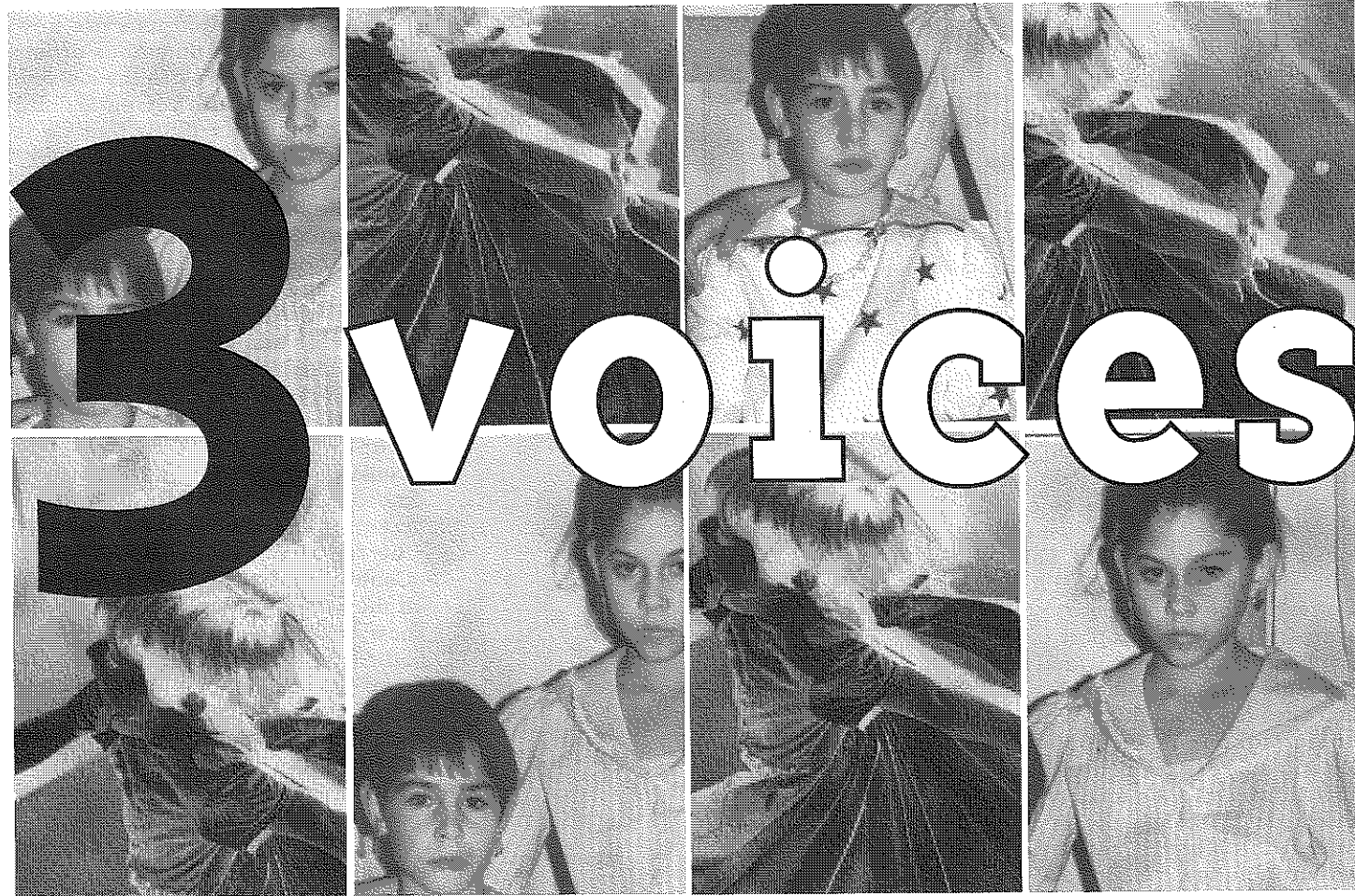


gender equity/gender treachery



sexed tetes collective

Mary Bryson
Suzanne de Castell
Celia Haig-Brown

I have a dream of an intellectual who destroys evidences and universalities, who locates and points out the inertias and constraints of the present, the weak points, the openings, the lines of stress, who constantly displaces himself [sic], not knowing exactly where he'll be or what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present;

who, in the places he passes through, contributes to the posing of the question of whether the revolution is worth the trouble, and which (I mean which revolution and which trouble), it being understood that only those who are prepared to risk their lives to reply can do so.

Michel Foucault

Introduction

We present here a rather unorthodox text in a rather unusual form. It's a collaborative attempt to wrestle with a set of very concrete challenges surrounding the conception, implementation, and our own involvement in institutional efforts to address what is widely termed 'gender equity.' It was not in total naivete that any of us began this work, yet none of us fully anticipated the kind and extent of the difficulties we would face. When one educational administration after another explicitly targets 'gender equity' as a 'major initiative,' we know at least this much: there is real danger here. We know there's no choice about dealing with this issue now, but for all the grand talk of 'pedagogies of possibility,' we know that the agenda is set elsewhere and that we—women, lesbians, feminists—are not the architects of its design. We are at best tacticians looking for 'transformative moments' in tiny fissures and crevices in a system which, hitherto predicated on the creation of gendered difference, now proclaims—incredibly—a commitment to its overthrow. Knowing, then, that while we cannot really act, and yet we cannot not act, we embrace the tactics of the weak with just one positive idea: our lesson from Virginia Woolf that 'gender equity' can't be allowed to mean just 'sex equity.' Nevertheless, that's most likely to be precisely the basis of the institutional strategies within which we set out to work.

here be dragons...

SC: How did we come to this, this social project of 'equalizing the genders'? What are the main historical lines, directions, sources of this project, these discourses which reform and regulate girls and women as subjects of public education? Usually, 'equity' is a term of concealment. In a progressive masquerade, it announces the right to be or to become like the idealized subject of 'human rights.' It reasserts traditional rules, roles and relations by announcing the right of non-dominant, marginalized persons to 'assume the position' of dominance, to hold the same jobs, go to the same places, have the same desires, and do the same things as the normatively-sanctioned bourgeois subject of human rights. These become, then, rights to pseudo-membership in the dominant group, rights to be like—but always impossibly so—those whose right it is to define the proper subjects of rights.

These are, of course, not rights as homosexuals, as indigenous people, as Asian, as poor, as women. Such rights might in truth be 'human' rights. The struggles of native people in Canada today, for example, seem to be principally for such human rights, accorded *despite* differences, and without the necessity to 'assume the position.' Conversely, struggles for gay rights are advancing only to the extent that the

state reconstitutes homosexuals as inevitably failing heterosexuals.

In education too, of course, it has always been the purpose of state systems to equip diverse student bodies with the 'habitus' universalized as normative. This compulsory submission of all children to extensive and intrusive state 'standards' is the process whereby the state constitutes the subjects to which it then accords rights, and then represents. This is what 'equity' in education has meant for minority students: the right to try, but inevitably to fail, to become white, male and middle class. And this is very much the kind of thing 'gender equity' means for girls and women.

As the New Right mobilizes around 'family values,' current gender equity work inscribes 'women's ways' as a new regime of truth in educational policy, entrenching even further the very tradition it pretends to reject—the gender version of a pre-civil rights 'separate but equal' policy justifying systemic discrimination.

MB: What gender equity means to me is equal opportunity to be who I am, not who I will *not* be, and can't even aspire to be. So long as we insist on working within 'gender' as a necessary or transparent categorical system, there can be no such thing as 'equity.' On the topic of 'gender' Judith Butler has written:

The presumption here is that the "being" of gender is an effect, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology. To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterposes the "real" and the "authentic" as oppositional....If the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiple contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing.

Gender Trouble

CHB: I was hired to develop and teach a course which a Ministry of Education Gender Equity Committee suggested to the universities. Through this work, I became interested in the euphemism, 'gender equity,' which seemed to include the possibility of allowing more space for feminism as praxis to expand its presence in established social institutions like schools and universities. It might serve as an alibi for feminism. As I worked, I pondered the duo: gender equity/feminist treachery.

Where does the traitor come in? A traitor to socialization or to some essential being lost in the process of socialization? A traitor to feminism? The notion of treachery appealed to me when the title was proposed: now, it has come to encompass some personal history, gender, and feminism and the praxis around all three. For me the treachery begins with amelioration, as we wait for the big change to an equitable society. Let me count the ways.

Through talk and education, we will find justice. Whose talk? Whose education? Whose justice? Can we be sure that this talk in which we engage at the university is not



simply a diversion, something to keep our busy little minds busier as the bosses and owners sleep peacefully and continue **their** lives of privilege? Can we, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, "unlearn **our** privilege as our loss" in a way that contributes to change for those who are being hurt?

Michel Foucault writes of "regimes of truth," or "...general politics of truth which each society adopts, a type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true." As we move into positions of declaring truth in the form of working papers on gender equity, outlines of courses called gender equity, delivering courses in gender equity, we accept the role of soothsayer and we prepare the discourse, our versions of truth. Whose interests are served? Who benefits? Can we keep the discourse open enough for the visions we'll never be able to conjure up?

We exploit our friends. We call them to be what Suzanne calls the performing parrots. "Step right up: a real live Lesbian. She walks and talks and you can ask her anything you want." We expose our friends to ignorance and abuse: "Black woman, First Nations woman, Woman of Asian origins, Lesbian. Come to my class and enlighten us." When is a token not a token? How many differences, how much diversity to really address this theoretical position called anti-essentialism? How many lives? How much pain?

As the teachers, we agree to take on an impossible task. The limits of time: one nine-day course to challenge essentialism with nineteen people. Some of them have never considered gender issues; a few are committed essentialists. The latter have barely considered that their experiences could be other than universal, and that their interpretations and political directions are not the only appropriate responses to situations of inequity. In nine days, we will change all this.

"True Stories" about Academic Feminism/s

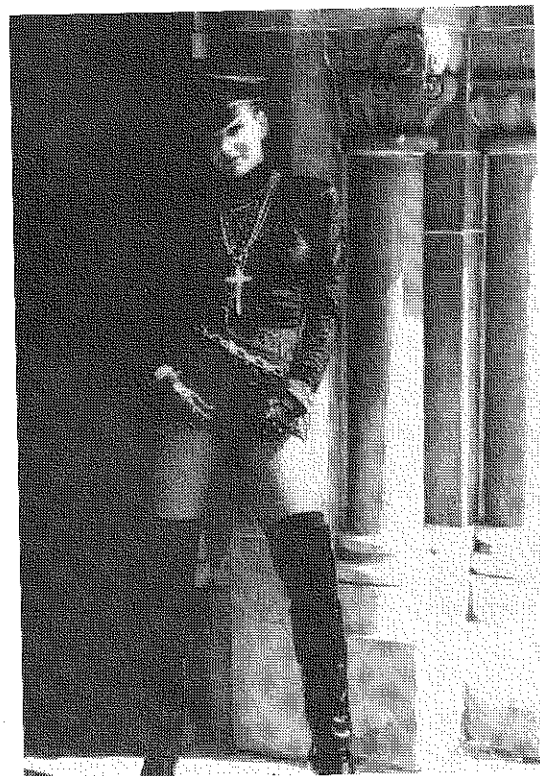
SC: Imagine This Scenario:

I should have known when I first walked in and saw those bowls of mini-lifesavers around the table that I was in trouble.

The first meeting began, as I knew it would, taking for granted that least clear, most contested, most fragmented conception: gender. The mood was to be one of purposeful, optimistic consensus. We all, it seemed, knew who 'we' were, and why we were here: we had a job to do, and an unprecedented opportunity to do it. We were here to advance, together, a hitherto neglected human rights agenda, the agenda of 'women.' We were here to ensure the provision of equal rights—and our job was to work on the ways this mission would be carried out.

I put it this way, because our job was assuredly not to discover or to invent the ways in which this was to be carried out, as this had already been done for us. Accordingly, our first agenda item was to approve the Ministry of Education's implementation plans for the next four years, from 1990 to 1994. The first year had already, if inconveniently, taken place. Undeterred, we were advised this meant we could proceed at a faster rate to 1991—a kind of bonus right at the beginning of the game.

We began, predictably enough, with instructions to

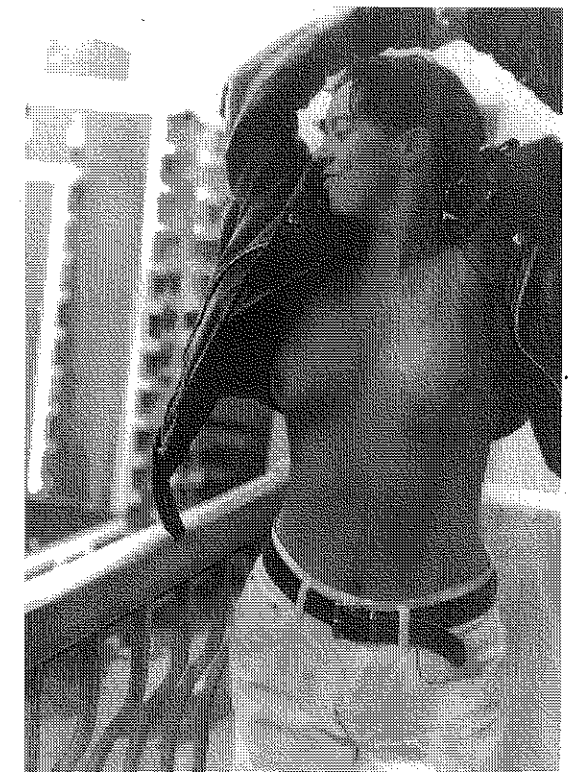


identify ourselves and to share with the group information about the gender equity initiatives presently underway at our respective institutions. This tactic served, of course, to cement the taken-for-grantedness about what gender equity meant. This rhetorical short-circuiting of the main argument, which was dutifully carried out by each one of us, nonetheless failed to effect a total ban on discussion. Because if I knew nothing else, and at that point I really did know very little else, it was that 'gender' and indeed even 'equity' were not unproblematic terms. I didn't know who 'we' were; that is to say, it was already all too apparent that I was not part of the we who were there, in skirts, in jewellery, in salon-styled hair, in wedding rings, in nail-polish, in smiling, lipsticked lips. Nor was I part of 'we men,' who joined the first meeting: one young, in jacket, collar and tie, boredom you could taste, resentment you could feel on your skin; the one who was told to be there, who never came back. Then there was the older one, the jovial human-rights-in-the-school administrative activist, enjoining us all to work for the advancement of 'both genders,' berating his absent, unsympathetic colleagues for their failure to see how gender equity was so necessary for us all, how it was so necessary for men, oppressed by sex-role stereotyping, their wives' careers impeded by the glass ceiling, their sons' emotional development obstructed by the burden of expectations of their manliness, who were not allowed to cry (the pinnacle of women's achievement in the affective domain). I wasn't part of we women, nor part of we men—I was instead—and this was the primary source of trouble for 'us' from that day on, one of the hitherto unthinkable 'differently gendered.'

MB: Imagine This Scenario:

It is "Women's Ways of Knowing Day" and I am intensely uncomfortable as I walk across campus to attend a session advertised as an "Informal Dialogue for students and faculty interested in feminism and epistemology—an opportunity to discuss the complex issues involved in feminist research" with two of its shining stars, Mary Belenky and Blythe Clinchy (see *Women's Ways of Knowing*, by Belenky, Clinchy, Tarule, & Goldberger, 1986). I feel nervous just contemplating what lies ahead. 'As a lesbian,' attending academic events advertised as 'feminist,' is inevitably to disrupt the 'always already' of compulsory heterosexuality that circulates through these gatherings. Invariably, 'speaking as a lesbian,' I am the 'outsider'—firmly entrenched in a marginal essentialized identity that, ironically, I have to participate in creating by naming my difference—sort of like having to dig one's own ontological grave.

Predictably, the speakers use the royal 'we' in talking authoritatively about women, and 'our ways,' though the actual sample of women about which they speak is almost exclusively identified as heterosexual and white. Periodically during this fireside chat, the speakers talk about the fun they had leaving husbands and children behind to constitute a regular series of women's ways pyjama parties where the researchers 'let down their hair' and collaborated in the production of a differently gendered epistemological framework, eventually to be described in the best selling book entitled *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Parodying one of my favorite postmodern identities, whom I sometimes refer to as "PoMo the Super HoMo On the



Photos: Heather Cameron,
Gender Treachery,
a photographic exhibition
exploring the edges,
A Space, Toronto,
April 1993.



Heather Cameron,
Gender Treachery, a photographic exhibition exploring the edges,
 A Space, Toronto, April 1993.

Go," I break into the cozy and convivial atmosphere and talk about how odd it is to find myself "not a woman," or "a woman by any other name" in their analyses. I describe my anger in reading the *Women's Ways* book which, intertextually, locates on the page descriptions of their research methods and findings between quotations by lesbian writers such as Audre Lorde or Adrienne Rich without ever naming the presence of those voices as 'lesbian,' and, simultaneously, without ever naming their own voices as discursively constructed through white heterosexual privilege. An uncomfortable silence hangs perceptibly in the room.

Lesbianism: "A difference that dares to speak its name"?- Not if you want tenure!

In the opening scenes of Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are being systematically hunted down and incarcerated for a variety of 'crimes against the state.' One woman identifies her particular crime as 'gender treachery,' used here as a code word for lesbianism. It is not surprising to see the representation of lesbianism as a form of deviancy that will not be tolerated under an explicitly repressive regime.

But how might it come to pass that for me to 'speak as a lesbian' within the purportedly liberatory context of women's studies programs or academic feminism would, likewise, be consistently interpreted as an undesirable form of disruption, or as a form of 'treachery to my sisters' that undermines the otherwise cohesive bond among feminists, ostensibly committed to the betterment of all women?

SC: It is the institutionally-sanctioned 'REAL' woman, the Good Housekeeping woman, necessarily white, heterosexual, and middle class, that gender equity seeks to affirm. Not women of colour, lesbians, or poor women. Hence institutions in this period of the rise of the New Right now gain popular approval and assuage liberal tensions by condoning 'approved' understandings of women's culture, or women's 'ways' and have relegated to the sidelines feminist culture, feminist 'ways.' Still, how to trust academic feminism any more, to believe in it... Because there's another treachery concealed at the heart of

academic feminist's bond with 'women.' To be a feminist is to be on the side of women. But women's culture isn't always feminist culture, and we know that in real life feminists and women are often in bitter conflict. In the end feminists always have to take the side of 'REAL' women—it's a rhetorical tendency the feminist project has of slip-sliding away. I want to say, dangerously, "queers against women." as a way of naming my own agenda—"Queers against academic feminism" for the way it seduces and betrays us, blindfolds us with our own good feminist intentions, and leads us back, unseeing, uncomprehending, into the culture of 'women.'

CHB: My first encounter with the new gender equity course was hallway gossip. One of the powers that be had asked what the academic content of such a course could possibly be, the implication being that there was none. I suggested he could visit my office and I would show him my books. The next thing I knew someone was asking me to teach the course. The feminist treachery began with the course approval process. I was assuming a strong relationship between feminism and gender equity. On March 5, 1991, I received a phone call to let me know that the course outline submitted for approval had been turned down. As I noted in my journal, there were concerns expressed that the course emphasized feminism and that such a course should focus on 'respect for persons' as opposed to women alone. I was speechless. All I could think was that I had never agreed to teach a course about respecting men. They already have respect, positions of power. I do bring in race and class which suggests the need to consider some men, but the focus to me should be on girls and women.

The head of the committee told me that I needed to make the course look more attractive to men. (A friend assuming heterosexuality suggested that I put a woman in a low-cut dress on the cover.) Second I was to take out the word 'gendered' which was a 'feminist' term. Feminism is political; the course should focus on moral issues like justice and respect for persons. "I see," I said. "If I teach a course in justice for persons, that's assuming a

moral stance, but if I teach a course that focuses on injustice to women, that's taking a political position." Finally, I should add "affective learning outcomes" to ensure that the course did not 'look' like a course in indoctrination.

The course outline, eventually accepted, was an effort to meet the needs of the course approval committee without losing sight of the important issues to be addressed in any serious consideration of gender equity. Nineteen students attended the nine-day summer institute. They read, listened to a variety of resource people, and participated in class discussions and presentations as well as keeping journals and preparing a final paper based on their presentations. Topics addressed included conceptualizing gender and equity; language and gender; women and history; women, girls, First Nations people and science; women and the law; teachers as researchers. Student presentations included gender and math, children's literature, technology education, physical education, and feminist pedagogy.

It was a 'good' course, well received and challenging. Most significantly the teachers appeared keen on channelling their anger around sexism, increasingly revealed for some, into thoughtful classroom and personal action. A mother commented that she was going to change her parenting. She had been encouraging her daughter to conform to society's stereotypes of women. "I've just been preparing her to throw her to the wolves," she said.

MB: Thrown to the wolves? Being a lesbian in academia means being 'thrown to the wolves' on a daily basis. Probably the most disheartening and disturbing aspect of my work in academia is the series of double binds within which anyone whose identity is constructed in the contradictory dynamics of difference is profoundly implicated.

In my case, there is the double bind I face as a 'lesbian/lecturer'—a position which Suzanne and I have described as an 'untenable discursive posture.' As a lesbian I am profoundly committed both to the production of difference and the support for difference, yet to 'speak as a lesbian' I



assume an identity which automatically situates me as an outsider whose very marginality invalidates my right to address central issues and silences my voice. How can I talk about issues that may be specifically of concern to lesbians without claiming the authoritative voice of experience—without claiming the unique capacity to speak as a lesbian. My capacity to speak is entirely a set of effects of contradictory and overlapping discursive positions—my white skin privilege, my middle class roots, my dyke world, my able-body-ness and so on....

As a lesbian,' for example, I was asked to review the proposal for a new Women's Studies degree-granting program. Although bibliographies for new courses included many lesbian writers, there was no explicit textual reference to lesbian 'subjects' either embodied or otherwise. When asked for my opinion of the proposal, predictably enacting my role as institutionalized lesbian, I discussed the absence of any lesbian content and suggested that it seemed ironic that much of the feminist 'canon' had been contributed by lesbian feminists and yet our actual embodied existence as lesbian subjects seemed nowhere in sight. Conventionally, this problem is usually described as one of 'lesbian invisibility'—yet this seems to misconstrue reality in an important fashion. Namely, that while lesbians are entirely visible and vocal it is the authority conferred by heterosexist myopia which rules our representations out of court. Striking while the iron was hot I proposed that Women's Studies fund a "Dyke Theories in the Post-Feminist Academy" lecture series that Suzanne and I had talked about putting together. Our lecture series turned into a 'lezzy studies' course, which we co-taught in 1991.

In the classroom, we quickly found, however, that only the students who identified as 'queers' (that is, as women who were committed to what we refer to here as gender 'treachery,' or in the students' terms, 'gender fucking') could effectively engage in the work that we had prescribed for our course. That is, the other students came to visit us, as instructors, during office hours in order to talk about their difficulties participating effectively in

class, but didn't voice their frustrations during class time. Most white students who unproblematically identified as heterosexual, for example, made lifeless presentations about lesbians that bore painful testimony to their inability to imagine an encounter between two lesbians. In their journals, non-lesbians typically made no attempt to make use of discussions of identity to reflect on the constructedness of their own identities, but chose, rather, to consume or to reject the material on the basis of critical rationality. Lesbians and lesbianism, in this form, became commodified texts or artifacts to be recklessly appropriated in a context with no ethic of consumption. Students with no direct experience of homophobia asked questions or made requests to the class that betrayed their privilege and that failed to meet the needs of lesbians in the class in relation to issues of safety or rights to privacy.

SC: The Ministry of Education hadn't seen the meaning of gender equity as much of a 'poser' at all. The minutes show that the job of the advisory committee was to 'adopt guidelines.' The chair's main task was to provide 'status reports' and to 'make statements.' Some members of the committee brought in papers and information for circulation, but no time was made available to discuss anything which was brought to the committee, unless it directly expedited the (entirely vacuous) 'implementation plans.' Members requested access to the briefs on gender equity which had been submitted to the ministry during the extensive process of public consultation which had purportedly been the basis for these initiatives, but were advised that they had been inaccessibly filed away. For those who had invested their labours in this democratic process of consultation, it would have been instructive to see the ease with which their work was dismissed as entirely dispensable to policy formation.

Whenever we took time away from the work of making statements and approving guidelines, it was made clear that we were to resume work as quickly as possible. Repeatedly, we were advised that budgeting deadlines made it impossible to alter min-

istry plans. For nearly every issue the advisory committee was 'consulted on,' there was no change made to what the ministry had already determined.

Time, we were constantly reminded, was at a premium, and at the beginning of two of the five whole days devoted to achieving gender equity in the province's public schools, we were promised that if we could get through the day's agenda quickly, we could go home two hours early. So it seemed almost impolite to ask, "What do these documents mean by 'gender equity'?"

This critical omission, and the ambiguity it enabled, was a strategic move which functioned to expedite a process of legitimating a (pre-ordained) policy that had the surface features of a progressive reform, but a policy which was in fact empty, devoid of meaning. It functioned as a placeholder—an unwritten, but yet paradoxically a regulative, fiction.

An operational definition was shuffled past us, de facto, but this was covertly achieved—and it was the only thing we concertedly opposed. Distributed to all members of the advisory committee along with the first meeting's agenda was a report commissioned by the Ministry of Education on "Gender Distribution in the British Columbia Education System: A Status Report," by a firm of management consultants. This commissioned report renamed 'sex' as 'gender,' and construed 'gender equity' as 'balanced distribution' of 'both genders' across a range of targeted roles, statuses and occupations. Accompanying that report was a memo to the effect that this document was provided to assist us in the formulation of our 'baseline goals.' The memo made it quite clear to us where we, the 'advisory' group on gender equity, were to be headed.

I thought it would be possible to subvert this process by creating a counter-document: a text which could materially stand in policy to define and demarcate what could and what could not be included within a 'gender equity initiative.' Collaborative writing, always a series of compromises, produced this:

Understanding Gender Equity

Gender equity is concerned with the promotion of personal, social, cultural, political and economic equality for all who participate in the education system of B.C. The term 'gender equity' emerged out of a growing recognition in society of pervasive gender inequities. Continuing traditions of stereotypical conceptions and discriminatory practices have resulted in the systemic devaluation of attitudes, activities and abilities attributed to and associated with girls and women.

The negative consequences of stereotypical conceptions and discriminatory practices adversely affect males as well as females. However, in the short term, greater emphasis in gender equity initiatives will be placed on improving conditions and attitudes as they affect girls and women. In the long term, these initiatives will also improve the situation for boys and men.

Gender equity, as distinct from 'sex equity,' is not attainable solely by a quantitative balancing of females and males in all aspects of the existing system. It must entail, also, a qualitative reworking of gender assumptions within all aspects of the present system itself, both formal and informal. Concretely, this means promoting gender equity in respect of (1) curriculum, instruction and assessment (2) social interaction within the school setting (3) institutional conditions and structures, and (4) the socio-cultural context of public education.

The treachery here involves one's complicity in the construction of a 'regime of truth'; a regulative fiction crafted in the name of emancipation, all the while knowing that such a regime, whatever liberatory illusions it may create, will operate repressively as a technology of standardization and normalization.

For Whom Do the Belles Toil?

CHB: As I work, I must focus on the (im)possibility of gender equity. Gender equity involves negotiation with the oppressor, and is yet another example of sleeping with the enemy, women or men. It begins with a denial of feminism. We keep the people in the Ministry of Education and ourselves well fed. I've replaced Suzanne on the

Gender Equity Committee. At my first meeting, I was greeted with the fat report entitled "Gender Equity: Distribution of Males and Females in the British Columbia School System, 1991" and a list of criteria for evaluating gender equity learning resources. There are grants available for local gender initiatives. A person describes a meeting she attended in which she was 'the only skirt in the room.' I present a report on the gender equity course. We spend the second day 'reacting' to the drafted Review Framework for gender equity program initiatives. "Take out the reference to feminist research," the ministry person advises, "It would be like a red flag to a bull." Gender equity can reduce feminist projects to the number games of liberal equality and Spivak's table-manner feminism. It is a retrogressive move in that it forces us first to critique gender equity before we can move on to the real work in feminism.

MB: For this lesbian involved with institutional Women's Studies, there's no place called home. There is, likewise, no home in many of the texts of academic feminism. In my work in a Faculty of Education, I cannot speak 'as a lesbian'—and yet I cannot say a word that isn't inflected, at some (usually awkward) point, by my lesbian voice, just as my white skin privilege constitutes a voice that makes counter-hegemonic practices simultaneously non-optional, suspect and contradictory. As Elizabeth Meese wrote:

The lesbian subject is not all I am and it is in all I am. A shadow of who I am attests to my being there, I am never with/out this lesbian.

SC: When the Ministry of Education calls and asks for help with any emancipatory project, hang up immediately. You may want to call them back, but only after having thought about what it is that this particular question excludes, denies, conceals, precludes. Gender equity functions as a conceptual roadblock, obstructing any progress in extending fair treatment to girls and women, as well as all the 'differently gendered.' It enacts the violence of a false universalization of a privileged identity on all who are contained within that fundamentally meaningless term, 'gender.' In its abstracted generality, it

leaves all of the problems which it purports to encompass wholly untouched, and in place of emancipation, it achieves a tightening of the reins of conformity in the name of progressive reform. In whose interests is 'gender equity'? To the extent that it succeeds, to that extent does it enhance the privilege of the already privileged. And for female 'career academics' it is at the present time, like academic feminism in general, the most direct route to professional advancement—particularly if what one seeks is a career in administration—for women willing to take on its agendas.

Whose carrot/
Whose stick?
Or, "Why should the
fates of the groovy
and the creepy be
intertwined?"

(Solonas,
1968)

In this article, we have described our involvement as faculty members in Education with/in a range of ostensibly liberatory activities and institutional relations. From our very different subject-positions in relation to this work, different kinds of praxis have entangled each one of us with/in a familiar tension; a profound dis-ease that hangs in the balance created by the apparent irreconcilability of socially transformative goals and painful institutional realities. These have been words that speak more of pain than of pleasure—that attest as much to the damages wrought in the name of social transformation, as to the benefits.

Through the telling of these 'reflexive tales' of our respective



engagements, disenchantments, and complicities with institutionally-sanctioned ameliorative projects we have broken a powerful pact of censorship that forbids participants to say anything about these kinds of activities other than that which falls within the resolutely positive 'language of solutions.'

You could even say that, as is often the case for oppositionally-positioned marginals, we have taken a familiar pleasure in telling tales out of school. These are stories significantly at odds with conventional narratives and received wisdom about commitments to implementing progressive policies for the advancement of social change loudly proclaimed on our respective campuses. Audre Lorde's oft-cited words continue to be suggestive of an avenue for generative inquiry:

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house... Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns.

Chandra Mohanty, writing about the "commodification of diversity," argues that, on university campuses in this period of right-wing backlash, the production of discourses of multiculturalism and so-called equity policies function both to depoliticize, and hence to 'manage,' difference. As Mohanty observes, "The central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged." It is instructive in this regard to see how difference is treated in 'equity' initiatives, as something to be alternately represented by 'authentic members' (the walking, talking lesbian who, it turns out, is 'just like us') and re-constructed as commonality ('our common humanity') to which students in such diversity-management classes learn they must

become 'more sensitive' so 'we' can learn to 'work together.' (But for what! And for whom?). Would we then continue in this work, whose origins, we do well to remember, are in the defensive political strategies of institutions attempting to cordon off and contain social movements which became, in recent history, so powerful that they threatened to disrupt 'business as usual'? To participate in this work

is all too often to undertake a job of management, not scholarship, or pedagogy. This work of management resembles in name alone the social movements in whose name it purports to work. And that is treachery in/deed.

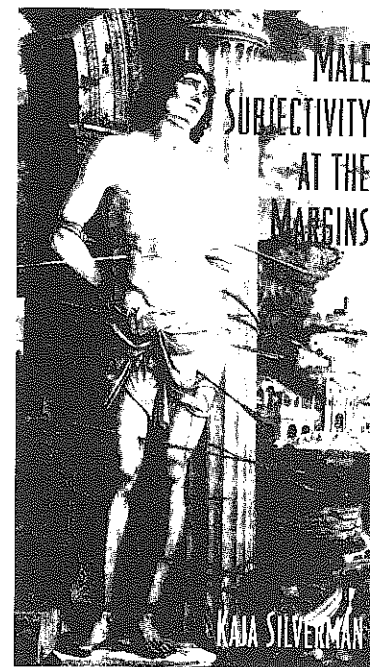
In trying to work seriously on 'equity issues' it is critical to understand how institutional responses to, and production of, 'difference' function in the context of university communities so as to entrap minorities into doing work that, paradoxically, engenders further oppression rather than producing equitable social change.

Perrot: And there's no point for the prisoners in taking over the central tower?

Foucault: Oh yes, provided that isn't the final purpose of the operation. Do you think it would be much better to have the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?

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Father, Don't You See I'm Burning (You)?

BY Jim Ellis

Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

In spite of the vast intellectual and political gaps that separate them, Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* and Robert Bly's enormously popular *Iron John* do engage the same issue: contemporary crises in masculinity. As with any crisis, of course, where you stand determines how you feel about it. Bly is attempting, through the invention of a new mythology centered on the hairy beast in every man, to reinvigorate the penis/phallus equation, while Silverman is intent on dismantling the murderous and repressive structure that that equation supports. While Silverman's book will never achieve the popularity of Bly's, it will certainly prove important for work in the areas of film studies, psychoanalysis, feminism and queer theory (rather than gay studies, towards which Silverman pays some lip service but remains a little hostile, associating it with biographical criticism). *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* constitutes an

analysis of what Silverman calls nonphallic masculinities in the work of, among others, R. W. Fassbinder, Henry James, T. E. Lawrence and Marcel Proust. On the way, the text provides often brilliant and always useful rereadings of such concepts as Althusser's theory of interpellation and ideology, Lacan's discussion of the gaze and its relation to female spectatorship, and Freud's analysis of "feminine" masochism.

Silverman's target is the group Bly feels has recently been victimized - white, middle class, heterosexual males. Her preferred method of attack is an undermining of their props. The basic premises of the book are Lacanian: that identity is external in origin, and that the basic condition for cultural subjectivity is lack. Her strategy is frequently to locate in male subjects those characteristics which are typically designated feminine, such as soliciting the gaze, acknowledging lack or castration, or assuming a passive or receptive role. In so doing she attempts to disrupt and denaturalize the categories of masculine and feminine, and indeed, homosexual and heterosexual.

Perhaps the most powerful chapter in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* is Silverman's rereading of Lacan through the films of Fassbinder, in which she rigorously distinguishes between gaze and look. Whereas the gaze, like the phallus, is something to which no subject can lay claim, the look of an individual subject remains within the realm of desire, and often functions as a signifier of lack. Feminist film criticism since Laura Mulvey has often argued that women in film typically function as the object of the male gaze, and that women must work to turn the gaze around. Silverman argues instead that we are all always simultaneously subject and object of desire, and that the real problem with the dominant cinema is that "male desire is so consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control" (144-5). Just as the penis is continually conflated with the phallus, to support the belief in the male subject as "whole," so too is the male look, a signifier of lack, often conflated with the gaze. "We have at times assumed" writes Silverman "that dominant cinema's scopic regime could be overturned by 'giving' woman the gaze, rather than by exposing the impossibility of anyone ever owning that

visual agency, or of him or herself escaping specularly." This, for Silverman, is precisely what Fassbinder's films demonstrate over and over: "The insistent specularization of the male subject in Fassbinder's cinema functions not only to desubstantialize him, but to prevent any possibility of mistaking his penis for the phallus, a dislocation which is at the centre of Fassbinder's 'aesthetics of pessimism.'" In films such as *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* and *Gods of the Plague* the male characters are inevitably caught in the same structures of seeing and being seen as the female characters. We are all always subjected to the gaze: like castration, it is a basic condition of subjectivity, a condition which is not strictly limited to women. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, in the films of Fassbinder to be is to be seen.

Much of the second half of *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* deals with what are normally designated as perversions. Silverman devotes three chapters to various forms of masochism and a fourth to male homosexuality. The significance of these sexualities goes beyond the purely sexual (and indeed, Silverman argues that nothing is purely sexual), in that perversion "turns aside not only from hierarchy and genital sexuality but from the paternal signifier, the ultimate 'truth' or 'right.'" Writers such as Jean Laplanche (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*) and Leo Bersani (*The Freudian Body*) have taken care to separate sadism from masochism, insisting that they are neither reversible nor complementary. Freud noted that sadism was completely compatible with heterosexuality (and hinted that sadism was in fact a usual component of it). Masochism, on the other hand, when it occurs in men, disrupts the economy of heterosexuality, often by foreclosing on the position of the father. (In Gilles Deleuze's account of masochism, derived from the novels of Sacher-Masoch rather than the writings of Freud, what is being beaten in the masochistic fantasy is precisely the father. Masochism is a contract entered into by the subject and the pre-Oedipal mother, who attempt to bring a new subject into being without the intervention of the father. Although certain elements of Silverman's and Deleuze's