Feminist Periodicals

Barbara Godard

"[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write," wrote Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own in 1929, a statement which echoes even today. While £500 per annum was sufficient for a writer of fiction then, it would not be nearly enough to support today's feminist journalist and would-be-editor. However, the principles of financial independence and freedom from domestic concerns that Woolf elaborates, remain the material condition requisite for any feminist writing venture.

One of the constants of the feminist periodical across cultures, is that it exists outside the dominant mode of capitalist publishing, on the margins and in opposition both through its borderline position with respect to the marketplace and its commitment to counterstate ideology. Feminist periodicals are developed to further feminist ideologies, to create new circuits for disseminating knowledge and practices that seek to transform the feminine condition under which women have been subject to systemic oppression: they are not in the business of producing commodity-texts to maximize the profit of a corporation. Signifying practices which challenge the symbolic order, feminist periodicals also establish counter-institutions that would validate new ways of knowing. Key to this challenge is their existence outside the dominant fiction of the marketplace as a determinant of value. Rather than engaging in a soft sell, feminists foreground their critical and transformative project. They self-consciously aim to produce a position for a specific reading subject, a feminist reader who engages in a critique of dominant reading and, by extension, publishing practices.

In disinterest in the profit motive is paradoxically both the strength and the vulnerability of feminist publishing. As an alternative to the mainstream press and in exchange for their editorial independence, feminist periodicals enjoy none of the safety nets of dominant practices. Advertising, which is the main source of income for mass market publishing, directed is in women's magazines to produce woman as passive, decorative object, not as reasoning, critical subject. As such, feminist periodicals aiming at large audiences, rivaling such dominant institutions as Good Housekeeping and Chatelaine, cannot depend on the traditional sources of support — ads for make-up, high fashion, "feminine hygiene" and food — that in form those dominant arrangements.

Other advantages, however, are in what they can do with a limited resource. Ads for women's health, women's clothing, women's magazines, and other goods with other than a strictly commercial function, also serve a national and local function. In the city, it may be that the glossy pages of a men's magazine are more important to the fate of the local economy than the pages of a women's magazine. And even the glossy pages of a national or international women's magazine are more important to the fate of the national or international economy than the glossy pages of a women's magazine. But it is the glossy pages of a women's magazine which distill the glossy pages of a men's magazine. And it is the glossy pages of a national or international women's magazine which serve an analogous function to the glossy pages of a national or international men's magazine.

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dominant signifying practices on woman. Other advertisers refuse to place their ads in what they perceive as publications with a limited readership (single gender, that is). Ads from professional women, from women's bookstores, ads announcing women's cultural events, exchange ads with other feminist publications — small, plain, mostly verbal ads — grace the pages of Canadian feminist magazines like *Branching Out*, *Hermiones* and *La vie en rose*, which, as almost monofilial, have adopted an illustrated format to appeal to larger national and even, in the latter case, international audiences.

It is the format of this advertising which distinguishes these magazines from the glossy creations of marketing agencies, like *City Woman*, which aims at a similar feminist and professional audience, in an effort to recuperate and deflate the political impact of the feminist movement and serve an audience of working women up to the fashion advertising industry. One may find in the pages of these latter a familiar mixture of reporting on women's culture, life styles and profiles, even Eleanor Vachel on politics (*"May Brown, Defeated."") *City Woman*, March/April 1979, 56-64) interspersed, however, with pro-fume, make-up and clothes ads. But one will not find updates on feminist issues such as control of reproductive rights, political rights of native women, or pornography, as is the feminist counterdiscourse.

The ease with which feminist discourse can be manipulated to turn an emancipatory discourse for women into an oppressive discourse on woman, is something of which feminists have long been conscious. The forces of appropriation as in the ambiguous context when a feminist tries to direct a commercial enterprise — to the mutual dissatisfaction of both groups — are described in Doris Anderson's novel *Rough Layout*, a fiction that gives an ironic inventory of the sad lessons she learned when she tried to take *Chaleurine* down the feminist path in the 1970s while it remained within the fold of the *Maclean-Hunter* publishing empire. In the novel, Anderson details the compromises a feminist editor is obliged to make in such a context. She defends herself against the charges of one of her bosses ("I have doubts about you from time to time. I really have to question myself about your judgement when you run some of the stuff you run on birth control, equal pay, liberalized divorce.") by running the line of Gibson Girl fashion poses he prefers. On the other hand, after failing to establish for her superior the value of professionalism as sufficient qualification for one of her editors, she asks the woman to wear a skirt or decent pair of slacks into the office so that she will blend better with the new decor which has been planned to make the magazine a trendsetter of taste. The blandness of *Chaleurine* in the 1980s is testimony to the recuperating force of the dominant institution. Just two years ago, the magazine published an article on post-feminism, an ironic post-mortem for Anderson.

Autopists are currently under way following the cessation in 1987 of two major Canadian feminist periodicals, *Hermiones* and *La vie en rose*. *Hermiones*, which billed itself as offering "women's news and feminist views," was published by a group of women in Winnipe, The original mandate was to engage with local feminist issues...
Stadium Rd., Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2W2

(Red: "A newsletter of feminist innovative writing," as it accurately announces itself, the most exciting feminist literary magazine (others include A Room of One's Own) was started two years ago to circulate feminist writing stimulated by contemporary feminist theory, especially the work of teachers and students of the West Word summer school, one of the concrete institutional changes produced by the national "Women and Words" conference of 1983. Editors Betty Weir, Angela Hnyik, Sandy Duncn and Enka Hnyik are supported by contributing regional editors, Saucy and stimulating in appearance — hot pink paper for volume 1, turquoise for volume 2 — the newsletter challenges literary conventions and discursive norms. These are poems that look nothing that the poetry we are accustomed to seeing, using all margins of the page as top: in Marlene Neurne-Philip's "The Breaks Her Tongue." Contributors include emerging Canadian writers like Ol Bien and Internationo poets from Australia and Ckile, for example. A short selection of the poetry is published along with noted material, excising the poetic process. As well, there is news about upcoming feminist literary events across the country, letters and debates, and the occasional essay or review. Exciting writing. Quarterly. Subscription $12.00 from: 3233 W. 5th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., V6K 1N9.

Kinesis. This tablet, first published in 1972, serves the Vancouver region with brief items of local, regional, national and international news about movement issues from radical feminist and socialist perspectives. Includes reporting on cultural events and feminist cultural personality, book, film and theatre reviews, as well as a monthly bulletin and classified section. Ten times yearly. Subscription $7.00 from Suite 305, 1725 Granville Street, Vancouver, B.C., V5L 2K6.

Our Lives. Founded in March 1986, this newspaper for black women with national and international content has included among its editorial collective, figures like social activist and poet Dise Art Cooper and musician Faith Nolan. It presents short action-oriented articles on such questions as domestic violence and the need for shelters for black women, problems with racism regarding staff policy at the Shirley Samson Centre for treated women, needs for affordable housing, the exploitation of black women who are illegal immigrants. There is also poetry and fiction, some from oral traditions, short book reviews, and position papers on black feminism. A voice for the active and vocal section of the Toronto feminist scene where feminist theory is mostly produced by creative writers. Quarterly. Subscription $15.00 from: Box 246, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 28.

and to this end it published bilingually. Later, it aimed at a national audience and although keeping articles of local interest on such groups as the Nellie McClung theatre collective, addressed general issues of the rise of REAL Women, the role of women in the Canadian Labour Congress, Laut Cooper, feminist popular musician, and the boycott of South African products. But in this, Horizons was too successful and it attracted the ire of right-wing women who sought the support of the dominant institution to silence this challenging voice. Financial failure was the ostensible difficulty the magazine could not surmount. Lacking an advertising revenue like other feminist publications, Horizons had escaped the cruel realities of the unbalanced budget through the aid of government grants. However, this made it equally vulnerable to the dominant order. The rise of conservatism lead to a letter-writing lobby by women's groups like REAL Women against the magazine's subsidy from the Secretary of State. Without it, Horizons could not survive past its fifth birthday. That government was at odds with feminism, signifying practices has long been clear to members of collectives applying for such aid. In its first applications to the Canada Council under its support for periodicals programme, the Toronto-based quarterly Fired was judged to have too varied contents to meet the criteria for a good literary magazine. The institutional desire for purity, for upholding the law of genre, has continued to impose the hybrid publishing ventures of feminism on the margins.

In the case of La vie en rose, published by a group in Montréal, failure was an even greater surprise, though also paradoxically, a result of its strengths. Indeed, it had been heralded as an amazing feminist success, a magazine which published stimulating articles on a variety of feminist issues attracting both popular and academic support. Feminist scholars came from France to write essays on this phenomenon. But, as Martine d'Amours writes in investigating its demise, the editors recognized in retrospect that they had lived for seven years on "love and water," while neglecting the commercial aspects of publishing. While they had been rich in ideas, they had been poor in capital and had not carried out systematic subscription campaigns using the natural networks at their disposal, feminist and trade union networks. When the crunch came and they needed to raise the subscription list by 10,000 to assure a monthly print run of 28,000, the editors had only $15,000 to finance a campaign. To return to a black and white publication aimed at a smaller audience seemed too high a price to pay for the editors who had created the magazine of their dreams. To recognize for the audience that they have no doubt is there, would take initiative and energy, neither of which Francine Pelletier, a founding editor, has to spare. Women her age are hustling to earn a living or overwhelmed by the responsibility of small children.

Many are the words: A workforce is made up of women who are vulnerable to the financial instability and involvement in other divisions, not necessarily the editorial board. Organizations are calling for special committees to be appointed who are committed to making feminists manage their own organizations and handle a number of cases efficiently in the process.

Feminist Perspectives on the Canadian State

Perspectives féministes sur l'état canadien

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Many are also engaged in political action. The total commitment necessary to start a feminist magazine would have to come from a younger generation. La vie en rose was in fact the production of a generation of feminist activists who are now nearing 40.

While the conflicting codes of feminist ideology and the dominant publishing industry have occasioned practices which make feminist publications financially vulnerable, the impact of chronic underfinancing and the consequent constant scramble for money is greater given another divergent practice of feminist periodicals, namely that of the collective editorial board. Instead of a hierarchically organized body of experts hired to attend to specialized activities, feminist periodicals are run by collectives whose major commitment is to an ideological position. Consequently, they rarely have a business manager with financial expertise to handle a crisis when it arises. More significantly in the long run, the fact that members of these collectives are unsalaried. They offer their editorial work on a volunteer basis, reproducing the traditional characteristics of women's work as a "labour of love." From the early 19th century, the question of professionalism was raised with respect to women writers whose amateur status positioned them outside the dominant publishing industry increasingly engaged in the selling of commodities in the form of intellectual property. "Women artists are all amateurs," wrote John Stuart Mill, aligning women with the negative in the binary opposition amateur/professional which was important in the development of bourgeois ideology, professionalizing coinciding with the evolution of industrial capitalism to its corporate form.

Refined the professionalism which they acquired after much struggle as they now take their distance from the dominant institutions, contemporary feminist editors require rewards of other sorts in the tangible forms of feminist solidarity and the ability to communicate one's vision and influence feminist thought. All feminist collectives experience tensions brought on by the rapid development of feminist thought which has frequently taken feminists into divergent theoretical trajectories from similar starting points. The last six months have witnessed upheavals in the policy of Women's Press in Toronto with a consequent changing of the guard that has seen one group eliminated from the collective by another group, which has taken charge on an explicitly anti-masturb platform. Currently, much discussion in the feminist press is being addressed to the intertwined issues, in this case, the institutional racism of feminist groups which thus inadvertently reproduce the dominant order and the political processes of feminist collectives which need to find new mechanisms for arriving at decisions in a group where all members must concur in the majority decision or when consensus rules the decision-making process.
Quelque temps après la publication de l’article, un nouveau livre est paru avec le même titre. L’auteur, un écrivain canadien, explore les conséquences de l’industrialisation sur la société. Il souligne que l’accroissement de la production a entraîné une augmentation du stress et une diminution de la qualité de vie pour les travailleurs. Selon l’auteur, il est nécessaire de repenser notre système économique pour prendre en compte les besoins de la population et de l’environnement.

Le livre a été bien accueilli par la critique, qui l’a salué pour son approche novatrice et sa pertinence. Certains lecteurs, cependant, ont critiqué l’absence de solutions concrètes proposées par l’auteur. Malgré cela, le livre reste une contribution importante à la débat actuel sur l’industrialisation et ses conséquences. Il donne à réfléchir sur notre manière de vivre et de travailler, et incite à réfléchir sur d’autres modes de production qui pourraient être plus durables et respectueux de l’humanité et de la planète.
makes unnecessary an exhaustive survey of these periodicals in the present context. The range of Canadian feminist periodicals is great: from Maternal Health News published in Vancouver; Women and Environment and Women’s Education des femmes coming out of Toronto to Re-joumeler, a new bulletin of the association of women in St. Boniface, Manitoba and Opchinist, a newsletter appearing since 1973 to bring up to date information on feminist issues to the women of the Yukon. Formats vary from tabloid to academic journal. Two of the very influential early Quebec periodicals of the 1970s, Quelques écritures demente and Les titres de plié, eventually became books in re-edition published by Les Éditions Rameau Ménage (1982).

Aside from the literary field, which is the most developed in the feminist alternative press, the best feminist analysis of culture and the visual arts is to be found in general cultural magazines, especially in the Toronto-based Parallelogramme, Impulse and Faze. The latter has a number of feminists on the editorial collective. It regularly features articles on feminists active in popular music, video, films, the plastic arts and writing. Especially noteworthy is the regular column of Marlene Neubauer-Phipps who has been working out a feminist analysis of black women’s writing. In Quebec too, the most theoretically oriented feminist writing appears in La nouvelle honte du jour which has at least one feminist issue a year. Editors have included noted feminist writers Nicole Brossard, founding editor, Louise Cote-Noir and Louise Dupré, and currently, Lisa McMurray. Extended book reviews from a theoretically informed perspective are to be found in Spinale, a journal of postmodern culture, which was founded by feminists Nell Scott and France Therrien. Later the editorial collective was preceded by Suzanne Lamy and currently by Sherry Simon.

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NOTES
4. Martine d’Amours, "De quoi la vie en soy est" (Le Stema" (La Gazette des femmes X, no. 3 (septembre-octobre 1988), pp. 20-22. D’Amours was a member of the editorial collective of the magazine during its final year.

nner 1988) had an article on the Chinese women in the Montreal Chinese community. The table format with many pictures, numerous interviews, testimonies by writers and jaqron-free language, all reach out to a non-specialist readership. Its focus on culture, especially on literary questions, prevents it from stepping into the shoes of La vie en rose. Organized around a special theme, such as diaries (no. 6, summer 1988) or the Third International Feminist Bookfair (no. 7, fall 1988), the magazine includes contributions by such internationally well-known writers as Nicole Brossard, Dada Manénd, Margaret Duras and Marilyn French, and the little-known "new Canadian" women writers (all in No. 7). Nor is La parole métisse afraid of controversy. Its coverage of the international Book Fair included a statement under its " Tribune Libre" column from Donna Katz Rushkin on behalf of the black women attending the conference on ways to eliminate the concentration and racism in the structures of the book fair. Another from Madelaine Gagnon, entitled "Sauvons l’art érotique," protests against the exclusive dominance of the feminist scene and feminist literary structures in Quebec by the radical lesbian faction which advocates separation in what Gagnon calls a "battle between the sexes." Quartely. Subscriptions $15.00 from: SOPS, Centre de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine, No. 12, Montréal, H3W 1M5.

Research feminists. The newest feminist periodical is published under the direction of Huguette Dagenais by GREMF, the women’s research group at Laval University. It aims to be an interdisciplinary scholarly journal serving the international francophone community, an "intellectually lively and socially useful" periodical. Issues will be organized around a theme, in the first instance, education, with articles by historian Nadia Fabiny-Ed et, sociologist Isabelle Lavoie et, and by specialists in education from Quebec as well as from Europe. Book reviews are oriented to this theme. The issue also contains a bibliography of Canadian and Quebec publications on women and education since 1975. As well, there is a research report on a rural development project and a document, a text by celebrated 19th century Quebec journalist, François. The focus promises to be more empirical than theoretical. Twice yearly. Subscriptions $15.00 (individual), $50.00 (student), from: GREMF, Pavillon Charles De Konick, No. 2863, Université Laval, Cité Universitaire, Québec, G1K 7P4.