would later comment that “there were hardly any women . . . Lenore Kandel stood out,” and yet it was there that she met Lewis Warsh, future lover and co-editor of *Angel Hair*, which would present a younger and more-traveled perspective of the New American Poetry — “poets of the New York School and . . . West Coast writers like Robert Duncan [and] Joanne Kyger . . . along with [their] own friends, and the few poets [they] knew” (Clay & Phillips 179).

The small press set about organizing its constituents as the 1960s came to a close in the belief that, as Allen Ginsberg had put it, “The solitary activity that we indulge in does have large historical results” (De Loach 106). By 1968, the newly organized Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSMEP) had held three annual conferences. At the 1972 conference in Madison, Wisconsin, frustrations over the “solitary activity” that women editors were indulging in would come to the fore: “many women who had traveled great distances to get there did not get enough notice and rebelled and said nothing was happening and they felt uneasy talking to the men . . . Carol Bergé [editor of *Center*, a little magazine of innovative fiction and dance and art criticism] stood up and made this point and that was the start of the women’s movement at COSMEP” (Kruchkow 235). Throughout the 1970s, developing feminisms did exert pressure on scholarship, on women’s representation in the poetic field, and on women’s innovative practices. But because of the androcentrism of poetics and scholarship that developed in the wake of the New American Poetry, the work women have done to open the field of poetic possibilities has remained in the shadows. Diane di Prima’s *The Floating Bear* and Poet’s Press, Margaret Randall’s *El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn*^{*} (“one of the decade’s largest and most important magazines” [Fulton 34]), the Waldrops’ Burning Deck Press, Anne Waldman’s *Angel Hair* and *The World*, and Bernadette Mayer’s *o to 9* and *United Artists* were all significant to the communities of poets in which they engaged. But these women, all co-editors,[†] were exceptions; for the most part “women sent out their work,” if they sent it out at all, “and waited to be taken up by powerful male editors and mentors who were willing to discover them and authenticate their reality as writers” (Fraser 1993, 57). In the coming years, the small press, party or revolution, and the poetic field it represented, would change in and through the shifting balance of gender.

III: “A ‘HIDDEN’ COMMUNITY OF WORKERS SUCH AS MYSELF”:

^{*}Anti-establishment, expatriate, avant garde, and bilingual, *El Corno Emplumado* perhaps best represents mimeo revolution political ethics, publishing poets from North America and Latin America until political unrest after the 1968 student uprising forced Randall into hiding and eventually out of Mexico.

[†]All of these serials were at some point co-edited by men. See Appendix C.

PRODUCTION BETWEEN POPULIST FEMINIST POETICS
AND THE AVANT-GARDE

“. . . when a baby cried, [Adrienne Rich] stopped. Talked about the years she wasn't able to go to poetry readings because of her children. She asked if there was a man in the audience who would take care of the baby so that its mother could stay and listen, so that women would be able to hear the poem.” —Frances Jaffer, “For Women Poets, For Poetry: A Journal Entry”

“. . . in 1969, and in the eye of a new storm of feminism, my lover Wendy Cadden and I helped to found the gay women's liberation movement on the West Coast. We discovered that women love poetry which is true to our own experience, and art which helps us see ourselves without masks. We also found that the independent women's presses are the foundation of women's literature. They have made it possible to speak the unspeakable, to reveal what has had to be hidden, to redefine the experiences of women, and the connections among us.” —Judy Grahn, *The Work of a Common Woman*

“Once you've said you're an 'editor' and once your magazine comes out a few times, you are *valid* — you are asserting yourself, and serving others.” —Alice Notley on starting *Chicago* in 1972

“The reward for asserting a vision is to become visible, to participate actively in the wider literary conversation and to help in creating a community that has been waiting to come into view. It turns out, in our [the editors of *HOW(ever)*] case, that there have been many women like us feeling isolated for years, excluded from the aesthetic or political mandates of existing poetics.” —Kathleen Fraser, “The Tradition of Marginality”

WHEN WOMEN BEGAN TO RECOGNIZE the correlations between the public, the private, and gender privileges and oppressions, the poem was embraced as an emancipatory vehicle from which women's personal (and political) dissatisfactions and demands could be expressed. Throughout the 1970s the poem and its public reading were occasions for 'consciousness-raising' and a realization of women's political agency. Through poetry, women enacted an

ethics of exchange, mutual listening that was essential to the developing Women's Movement. Scholars and poets, often inspired by their writing groups, emerged onto the fields of poetic and literary-historical production with a set of particular, gendered concerns: in what way does the history of poetry conceal women's voices and realities? And how might poetry serve as an expressive political tool, as a meter of self-awareness and liberation? Judy Grahn's insistence that "[w]omen must define what our poetry is" (24) was echoed in Adrienne Rich's summons to "try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into" (Rich 35), a consciousness highly critical of ancient myths and beauty myths alike. Grahn called her first "woman-produced, mimeographed" book *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems* because "it meant people had to say the word *dyke*" (24) — that it would be part of, in Rich's words, a "common language."

Publishing activities that grew out of this new oral medium were consciously *feminist* activities, a result of the growing awareness that the male-dominated press, like other patriarchal power structures, afforded women scant opportunities for participation. "Women had to create their own presses and they did — very nearly from scratch" (Biggs 1983, 5). Taking over the means of small press production, like taking over conventionally androcentric poetic structures, was self-consciously counter-cultural. A self-styled, outspoken, outlaw status was reflected in the names they chose for their magazines and presses — shameless hussy, mama, wyrd woman, amazon, common woman, muse. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, at least one explicitly feminist little magazine devoted to politicizing and validating women's experiences hit the streets each year.* In New York and the Bay Area, women's bookstores stocked many quickly and inexpensively produced staple-bound books, pamphlets and little magazines. It was not only *literary* feminist publications that published poetic alternatives to existing political and literary discourses; nearly *all* feminist publications did: various city- and campus-based "women's liberation" newsletters, feminist academic journals, and 'commercial' magazines such as *Ms.* all published poetry, and, it wouldn't be too much to say, with a vengeance.

Many women writing did so against a political backdrop that could be as limiting as it was liberating. Tina Darragh felt at the time that "[v]ictimhood was the basis for the form and content of poetry, and was valorized as the source of combination political statement/personal identities" (Darragh 1998, 696). The atmosphere could be indifferent (and

**Le.* Shameless Hussy Press, Mama's Press, and Wyrd Press. A partial list of little magazines includes: *Black Maria*, 1971; *Amazon Quarterly*, 1972; *13th Moon*, and *51%*, 1973; *Sojourner*, 1974; *Letras Feminas*, *Primavera* and *The Wild Iris*, 1975; *Calyx*, *Sinister Wisdom* and *Room*, 1976; *Bloodroot*, *Common Woman* and *Conditions*, 1977; *Sing Heavenly Muse!*, and *Heresies*, 1978.

even hostile) to a writer whose interests lay in experimenting with language rather than focusing on the verbal validation a poem might offer. Experimental poetry by women, though it too explored women's relationships to culture, was by many dismissed. What good, one might ask, was *The Woman Who Could Read the Mind of Dogs* that Leslie Scalapino would dwell on so? What good Rochelle Owens' 'wild-woman' who ranted "VIVA WILD-MAN" in *Poems From Joe's Garage*? And what to make of Joanne Kyger, writing *Places To Go*, critical of such ideological inflections: "I think of people *sighing* over poetry, *using* it, I / don't know what it's for" — what good was that?^{*} Though politically radical in the preferred *content* of poetic utterances, feminist editors were aesthetically conservative and, ironically, the spaces that they were creating to open communication, like the patriarchal lines they'd set out to subvert, proved impermeable to other sorts of women writers: "ranks appeared to close, rather than open, as the powerful ideology of a 'common language' took hold" (Fraser 1992). For an experimental woman poet there were two visible alternatives — populist feminist poetics and the avant-garde — and, refusing or unable to identify with either camp, she was a hybrid like the 'woman poet' in the 19th century — vexing either category, herself excluded (self-excluded) from both.[†]

With ideas and methodologies that were not feminist enough for feminists and/or not masculine enough for the avant-garde, many poet-editors set out to provide alternative spaces to encounter and construct — and thus legitimize and develop — intellectual and artistic communities. At least 11 women-edited little magazines and 7 presses commenced publication in the 1970s and by 1979 over 47 new women poets had published books with Effie's Press, Kelsey St., Five Trees, Telephone, Angel Hair Books, Tuumba and Burning Deck.[‡] Though production was undoubtedly small (generally from 200-500 copies) and distribution often local, the discovery of other innovative writers created a sense of community, however

^{*}These three books were published in 1976 (Sand Dollar: Berkeley CA), 1973 (Burning Deck Press: Providence RI), and 1970 (Black Sparrow Press: Los Angeles CA), respectively.

[†]The extent to which particular innovative women poets negotiated ideological and social contentions between populist feminist poetics and avant-garde poetics of course varied, and many would ultimately bring their feminism to bear on their experimental poetic tendencies and vice versa — a phenomenon which would only become visible as the number of women who published their work grew.

[‡]Effie's Press: Carol Bergé, Beverly Dahlen; Kelsey St.: Frances Phillips, Rena Rosenwasser, Nellie Wong, Karen Brodine; Telephone: Fanny Howe, Janet Hamill, Janine Pommy-Vega, Rebecca Wright and Rebecca Brown; Angel Hair: Joanne Kyger, Anne Waldman, Bernadette Mayer and Alice Notley; Five Trees: Jaime Robles, Jane Rosenthal, Judy Katz-Levine, Susan MacDonald, Lois Steinberg; Tuumba: Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Barbara Baracks, Kathleen Fraser, Carla Harryman, and Rae Armantrout; and Burning Deck: Hejinian, Rosmarie Waldrop, Barbara Guest, Dorothy Donnely, Carol LaBranche, Mary Ashley, Rochelle Owens, Nancy Condee, Marcia Southwick, Debra Bruce, Lissa McLaughlin, and Susan Hankla.

“hidden.” It legitimized for Tina Darragh, for instance, her commitment to “turning to words” as a response to a need for political change. “In 1974,” she writes,

there had been no Revolution . . . and I found myself turning to words and the directions they suggested to me.

Naturally, I felt that I was the only one going that way, but gradually I began reading the work of others who seemed to be moving along the same lines. Given this sense of a “hidden” community of workers such as myself, I replace “the story of the revolution” with “the story of turning to words.” (1998, 703)

If innovative women poets produce, according to Joan Retallack, “enactments of the feminine” rather than “images of the female” (1996, 355), publishing, too, is one such enactment. Devoted to furthering innovative explorations, a woman poet-editor enacts a feminist poetic not by creating a space specifically for women writing in a feminist/liberationist dialogue, but by inserting her editorial agenda and reshaping the field of poetic production to include different practices, priorities, and poetics — hers. Small press work provides for cross-pollination: its products ensure that individual poets and editors read and publish each other’s work. In the 1970s-80s it ensured that poetry written by women was increasingly represented in the literary production of a generation. Susan Howe, for example, feels certain that if it wasn’t for Maureen Owen, who published her first book *Hinge Picture* on Telephone, she wouldn’t have found her poetic community or realized herself as a poet.* Darragh would comment retrospectively that

Whenever I pick up one of [Susan Howe’s] books, I’m reminded of the endless discussion groups dealing with the topic of the ‘politically correct’ woman writer . . . Her first book, *Hinge Picture* . . . could have brought some needed clarity to our women’s group discussions that grew increasingly embroiled in ideological arguments that obscured real feelings and real events, both past and present. (1986, 547)

This is not to imply that women were never published in male-edited small presses, but rather that as women published more, their interests and texts joined the discourse that is shaped through poetic communities. A detailed study of the number of presses publishing

*Personal interview, 10/1/98.

women, broken down by the editor's gender, might allow for a clearer sense of personal urgencies and prejudices, but the point here is that a dynamic was in place for a few interested and motivated individuals who felt that editing was something they could and should do alongside their poetic practices. For Lyn Hejinian, for example, her interest in starting Tuumba in 1976 was to extend her poetic inquiry and to expand ground for aesthetic discovery: "I thought of it, too, as an extension of aesthetic responsibility. I had the sense that my poetics included other writing than my own, by definition. Part of the method was to include it" (Hejinian 1986, 3).

While such resources provide much-needed intellectual community, the small press as a practice vitalizes poetic communities as well. Production can be intensive both for the poet-editor, who must often learn new skills or come up with creative solutions. Maureen Owen relates:

I pasted Yuki Hartman's *Hot Footsteps* up when I had taken my children to my Uncle's farm in Minnesota one summer. I rolled out a 25 gallon crock from my Grandmother's pantry, cleaned up a sheet of glass I found, and dropped a toggle light into it. Voila! a light table! I pasted the whole book up and designed the cover on the upstairs landing after I had put the kids to bed at night. I must have looked like a madwoman bent over the crock with my rulers and tweezers and rubber cement as my children snored in the next room.*

Owen's example illustrates a dynamic feminist poiesis that extends beyond the making of the poem into re-assembling the immediate materials in one's world. Working, writing, publishing, raising two children, and struggling constantly to afford mimeograph stencils and paper, Owen operated in a restricted economy that produced a generous poiesis fueled by the sensual pleasure of the do-it-yourself aesthetic:

immediate, street wise, hands on, open to change to the last second before the machine starts to hum, and the ink sits up on the page like art. It's sensual and sexy, raw and real. Alone in the big empty church of St. Mark's late into the night with only the sound of the mimeograph 'kachuking' and the pages swishing down. (Clay & Phillips 227)

*Personal correspondence, 10/6/98.

What emerges from the proliferation of these practices among women writers is a larger economy that might be thought a poetics of production: networks of advice and shared devices within and across poetic communities that increasingly displaced tradition- and feminist-led demands for normative aesthetic collaborationism with the collective peculiarities characteristic of small press activity; thus encouraging the co-existence of a wide range of aesthetic practices.

One such cohesive network — technically, aesthetically, historically, and geographically — as well, was associated with the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, established in 1966 with funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity. All New York mimeo activity of the 1960s — *Yugen*, *Floating Bear*, “C,” *O to 9* and *Fuck You*, for example — developed in direct relation to the Lower East Side locale. Howe's indebtedness to Owen belongs as well to St. Mark's, where Howe was drawn for free poetry workshops (she took one with Ted Greenwald); it was where Owen “met a number of poets and especially women poets who weren't getting published anywhere” and whose poems she thought “should be on the street.” In the 1970s, the so-called second wave mimeo revolution was initiated with the publication of *The World* following “a lull in the little magazine blitz” (Clay & Phillips 187). This time many women editors who traversed the church's basement, where the Gestetner mimeograph machine ran off Owens' *Telephone* and Telephone Books, Waldman's *The World*, and other publishing ventures, albeit short-lived, such as Eileen Myles' *Dodgems* and Rag-on Press's sole production, *The Ladies Museum*, a satirical mimeo-anthology women poets at the Poetry Project.*

Even when it wasn't the center of production, the Poetry Project was a nexus for many, and often mimeo served to maintain close connections from afar. Somewhat isolated in Lennox, Massachusetts, Bernadette Mayer and Lewis Warsh bought a mimeo machine and began *United Artists* in 1977 because “editing a magazine put [them] in touch with poets and friends [they] had left behind in New York” (Clay & Phillips 199). Waldman, resettling in Boulder in 1976 and homesick, bought a used mimeo machine and founded *Rocky Ledge* with Reed Bye. To Alice Notley, Ted Berrigan had suggested that she start a magazine as a way to make contacts. Temporarily displaced from New York, editing *Chicago* allowed her to create the energy and community that was crucial to maintaining her identity as ‘woman poet.’ She started *Chicago* in 1972:

*For an intimate history, see Marcella Durand's “Publishing a Community: Women Publishers at the Poetry Project” in *Outlet* (1999, 4/5).

I was pregnant with our son Anselm . . . I was twenty-six and living in Chicago, and I was afraid I would have to put my career on hold, my writing . . . I wasn't thinking 'feminism' at the time but on the other hand I was thinking 'survival, of a woman poet who's about to have a baby.'*

Male figures associated with St. Mark's such as Allen Ginsberg, Jim Carroll and Ted Berrigan loom large but women poets, Notley insists, "were in charge." One mimeod little magazine, *Caveman*, had passed around, issue by issue, from editor to editor, before it fell into the hands of a group of women and came to function as a source of humor and community critique. It was a "savage publication,"

dominated by women but too anarchic to be called feminist or anything else. The feminists savaged the feminists, this because it was an ongoing critique of the P[oetry] P[roject] (which got called the Peepee Projectile, that was our level) they were the authority which had to be flouted. So when Maureen Owen was in charge, someone wrote in *Cavemen* "if you want a reading grow tits."†

Perhaps because there was residual masculine energy to contend with, women editors were energetic, outspoken and prolific poet-editors whose strength was contagious. The Poetry Project had a "matriarchal kindness and openness to all poets, women and men"‡ and has "stayed woman-strong" because Waldman's influence "lasted a long time both literally and imaginatively."§ Waldman had sought out many poets in New York during the 1960s, including di Prima, Mayer, Notley and Hannah Weiner because "the sense of other women engaged in the same demanding act of writing & being a poet in what was basically, at that time, a man's world, was inspiring, encouraging." di Prima's "stamina and her seeming ability to 'do it all' as a woman" inspired Waldman, when she was working to establish the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church, "to include more women in the programs & in the publications" (Osman & Spahr, 108-109)¶. A New York poet-editor of the next generation

*Personal correspondence, 3/12/98.

†*Caveman* was edited by Barbara Barg, Shelley Kraut, Elinor Nauen, Alice Notley, Eileen Myles, and Susie Timmons Personal correspondence, 3/12/98.

‡Maureen Owen also notes "I'm sure it didn't appear so to everyone, and for many different reasons." Personal correspondence, 10/6/98.

§Alice Notley, personal correspondence, 3/12/98.

¶This citation refers to the "Editorial Forum" in *Chain 1* (1994) thus individual quotes may not be specified by author herewith.

(Lee Ann Brown of Tender Buttons) remembers Waldman “saying to [her] one summer (‘87) in Boulder, ‘why don’t you start a magazine?’ . . . [Waldman] also emphasized how many great poets would not be in print if it wasn’t for their friends’ efforts. So [Brown] set out to do some inspirers right” (Osman & Spahr, 16). Waldman’s efforts had encouraged Owen to realize herself as a poet-editor, and, like *The World*, *Telephone* fed off of and fed the community:

Ann Waldman was bringing out *The World* . . . and it was very exciting. I started thinking about doing books and putting a magazine of my own together. I went over to St. Mark’s and asked Anne if I could use the Gestetner to launch my new press . . . I’ll never forget that first page coming off the big roller. Like a miracle, the dark stencil had yielded up a page bright white with words embossed in shiny black ink . . . After we ran off the pages we stacked them to dry, and some days later I gathered every friend I’d made and their friends and we collated. (Clay & Phillips 227)

The urban, gritty, do-it-yourself aesthetic suited St. Mark’s. It brought publishing technology to anyone’s fingertips with very little technical training. Mimeo publications come in one shape and size and simply *look* like reduplicated typescript between covers, sometimes hastily, sometimes laboriously, done-up — line drawings or collages — by the editor or an artist friend. Ask any mimeo poet-editor and they’ll tell you, it’s an ethic, a way of life, a way of creating community for oneself and for giving back to one’s community, of encouraging and locating poetic affinities, and of cultivating a scene. An earlier instance of this was Jack Spicer’s *J*; he left a box marked “J” in his favorite bar for submissions. Mimeo was an effective community-builder in part because producing an issue, from prepping materials to machine-operation to final assembly, was laborious yet easy to learn and the product indelicate:

‘mimeo’ is a special kind of experience involving the energy of a whole community of poets to respond and, more specifically, the energy of one individual to edit, type, run off, collate, staple and distribute with the help of several friends and a few pep pills. The people editing such magazines are poets and the people reading them are poets, poets who exist in some sort of working community together. (Waldman 1969, xiii)

Mimeo built on the immediate community by bringing it ‘inside’ — into the space of someone’s apartment, or St. Mark’s basement — and turning it back out as each labor-contributor, with several copies in hand, left for local hangouts. Thus the concentration of energies literally *in* the field of production, localized around a specific effort, and the proliferation of mimeo magazines embodied the energetic tenor of the Poetry Project.

Meanwhile, with equal zeal many women in the San Francisco Bay Area were learning techniques of offset and fine letterpress printing. Kelsey St. Press’s Rena Rosenwasser notes “One could easily view this period as a renaissance of the craft of printing [but this time with] women printers . . . at the hub” (Osman & Spahr 93). Unlike Poetry Project publications, these presses didn’t share historical roots or common spaces, weren’t handed down (like *The World* and *Caveman*) or (co-ed)ited (like all small presses of the previous decade in which women participated), and they diverged widely in ethics, aesthetics and poetics. The handful of women-edited presses that would emerge out of the demand for more experimental representation in the field of 1970s production — Kelsey St., Five Trees, Tuumba and Effie’s Press — interacted with both populist feminist and avant-garde writing and publishing activities with considerable breadth. While Kelsey St. and Five Trees both operated on feminist co-operative principals, Kelsey St. focused on the poetry of contemporary innovative women writers and Five Trees reprinted fine editions of H.D. and Djuna Barnes as well as publishing contemporaries Levertov and Charles Olson.* As for individually run presses, Bonnie Carpenter’s Effie’s Press published women exclusively, while Hejinian’s prolific Tuumba, like contemporary little magazines *Big Deal* (ed. Barbara Baracks) and *Gnome Baker* (ed. Madeline Burnside and Andrew Kelly), and *Matchbook* (ed. Joyce Holland), and, later, *QU* (ed. Carla Harryman), focused on experimentation rather than gender politics.

On the West Coast, production was not centralized as in New York. The Poetry Center at San Francisco State served as a nucleus for readings and workshops, but print community was often constructed from scratch, from the inside out, so to speak. Primarily because operating a letterpress is a skilled trade, and books, often “fine press” editions, are carefully assembled, press work is more likely to be carried on solo, and the printer is usually detail-oriented. Each page is assembled character by character, space by space, inked by hand and pressed onto paper with a manually-operated machine. (“It took time. We were slow. But our hands locked the metal type into the press’s bed, pushed the rollers over the type until the desired impression was exacted on the paper” [Rosenwasser in Osman & Spahr 93]).

*Kelsey St. is no longer a co-operative, but it is the only press of these four still in operation. Founding members were Karen Brodine, Patricia Dienstfrey, Kit Duane, Marina la Palma, Laura Moriarty, and Rena Rosenwasser. Five Trees was founded by Eileen Callahan, Cameron Folson, Cheryl Miller, Jaime Robles and Kathy Walkup.

When production necessarily exceeded the space and the unwritten laws of a tight-knit community often encountering the 'outside' meant encountering cultural prejudices. In New York in 1954, for example, when someone entered the print shop where she was at work Daisy Aldan "had to stop . . . because women were not allowed in the union then and the printer would have been suspended or fined" (268). Though that had changed to some extent in the 1970s (Annabel Lee, who used the letterpress at the Center for Book Arts, had worked in a union offset printing shop), for Lyn Hejinian learning letter press in 1976 was a flashback to a more prohibitive era:

In order to learn how to print, I invented a job for myself in a print shop of a local printer. The shop was in Willits, California — a small rural town with an economy based on cattle ranching and logging; the owner of the shop (the printer, Jim Case) was adamant that 'printing ain't for girls,' but he took me on three afternoons a week as the shop's cleaning lady. (Clay & Phillips 257)

Work wasn't always isolating; though the *manual* production required for fine presswork is often solitary and physically demanding, its technical intricacy and flexibility required a certain amount of outreach. A poetics of production arose out of a need for practical advice and aesthetic guidance which would bring fledgling publishers like Patricia Dienstfrey (of Kelsey St.) and Hejinian into contact with their contemporaries. Kathy Walkup (of Five Trees) and Johanna Drucker "taught [Hejinian] a few essentials and a number of tricks" about typesetting (Clay & Phillips 257). Rosmarie Waldrop, who'd been publishing for over a decade, and Barbara Baracks were to influence Hejinian aesthetically and provide continued encouragement and advice.

A poetics of production also arose from the inside out in the case of the women's writing groups that formed bases for founding little magazines and presses. The same year Tuumba was established, "the excitement of sharing . . . work each week" made the editors of *Room* "aware of the need for more dialogue among women who write."^{*} And for the members of Kelsey St. their writing group contributed to their growing awarenesses of women's absence — from canonical omissions to similar inequities in current publishing practices. When a 1970 anthology, *San Francisco Bay Area Poets*, came out, for example, the fact that there wasn't one woman included would not be overlooked.[†] This fact, along with the group's awareness of the limited scope of women's writing available, would encourage Kelsey

^{*}"Editor's Note," *Room* 1.1 (1976).

[†]Personal correspondence with Patricia Dienstfrey, 3/1/98.

St. to stray from the feminist poetic party line to publish writing they as a group valued — writing that was approaching issues of identity in new ways. Co-founding a press with this purpose in mind “was a means of questioning the centrality of the male figure in writing” (Osman & Spahr 92). Working from a small community out into a larger community of writers and readers, Kelsey St. developed an outreach-ethic, considering the impact their cognitive and material productions (book selection and design) might have, and worked to establish a women’s literary salon in the Bay Area.* Co-editor Patricia Dienstfrey laments that in preserving few records from the 1970s they “lacked perspective on [their] possibilities for a good part of [their] publishing life.” But they could hardly have foreseen the significance they would develop to institutions such as the New York Public Library division of special collections and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

Unlike most presses of the 1970s, Hejinian’s Tuumba Press didn’t arise out of a need to serve a particular community of women though she did enact her feminism as editor and poet; she asserted (and inserted) herself into an overwhelmingly male writing community. Along with little magazines such as *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, *This*, *Tottel’s*, *Hills*, Tuumba became central to the development of so-called Language Poetry, a ‘group’ uncatagorically united by its various avant-garde theoretical forays. The idea of “perceiver-centered” writing was for Hejinian implicitly feminist (and revolutionary). In *Poetics Journal*, a subsequent publication she co-edited with Barrett Watten, Hejinian noted that making texts “open to the world and particularly to the reader, invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies” (Hejinian 1998, 619).

Hejinian, too, worked from the inside out, “looking to various modes of ‘experimental,’ ‘innovative,’ or ‘avant-garde’ writing for information.” Between 1976-84, Tuumba produced 50 “pamphlets,” a term she preferred over “chapbook” because she “wanted the Tuumba books to come to people in the mode of ‘news’” (Clay & Phillips 257). And though publishing Tuumba was physically and intellectually a “solo venture,” it was not a solitary one. Community meant not many hands ink-stained hands but many minds:

I had no partner(s) or assistant(s) but [Tuumba] was not . . . private [or] solitary;
I had come to realize that poetry exists not in isolation (alone on its lonely page)
but in transit, as experience, in the social worlds of people. For poetry to exist, it

* Dienstfrey comments that though it never developed, “for a year, many committed and articulate women — professors, artists, lawyers, poets, of different races and classes and sexual orientations — met to define what this salon might be, and what the crucial issues were.” *Ibid.*

has to be given meaning, and for meaning to develop there must be communities of people thinking about it. Publishing books as I did was a way of contributing to such a community — even a way of helping invent it. (Clay & Phillips 257)

The impulse behind mimeo revolution publications was, from the start, to create community around otherwise unrepresented concerns. In the case of *under*-represented women writers, the small press created spaces to make representation possible, enabling accumulation and recognition, and, eventually, the sort of dialogues and diatribes that lead to critiques and critical theories of poetic praxis. Undoubtedly the increasing number of women poets and editors played an important role in defining for numerous poets a political engagement with poetry, a ‘turning to words’ that found information in the newly available work of other innovative women poets. Though “hidden” throughout the seventies by the more visible and vociferous poetics of the Women’s Movement, women poet-editors continued moving out into larger and more inclusive communities. By the end of the decade work by innovative women was available in unprecedented quantities, yet it’s clear that those willing or wanting to publish remained comparatively small in number, and, as in the male-dominated presses, more men were published; women-operated presses of this period published more than twice as many books by men as by women.^{*} That’s not to say that these editors were less feminist or more avant-garde. Against a backdrop of prohibitive literary history, asserting one’s editorial position, as well as writing and agreeing to have one’s work read and published — insomuch as these amount to an exercise of agency — is a feminist undertaking. The appearance of these writers and editors upset the prevalence of a set of top-heavy relations (subject/object, speaker/listener, viewer/viewed) and served to fully deconstruct the hegemonic order of feminist realism and masculinist innovation that preceded it. This in itself is revolutionary.[†]

^{*} Five Trees published at least 4; Telephone, at least 8 Angel Hair, at least 35; Tuumba 18; and Burning Deck at least 70.

[†] If my project weren’t limited to print journals, I would mention other projects such as Susan Howe’s radio show “Poetry,” a series of readings and interviews broadcast on WBAI Pacifica Radio in the late seventies, and C.D. Wright’s “The Lost Roads Project: A Walk-in Book Of Arkansas,” a multi-media exhibit “to advance the relation between writing and reading in a slightly different medium” and “to work alongside other Arkansas artists/thinkers/does in the process” (*Chain* 3, 206) which opened in 1994 and toured Arkansas for 2 years, featuring the work of native Arkansas artists. Wright Comments “I think I stand a better chance of gaining that sweet communal feeling again from the lonesome practice of poetry for having found expression in a walk-in book” (*Chain* 3, 211).

IV. WHEN WE AWAKJEN THE DEAD (AROUND 1979):
LITERARY HISTORY, LITERARY HERSTORY,
HOW(ever), AND AFTER

“In 1978 Charles Bernstein asked me to write an essay responding to the question, “Why don’t more women do language-oriented writing?” The first answer that came to mind was that, as an oppressed group, women have a more urgent need to describe the conditions of their lives. This answer, however, seemed rather facile. It implied, for instance, that there was another (that is, non-language centered) poetic style in use which could fully and clearly represent the nature of women’s oppression . . . The question of how best to represent women’s social position remained open, and the answer must depend on what one assumed the cause of that position to be.” —Rae Armantrout, “Feminist Poetics and the Meaning of Clarity”

“It is my belief that she cannot simply enter the tradition, identify with it as if she were male; she is, I think, in grave risk to do so. But what other identity is there? Surely, to ask that is to bring us to the heart of the matter: woman as absence and the consequent risks involved in the invention of our own traditions.” —Beverly Dahlen, *HOW(ever)* associate editor

“I began writing to escape being a woman.” —Johanna Drucker

I sometimes even wonder whether men can understand the voice of the women we live next to and from whose bodies we have come, since I hear every day the male version of the universal voice of rationality trying to control, as if by ventriloquism, female bodies. —Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics*

Critical articulations such as the foregoing began to accumulate in alternative spaces opened by the small press. Voicing dissatisfactions created a space “between,” while the avant-garde small press enabled women to critique feminism’s powerfully asserted vision and methodology. Even before feminism was critiqued for inadequately addressing the concerns of non-white middle-class women, it was clear that a feminist approach to gender and language could not represent a full range of women’s concerns. A *feminist* poetics from any ideological or theoretical perspective always contests the limitations of the “universal voice” which threatens to erase, marginalize or discount the cultural participation of women. But

exactly what a “feminist poetics” might be was contested throughout the seventies and eighties as women engaged in radical acts of poetry. The feminist poetics of the Women’s Movement was informed by and large by the revisionary tactics outlined in Adrienne Rich’s 1971 essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” which consisted in “breaking” tradition’s “hold” over the female poet’s “available materials,” her subject-matter. This was to be done by means of voice, through which previous lyrics of “victimization by Love” would be replaced by ‘new’ lyrics expressing “female anger and . . . furious awareness of Man’s power over her” (35-36). By 1979, critic Elaine Showalter had encouraged women in “Towards a Feminist Poetics” to render “the newly visible world of female culture” and “the experience of the ‘muted’ female half” (28) in order to create a “distinctly female literary tradition.” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979) spoke of the female “prisoners” of a previous century, “glancing into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text” and — finally — seeing themselves “enraged.” Thus co-opting traditional mimetic strategies was central to the “vision” of the feminist poetics under construction.

Titles of other feminist works, such as *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and *Shakespeare’s Sisters* (1979), reveal the extent to which Virginia Woolf was taken up as a mentor and a guide. Her fictional Judith Shakespeare illustrated the incomprehensibility, under the strictures of a patriarchal descriptions of Woman, of the inscription “woman poet”; she was seen and not heard and thus to be a “poet” was to be “profoundly ‘unwomanly’” (Gilbert & Gubar, xxii). While Woolf was writing on behalf of women and while her infamous case for £500 per annum and a room of one’s own *does* articulate the female artist’s struggle for self-representation, it also locates as a contingent concern woman’s need for self definition: Woolf asks, “what is ‘herself’? I mean, what is a woman?”

But there was another Virginia Woolf, one who had written, in *A Room of One’s Own*, of a woman writer’s ability “to use writing as a means of art, and not just self expression.” Woolf also delineates a struggle *with the means* of self-representation — language. In 1979, poet and scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis looked toward Woolf for a different version of feminist poetics, one that included a vision of difference and recalled Woolf’s observation that writing by men and women exhibit “marked differences of plot and incident . . . [and] infinite differences in selection method and style.” Reviving Woolf’s insistence that sexual difference influences artistic production on a semiotic level, DuPlessis set about to argue for recognition of a “female aesthetic” in artistic production “which begins when women take, investigate, the structures of feeling that are ours” and which reveals a conflict with the “patriarchal structures of feeling” — that determine a range of permissible formulations. A

feminist poetic based on this aesthetic would take sexual difference into account not only as it determines the realm of one's experience but also as it mediates one's articulation of it: "these differing experiences produce different consciousness, different cultural expression, different relation to realms of symbols and to symbol users" (DuPlessis 1980, 141-49).^{*}

The re-visionary poetic trope fails to account for this 'otherhow'[†] of Woolf's divisive ideology — her insistence that, in order to break the conventional mirror-like structures/strictures that had cast the feminine in the pose of object, women writers must attend to a "technical difficulty" by radically altering the structure of the sentence: "the very form of the sentence," wrote Woolf, "does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men, it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for woman's use." A mirror, even attuned to a more sympathetic female gaze, is still a mirror, and those captured in its 'authoritative' glare 'objects' of attention. A Woolfean feminist poetic announces that it is not experience which literature must reflect (the basis of those "dumping grounds," according to Woolf, the drawing room novel), but woman's consciousness that must freely move *through the medium of language*. Importantly, DuPlessis' female aesthetic, like Woolf's inquiry into feminine consciousness, is focused not on newly-found emotions and expressions peculiar to women but on questions regarding the structures that subjective poetic utterance takes; it is not essential to women but a set of mobile "practices available to those groups . . . which wish to criticize, to differentiate from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowing and understanding with which they are saturated."

Feminine consciousness, in Woolf's formulation, was irruptive to conventional (masculine) semantics that marked writing as "feminine": unacceptable, subversive, chaotic. Unacceptable, as well, to the normative female literary tradition, where Woolf's radical admonitions, along with those of Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, and, as Susan Howe has shown, Emily Dickinson, were relegated to the blind spot of "Re-Vision" — or their complexities reduces to slogans.[‡] Implicit in DuPlessis' essay is a critique of a feminist poetics that maintains traditional hegemonic structures to express new realizations.

^{*}By 1990 DuPlessis would modify the phrase "These differing experiences produce different consciousness" to read "These experiences of difference . . . produce different consciousnesses" (1990, 11), foreclosing the binaristic notion of woman as 'other' with the notion of 'difference.'

[†]The term is DuPlessis': "not 'otherness' in a binary system, but 'otherhow' as the multiple possibilities of a praxis" (1990, 154).

[‡]Stein receives such treatment in *Madwoman in the Attic* where the authors refer to "the career of a single woman artist, a 'mother of us all' as Gertrude Stein would put it"(101) and "what Gertrude Stein would call 'patriarchal poetry.'" According to Susan Howe, *Madwoman in the Attic* "fails to discuss the implications of a nineteenth century American penchant for linguistic decreation ushered in by their representative poet." See Howe's *My Emily Dickinson*, especially pp.13-18.

Preserving these structures, she implies, ironically preserves conditions of women's objectification and oppression and confirms patriarchal perspectives — a critique that would be elaborated years later by DuPlessis herself. Joan Retallack too would critique hegemonic feminist poetics for simply exercising “an assertively female vocabulary — *womb, breast, vagina, menses*” polemically situated in conventional lyric structures. To “steal” from patriarchal ideology conventional means of constructing poetic voice, Retallack argues, adheres too strongly to patriarchal structures to transform them: “Since images created by women do not impress what are still seen as male linguistic arbiters, these images cannot really enter, much less transform the language” (Retallack 1994, 354).^{*} The mode, DuPlessis insists, is of “rupture,” which “makes of representation a site of struggle” (DuPlessis 1990, 145). A critical feminist poetics, as Woolf notes, if it is to be of *any* use to women writers, experiments *improperly* with conventional forms qua literary history.

“Experimental writing of all sorts has always been crucial to the feminist project of cultural change: of revolution, not revision” (DuPlessis 1993, 105). But for a *woman* to join the growing male avant-garde in playing openly with semantics (by eschewing accepted formal, syntactic, grammatical, typographical, or referential structures, etc.) — to write, in the 1970s, like Vito Hannibal Acconci, Robert Grenier, or Barrett Watten — was to risk “unintelligibility.” In the eyes of movement feminists, to be ‘unintelligible’ or ‘difficult’ was to be inaccessible and incommunicative, to assume a position of self-imposed silence, and thus of privilege and power. Straying from ‘properly’ feminist voice- and identity-based poetics by wrenching one’s language from ‘easy’ structures was to challenge the validity of the normative (and normatizing) perspective espoused by such structures. This, DuPlessis maintained, was to change consciousness and transform social relations:

writing exerts a continuous destabilizing pressure, and, in both analytic and formal ways, creates an arousal of desire for difference, for hope. If consciousness must change, if social forms must be re-imagined, then language and textual structures must help cause and support, propel and discover these changes. (DuPlessis 1993, 105)

^{*}See Retallack’s essay for a thorough critique of the feminist strategy of appropriating traditional (lyric) structures to voice female experience. Retallack makes reference to the title of Alicia Suskin Ostriker’s monumental 1986 study *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*.

In the following years innovative women poets and poet-editors would continue to pursue the work of women writers of the past, especially in those aspects that had been effectively deadened or left dormant. For Kathleen Fraser this meant re-utilizing and creating access to women's radical poetic practice. Teaching a 'Feminist Poetics' seminar at San Francisco State University in 1982, Fraser introduced "nontraditional language structures" and contextualized these by focusing concurrently on modernist and contemporary texts by women and recent feminist criticism. In this way, one could rethink the boundaries of poetic practice and wonder whether the exclusion of "women's literature" was related to the exclusive nature of genre and, Fraser suggested, a particular understanding of temporality in writing. Following Woolf, Fraser proposed women's spatio-temporal experience as a literary structure, a formulation that was shaping Fraser's own poetry. She advocated an alternative feminist formulation, "the building or restructuring of the poem incorporating the measure of female thought and daily life, the stutter of uncertainty, the multiple voice, the discontinuous character of time experienced in women's diction, the simultaneity of multiple perceptions" (1982, 8). If, following Woolf, a woman could restructure the sentence to reflect feminine consciousness, and if, in lieu of a room of one's own in which to experience uninterrupted thought, Fraser reasoned, a feminist poetics should embrace this interruption as a formal innovation.

Continuing on the heels of recent feminist criticism that questioned the canonization of some modernists — Pound, Williams, Eliot, Yeats, and, tokenized, Marianne Moore — and the accompanying erasure of others — Laura (Riding) Jackson, Dorothy Richardson, Lorine Niedecker and Mina Loy — Fraser urged her writing group (Frances Jaffer and Beverly Dahlen) to edit a little magazine. *HOW(ever)* would work to recover a lineage based on the enactment of experimental practices by women and use these newly available "models" to think about formally innovative *contemporary* writing by women. Its interrogative feminist poetics registered an editorial outcry against the suppression of the "unofficially recognized realm" of experimental women writers who were coming along in the wake of these modernists. Her critical sense of literary history, like that of DuPlessis, a substantive "'mail-order' contributor,"⁸ critiqued and challenged the conventional, centered and restrictive 'lyric order.'

Though in opposition to a too-narrow definition of feminist writing that had emerged in the feminist small press and scholarship, *HOW(ever)* shunned the isolationism and anti-academism of avant-garde little magazines that would have hindered its feminist literary-historical project. Fraser notes that "there were problems in asserting a point of view that defined itself as female and often feminist . . . some people inevitably felt excluded . . . But

⁸As DuPlessis dubbed herself in an essay of 1993.

rather than seeing ourselves as exclusionary or here to displace or replace anything or anyone, we hoped, instead, to be an added source of information and stimulation” (1993, 63). *HOW(ever)* provided a forum for an informed exchange, publishing experimental work by women* in tandem with poet-generated “working notes” that would provide elucidation for other poets and feminist literary critics wanting to develop an understanding of them. “Maybe,” Fraser reasoned, “women critics simply didn’t know how to begin thinking or talking about the more innovative compositional work and the seriousness of its quest . . . perhaps new insights and descriptions coming directly from the poets might provide useful clues for the careful detective work in which scholar-critics engage” (1993, 62). Patricia Dienstfrey observed that this structure kept experimental texts “open to feminist readings” at a time when the influential ideology of Language poetry was “publicly defining” them.† *How(ever)*’s informal exchanges would battle the myth of codification, of the ‘experimental voice’ as merely an alternative to the ‘coalitional voice’ celebrated by populist feminist poetics. The editorial board sought the feminist scholars they were reading in the hopes of having dialogues, communication that could fight the dismissal of experimental writing as merely ‘difficult’ or ‘inaccessible,’ thus providing insurance against future omissions from literary history. Each issue’s “Postcards” hosted lively exchanges and responses, and by inviting scholars and poet-scholars to contribute “alerts” (“brief commentary, new slants, current scholarly finds”) *HOW(ever)* could build a new body of criticism from inside the new tradition it was forming, with informal essays or transcribed talks on modernist and contemporary poets (such as Mary Butts or Dorothy Richardson, Barbara Guest or Mei-mei Bersenbrugge) and poetic issues (such as canon formation and questions of form and style) — issues that found little or no space in other serials.

The collective editorial practice of *HOW(ever)*, a “tricky staging of vulnerability, chanciness and resistance to male editorial approval” (Osman & Spahr, 45), helped the editors to find alternatives to the sorts of disabling editorial biases and controls they confronted as ‘uncategorizable’ poets.‡ In arguing for their choices issue by issue they sought to keep their preferences unhindered and avoid settling into a fixed aesthetic. And,

* In its 9 years, *HOW(ever)* published many women writers central to experimental poetic discourse including Barbara Guest, Maureen Owen, Rae Armantrout, Fanny Howe, Susan Howe, Laura Moriarty, Myung Mi Kim, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Hannah Weiner, Norma Cole, Patricia Dienstfrey, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Johanna Drucker.

† Personal correspondence with Patricia Dienstfrey, 3/1/98.

‡ *HOW(ever)* had a number of different editors (and associated editors) throughout its lifetime, including Kathleen Fraser, Frances Jaffer, Beverly Dahlen, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Carolyn Burke, and later Susan Gevirtz, Myung Mi Kim, Meredith Stricker, Diane Glancy, and Adalaide Morris.

Fraser reasons, they were “opening up places that had been shut down by powerful ideas of ‘worth’ and ‘importance’” (Osman & Spahr, 44). The name *HOW(ever)*, an homage to Marianne Moore, “represented for [them] an addendum, a point of view from the margins, meant to flesh out what had thus far been proposed in poetry and poetics”(1993, 63) as reflected in *HOW(ever)*’s format and unconventional mix of texts.

HOW(ever) continued to publish for eight years, until, as Fraser recently commented, they “finally felt legitimate” (19); and, with the establishment of *HOW(ever)*, Dienstfrey notes, “the Bay Area . . . had once more positioned itself as a locale where new practices, readings and rereadings could converge. This time the nexus would be experimental writing by women” (Osman & Spahr, 94). Beyond providing a space to locate and discuss experimental practices, *HOW(ever)* disrupted the complacency of at least one reviewer, who wrote, “I have yet to meet anyone who has been able to sit and read GERTRUDE STEIN for more than an hour at a stretch . . . or to remain excited by H.D. after twenty pages or so. These seem the deities behind this sort of writing. . . . When I pick up *HOW(ever)* I shudder.” He issued an edict: “Let’s strangle the little creature in his crib before he soils his pants and screws up our life,” and took the opportunity to legislate further poetic prescriptions: “A poem is not a dictionary. A poem is not a set of easy metaphysical speculations on the nature of grammar, guilt, or the primal flood aggressive . . . Nor is the facile word play, no matter how ‘round’ and female the concept, poetry.” He put these editors descriptively in their place, “bitching” and “get[ting] together on a rainy day and sip[ping] their herb teas.”

Concurrent to formulations of feminist poetics, in the early 1980s translations of French feminists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva were appearing in American feminist journals. Their work refigured the “feminine” in discourse, *as writing*, a set of discursive practices disruptive to the Lacanian ‘law of the father,’ patriarchal language established in and through textual conventions. They provided a useful vocabulary for thinking of the feminine in language *and* in literary history; multiplicitous, fragmented, and thus subversive, the feminine “ruptures” the symbolic, refusing to play Other to the phallus, the signifier that “centers” and through which all meaning is secured. For innovative women writers striving to work with language as a material rather than a mirror, as something that constructs rather than reflects (identity and gender, among other things), these powerful notions, accepted, questioned or rejected, kindled theoretical fires.* Carolyn Burke’s guest

* Often their tropes — Irigaray’s lips, Cixous’ milky ink, Kristeva’s womb-like semiotic chora — appeared too essentialist, and perhaps too physical, to effect otherwise intellectual and theoretical ends. In “The Rejection of Closure” for example Lyn Hejinian claims that “the literalness of the genital model for a woman’s language . . .

lecture on French Feminism in Kathleen Fraser's 'Feminist Poetics' seminar was, Dodie Bellamy recalls, "so exciting that afterwards the women in the bathroom talked about it like [they] were on drugs" (Osman & Spahr, 13). The sense that in writing women engage in language *differently* on a *structural level* encouraged a (feminist) critique of *language* (and not merely poetry) as a set of (masculine) conventions that renders 'illogical' and thus 'inaudible' notions that can't be articulated in normative, rationalistic, or unexamined structures: "When a writer attempts to speak directly, she is crippled by an inherited patriarchal language in which certain core female experiences/perceptions are inconceivable" (Bellamy 1989, n.p.). The inquiry had shifted away from points of enforced silence to the overall structural limitation, such that all representation was suspect and the notion of the feminine in discourse was examined for its potential to influence poetic (and not specifically feminist) practice. Rosmarie Waldrop, for example, speaks of her work of the late seventies (*The Road is Everywhere or Stop This Body*) as feminist in retrospect: "It was only later, that I realized that this challenge to a rigid subject-object relation has feminist implications"; thus drawing out the work's relation to inherent (and no longer hidden) cultural issues: "Woman in our culture has been treated as object par excellence, to be looked at rather than looking Instead, these poems propose a grammar in which subject and object function are not fixed . . . where there is no hierarchy . . . but a fluid and constant alternation" (1998, 13).

While it had been important for feminist criticism to validate the historical identities of women poets, and important likewise to introduce alongside the newly emerging "female literary tradition" the existence of a tradition of experimentation, many writers grew wary of the risk implied by a too-inclusive characterization — that actual practices might be subsumed and destroyed, in literary-historical terms, by the imposition, for example in criticism and anthologies, of a generalized identity (the "experimental woman poet") — yet another exclusionary boundary. Bellamy resisted the idea that "avant-garde women's writing . . . is merely an acting out against traditional feminism. Many women deeply feel the need to do more in their work than tell the stories of women's lives" (1989, n.p.). And Alice Notley, for example, questioned the construction of a gender-specific alternative tradition: "you can't create this female tradition and keep it all for yourself. It isn't nice. It doesn't matter if men haven't been nice. You can't repeat their sins" (1988, 26).

Women poet-editors operating in the small press do provide against erasure: no one can say "women did not write in the 1980s" the way they have said "women did not write in the 1950s." But they surpass the boilerplate feminist rhetoric of securing a feminist literary history — the construction of a past for future use. As Hejinian suggests, the site of

may be problematic. The desire that is stirred by language is located most interestingly within language itself."

construction is present and active: “language itself is never in a state of rest. . . . And the experience of using it, which includes the experience of understanding it, either as speech or as writing, is inevitably active” (1998, 624). In other words, experimental women poets and poet-editors do not only contribute to the grand historical project of constructing a tradition of women’s writing, but work to insure heterogeneity and stave off categorizations that might eclipse the particularity of any one project. This is why, for example, such distinct projects as Fraser’s and Hejinian’s could work contemporaneously. With its centers of production and exchange, the small press enabled the development of a multiplicity of feminist poetic strategies, disturbing not only poetic conventions but, one hopes, critical conventions that simplify retrospectively.

This is why, perhaps, women have come to the fore among poets of the post-1960s generation. Through debates “that raged around issues of language and gender” (Cole 593) women proceeded, to various degrees, to investigate structures through which gender distinctions are maintained. While Fraser seeks to reproduce social effects “structurally, in the look and sound of [women’s] poems,” Leslie Scalapino sees her work as *unraveling* structural effects: “My articulation of feminism is in the gesture of trying to unravel how something is packaged or mirrored back to me — as part of the whole web of what’s around us — and how we can be attuned to seeing social creations of ourselves and others” (Frost 20). Alice Notley recognizes that cultural effects structure linguistic possibilities — “most ways of composing & setting down lines of poetry, of grouping them into poems on the page, seem ‘male’” — but sees also in language the possibility to question: “What would it be like to make a female poetry? Is that possible? . . . *Is there feminine and masculine?*” (Notley 1991, n.p.). Rosmarie Waldrop apprehends a similar openness in language: “I don’t really see ‘female language,’ ‘female style or technique.’ Because the writer, male or female, is only one partner in the process of writing. Language, in its full range, is the other” (1998, 61). Joan Retallack, who delineated “a distinctly ‘feminine’ experimental project that had previously been carried on almost exclusively by the male avant-garde” (1996, 296) — recognized it as being composed of a set of strategies (“new grammars and models for thinking about interrelationships”) accessible to all writers.

While the concept of an experimental feminist poetics has proven useful, it does not define the critical thought for a generation (or two) of women writers. The number of poets committed to their own explorations of language shifted the poetic debates of the 1980s away from boundary-making discourses, feminist or not. That is, they recognized no center, authoritatively decreed, which women approach marginally; the totality implied by that model having been supplanted by a recognition that the proliferation of contingent individ-

ual constructions effectively de-centers the field. The small press was the vehicle for this phenomenon. Women poet-editors effectively intervened by publishing women's poetic experimentation of this period, which extended from and particularized, by means of individual poetic lineages, the large structures they encountered: both the operative field of production and a "female tradition in literature" that feminists proposed as another authoritative center.

In 1989, Dodie Bellamy argued that it was "time to blow apart the arbitrary gulf between experimental and traditional, to create a sense of continuum. Any writer should be able to choose wherever she wants to be along the continuum in any particular place. To allow permission for these fluctuating boundaries" (1989, n.p.). Recognizing gender as a mechanism through which distinctions were made in poetry and in language, poet-editors created spaces to carry out experimental feminist investigations of the boundaries it proposed. Charles Bernstein has noted a "male version of the universal voice of rationality trying to control, as if by ventriloquism, female bodies" (1992, 5). Experimentation sought ways around the formal closure that a populist feminist poetics proposed — a female version of the universal voice that exerted influence over women's texts — and used poetry, to use Hejninian's phrase, as a "language of inquiry."

V. EDITING, (CO-ED)ITING, AND A NEW POETICS OF PRODUCTION:

"WITH A PROPER BASLANCE OF GENDER (OF COURSE)"

"Emily Dickinson's carefully handwritten manuscripts — some sewn into fascicles, some gathered into sets — may have been demonstrating her conscious and unconscious separation from a mainstream literary orthodoxy in letters . . . The issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of anti-nomianism in our culture." —Susan Howe, *The Birth-mark*

" . . . Bernadette Mayer's *Sonnets* manuscript had been sitting in a drawer for while . . . one publisher had fallen through. Besides, who was going to publish me? I might as well do it myself. But I shouldn't do myself first, I reasoned. I should create a context." —Lee Ann Brown, on Tender Buttons Press

“Women who edit hold a particular place in an established discourse of authority. Whether they think about it or not, they must evaluate their stance in relation to that realm. Perhaps to ignore the factor is in itself a form of subversion — it’s a way of maintaining a frame that refuses to participate in unpleasant histories.”
—Jena Osman & Juliana Spahr, *Chain*

“I see the world as physically maleish in a way that has nothing to do with language or symbols. I participate in male forms. A poetry journal is a male form. My other choice is to be a hermit.” —Alice Notley

“Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.” —Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation”

IN 1998, THE FIRST ISSUE OF *Gare du Nord* promised to provide “a good mix of work from as many different cultures as we can find, with a proper balance of gender (of course).”^{*} Women’s participation, like the ‘always already’ feminism implicit in various modes of women’s experimental poetic practices, is a matter “of course”; the “balance” of women in the small press has enabled the emergence of an otherwise uncategorizable and hidden community of poets. By the early 1990s, editorial poetic practice began to change hands. 1984, especially, was a turning point: Tuumba (in the San Francisco Bay Area) and *Telephone/Telephone Books* (in New York) both ceased operations. Book production by women waned until, prompted by ethical necessity more than economic ‘accessories,’[†] in Berkeley, Leslie Scalapino began O Books (1986) and Lee Ann Brown started Tender Buttons in New York (1989). By 1990 several new women-edited and (co-ed)ited little magazines (*Avec, Scarlet, Big Allis, tight, Re*map* and *Troubled Surfer*) were established. Leave Books, highly prolific, would publish its first book the next year, while Texture Press and Avec Books geared up to begin production and join in a small (women-edited) desktop revolution: in 1991-1992, eight new little magazines and four new presses were established. The amplification of women-edited small press activity — more than double that of the previous decade[‡] — effectively diffused

^{*}See “Editorial,” *Gare du Nord*, Vol. 1.1, (1997).

[†]“Mistakes were made.” Attributable to the Reagan Administration’s war on public arts funding, the paucity of small press production throughout the eighties contrasts sharply with that of the preceding decade, when government subsidies were widely available.

[‡]Between 1990-1999, twenty-five new little magazines and ten new presses appeared, vs., from 1979-89, twelve and three.

the bi-coastal nature of poetic production (the East/West of Ron Silliman's 1986 anthology *In the American Tree*). Providence, Rhode Island, home of the Waldrop's Burning Deck, would witness a small explosion of women-edited littles (*The Impercipient*, *Black Bread*, and *Cathay*). Women-edited small presswork at the State University of New York at Buffalo, which began with Judith Kerman's collectively edited *Earth's Daughters* (1971-80), was revived by *No Trees*, and later arrivals *Leave Books*, *Chain*, *Apex of the M* and *verdure*. The women-edited desktop revolution (currently over 20 little magazines and e-zines and 11 presses) not only extends from New York to San Francisco, but punctuates the landscape from Hawaii (*Tinfish*, *Chain*), to Oklahoma (*Texture/Texture Press*) and Kansas (*First Intensity*), to Pennsylvania (*six*) and Washington D.C. (Primitive Publications), to Paris, France (*Gare du Nord*).

This transformation of the field of poetic production continues to be crucial to the development of theoretical and critical writing by and/or about women. *HOW(ever)* put out its last paper issue in 1992 after publishing poetry and providing information on modernist and contemporary poetry and poetics for over 8 years.* *Poetics Journal*, too, had put a hold on production after having published essays — including Hejinian's influential "The Rejection of Closure,"† and an in-progress section of Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* — by more than 30 women poets. Hejinian had articulated her sense that men didn't "tend to take women seriously" in a 1980 letter to Susan Howe and proposed that women "have to keep telling those guys to do so" (Vickery 31). The modification that women poets in the 1980s proposed was revolutionary in that it would bring about change by subverting authority within the field of poetic production (challenging, transforming or discarding its conventions) which is to challenge the operative structure of the field by creating new, unanticipated positions. Editing and disseminating new poetic material thereby deconstructs the binaries that grant women's work lesser, marginal, or non- status. Women editing and actively shaping the field challenge such boundaries, a challenge that is not only feminist; it does not concern only the acts of women. The challenge is enacted on the level of poiesis, in that it serves as a practical critique of a range of practices that constitute the field of production.

Changes in the reception of women's work were reflected throughout the small press. Poetry and responses by women were increasingly published with a host of presses, such as *Potes and Poets*, *Roof*, *Sun and Moon*, and *Chax*, and in many little magazines such as *o blek*, *A.bacus* and *Sulfur*. While a comprehensive list might sketch particular preferences, a statistic (the number of men publishing work by women) would obscure the actual situation:

* Fraser recently launched *HOW2*, an on-line publication. See Appendix B.

† First delivered as a talk in a series of talks held in the Bay Area. See Bob Perelman's *Writing/Talks* (Southern Ill. UP, 1985).

at times it is not gender differences per se which keep women out of print, but those formalities of textual production that keep activity (including writing) by women hidden.

In 1992, Johanna Drucker pointed out that

If one of the features of the modern avant-garde was to pretend to the autonomy and self-referential value of the work, then one of the most significant projects of the contemporary scene has got to be the undoing of that mythic autonomy in recognition of the complicity of (still male dominated) power relations as they structure the ongoing production of literature as its own critical history. (13)

Her comments point at once to the project of *HOW(ever)* (in which Drucker's essay appeared) and away from it, to a younger generation of innovative women poet-editors. In 1992, the Canadian little magazine *Raddle Moon* produced a "Women/Writing/Theory" issue (no. 12), promising to be "a first exchange" involving some of a group of women who "agreed to pursue in print the conversation they had been having among themselves and were aware of around them."

The emphasis on "first exchange" simultaneously positions the issue in relation to the already ongoing conversation between women, writing, and theory (or women's writing and theory) — in which *Raddle Moon* had been a participant throughout the 1980s — and announces the possibility of a break or re-beginning commensurate with the shift in editorship and in editorial concerns that occurred in the early 1990s. This first exchange also constitutes a change in editorial dynamics that had shaped the little magazine as a field of poetic inquiry. Editor Susan Clark then established *Q'ir'i*, a "small, casual irregular of poetry and poetics, discussion and information" to exist beside *Raddle Moon* and to extend its inquiry. Though *Q'ir'i* was never realized as a serial (the contents of the first issue were republished as the *next* issue of *Raddle Moon*), it suggests that by 1992 a critical mass of poets and poet-editors had been reached such that their conversations must be publicized. It suggests also that a new poetics of production was underway — "in recognition," as Drucker had put it, "of the complicity of (still male dominated) power relations."

A woman editing takes on production as a sort of experiment as her authority over the materials and processes she engages with is untried. Editing means confronting familiar prohibitions. Ann Erickson, editor of *tight*, for example, "was tired of messing around and .

*Respondents included Abigail Child, Jean Day, Johanna Drucker, Norma Cole, Kathryn MacLeod, Chris Tysh and Laura Moriarity.

. . . wanted to run one corner of the universe in [her] own way,”* and Mary Hilton started Primitive Publications in part “as a way to break out of ‘I can’t’ or ‘I could never.’”† Jennifer Moxley eschewed plans to co-edit with her partner because she “would have become intimidated by his presence and judgement and before long would have started to turn to him for approval on every decision,” and viewed the *Impercipient* as “a space in which [she] did not have to fight” (Osman & Spahr 85). These individual assertions, however personal the impetus, work to reconstitute the field and dynamics of selection and exchange kept in circulation there.

But as Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr suggested in the premier issue of *Chain* (1994), why stop there? To edit could mean to explore language and contingent issues of power. Along with disseminating new work, *Chain* also served as a forum in which to scrutinize editing practices and to start a dialogue among current women editors. Suggesting that editors must examine the extent to which they’re complicit in constructing boundaries, they pointed out how unannounced editorial assumptions construct ideological frames. They provided a critical edge to a gesture like that of Madeline Burnside and Andrew Kelly editing *Gnome Baker* in 1978, who aimed “to present a variety of previously unpublished written work . . . which is centered upon the use of the written word as a medium in itself” and sought “to free the writer from the intrusion of editorial taste or select[ion by] provid[ing] a written space large enough for the representation and articulation of a complete idea,”‡ Osman and Spahr wrote, “I am uncomfortable with the idea of the editor as arbiter of good taste, or as the (in)visible navigator/sculptor of a final packaged product. Journals rarely seem to openly admit the presence of personal ideology behind their pages. And when they do, the ‘personalized’ frame seems to stifle and alter the work by mashing it into an overly-prescribed space” (129). They chose instead to experiment radically with (non)editorial possibilities — *Chain*’s first issue, “devoted to the work of women poets, editors and critics” (6), includes an “Editorial Forum” based on their provocative questions regarding gender and editing. The issue concludes with “a series of ‘chains’/poems and other responses that enact an alternative editorial practice” — *i.e.* the editorial philosophy of the series was to avoid authoritarian framing in favor of presenting individual contributors’ felt connection to other participants. Rather than presenting a magazine structured by a centralized, authoritative nexus, their editorial efforts reflected a decentered field of poetic production. To this end the method of the concluding series was to play off of the form of the chain letter in its unpredictable path.

*Personal correspondence, 3/3/98.

†Personal correspondence, 6/17/98.

‡Editor’s note, *Gnome Baker I & II* (Spring 1978).

Further undermining the notion of editorial selection as a finalizing gesture, one that “opens” the work to a reader just as it “closes” it within the frame of its pages, Osman and Spahr place their editorial note in between these two alternative editorial propositions. *Chain’s* project is utopian, an attempt to produce the admittedly implausible frameless frame, “an attempt to investigate the (im)possibility of an unmediated reception, the (im)possibility of detaching a writing from its presentational/ideological form”(129).

Poetic experimentation attempts to shift the frames of understanding that assumptions (previous understandings) of poetry elicit. Editorial experimentation attempts to challenge concepts of authority and these conjoined have enabled women’s individual (and collective) editorial assumptions to shift the focus in (or on) the field of poetic production, not by pulling women out of the margins but by making the field inclusive of their concerns through instrumentalizing engagements and dialogues. By the middle of the 1990s, a larger, more geographically diverse third generation of women poet-editors — many of whom were literally “schooled” in feminism, the construction of literary history and the work of experimental women poets — were moving into and using the spaces that, during the previous two decades, women had engineered. Their focus had shifted from the strategic ground-breaking and space-making that enabled first-wave representation (and the codification of individual poets engaged in common poetic practices) to continued explorations and geographically diverse enactments of theoretical and political concerns. Many are devoted to non-gender-specific issues, representing and developing other concerns and experimental investigations: *Tinfish*, for example, forges connections between experimental poetics of Pacific Islanders and mainlanders, challenging U.S. isolationism; Primitive Publications focuses on historically-based writing that is perceptibly influenced by the present; *Tripwire* explores the poetics of post-Language poetry and a range of contingent concerns regarding race, class and gender; Em Press continues in an artist’s books tradition and Kelsey St. makes related forays into artist/poet collaborations; *Re*map* encourages and publishes informal dialogues along with poetry; and many little magazine editors follow the path forged by Burning Deck over 30 years ago, taking on the different demands and skills associated with book publishing (*Avec/Avec* Books, *Outlet/Double Lucy* Books, *Texture/Texture* Press, *Explosive Magazine/Spectacular* Books).

A history of women in the small press is a history of innovative feminist poetics. For innovative women poets, an engagement with avant-garde writing — as a practice and as an institution — is an act rooted in a feminist awareness of literary history and textual production. Undoubtedly many women feel the imperative to edit *because* they are women in this particular historical moment — because they *can* edit, they *can* take a position in the field of

poetic production. Increasingly women poet-editors render their own position within the field of poetic production rather than approaching it 'marginally' or from the 'outside.' A result of their activity is not to register difference — to construct a new identity, the 'experimental woman poet' — but to transform the field of production so that it is inclusive of a range of poetic practices. The emphasis, though, has been on proliferating poems rather than critical or theoretical writings; thirty new little magazines have appeared between 1990-99, and only six of those include a substantial amount of critical investigation.

Like Susan Howe's Emily Dickinson — 'feminine' *and* antinomian — contemporary women poet-editors continue to challenge the integrity of literary establishment expectations, and raise issues of editorial control. But experimental texts written by women — texts, like Dickinson's, in dialogue with one's poetic lineage — are transformative of the field of poetic production only when they are recognized, and a 'hidden community' revealed through individual acts of editorial insertion. The contemporary reception of writing, its publication and the critical discourses it engages with and vice versa, are its only insurance against literary-historical revisionism — no matter how ample, however considered and prepared, manuscripts in a drawer —

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