

Feminism—Art—Politics. What is their connection? In theory? In reality?

Once there was a women's art center that was very excited about an "Art as Work" seminar I proposed. They wanted a short personal resumé to follow the course description in the catalogue—to let students know who I was, where I was coming from: Harmony Hammond is a lesbian feminist artist who has exhibited at Gallery X and Gallery Z and taught at R. University and C. University. They wanted my labels and then did not like them. No seminar. Really, I was coming on too strong. Couldn't I use a different word? Or just not say it at all? Would I be teaching art or politics? They were an "Art" center. They were afraid, they said, afraid I would jeopardize. . . .

Jeopardize what? Their art? Their teaching? Their students? Their bodies? Their minds? Their sexuality? Their politics? Their power? Their authority? Their thinking? They did not know . . . they were just afraid.

I did not fit their concept of a feminist and therefore I was dangerous.

Labels. The meaninglessness of labels. The power of labels. The confining. What does it mean to be a lesbian, radical feminist, activist, mother, artist? I am all of these individually and combined. It means I am political. It means I want to change existing power relationships. A list of experiences. The power of labels is the power of ideas and action combined.

The political mother, the political artist, the political feminist, and the political lesbian refuse to be second-class. They take action by "doing." They refuse to be isolated into separatist stances, and they become a total whole. They add up to what Charlotte Bunch has called a "non-aligned feminism"—not automatically attached to one line of feminism (socialist/left vs. reformist vs. cultural/spiritual) but rather evaluating each individual issue and situation from an independent feminist perspective.

Lesbian. Radical feminist. Activist. Mother. Artist.

The common denominator is woman. Women are oppressed as a class. This oppression underlies the patriarchal institutions of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and heterosexism. To end all forms of oppression we must first end the oppression of all women regardless of sexuality or economic class, racial or cultural background.

Lesbian. Radical feminist. Activist. Mother. Artist.

Together they form my feminism. Feminism is my politics. My art both is formed by and is a statement of my feminism. H.H.

While I'd always worked in social programs, I never considered myself a political person. Political groups so often revealed confused priorities that I inevitably ended up by questioning my own. But feminism was different—so much was personally at stake. If I questioned my commitment (how can I be amused by this or not outraged by that), I soon found I was not amused and I was outraged by things I might once have considered innocuous or simply unalterable. Feminism had become a persistent way of living and thinking and the most important awareness of my life.

Today I trust the impulses calling out for radical change because they're rooted in a lifetime of self-analysis continuously and consistently validated by other women. Frustration, it seems, is being resolved in conviction and action and the awareness of this power has been startling to me. Needless to say, art which strengthens that awareness is exhilarating.

I am a medievalist. I was attracted to the field by the escapist fantasies of folklore and romance. But I now feel that all art—whether ancient or modern—can be seen and judged within a feminist context. A.L.

From the First-Issue Collective

The editorial collective of this first issue of *Heresies* shares not a political line but a commitment to the development of coherent feminist theory in the context of practical work. The time for reformulating old positions or merely attacking sexism is past. Now we must take on the most problematic aspects of feminist theory, esthetic theory and political theory. We are not only analyzing our own oppression in order to put an end to it, but also exploring concrete ways of transforming society into one that is socially just and culturally free.

The role of the arts and the artist in the political process is our specific arena. By confronting the very real differences in our own attitudes towards art and politics, which reflect those in the wider feminist community, we have uncovered networks connecting a broad range of forms and ideologies. As material for the first issue came in to us, we found that no hard line could be drawn between texts and visual material. There are, therefore, few "illustrations" here, but independent statements expressed visually, verbally, or in combination, sharing

When pressed by the people who ask "What do you do?" at times I call myself an artist and then no one knows what to expect. The term is so vague and useless that it does not begin to identify a point of view. The fact that art work keeps the bourgeoisie in style, and the bourgeoisie keeps all the art, suggests that most artists don't bother with politics and ideology, instead they are united by a lifestyle: generally you must privatize your work, hang your head to the left late at night in the bars, and think deeply about how your work will be understood in the melancholic future; be concerned about your isolation from the community.

It is difficult not to become a cynic. Opportunism knocks. Even the women's movement is another stepping stone towards critical recognition. Most people are more concerned with the objects we are producing than the world into which we place our work. I make abstract paintings and super-8 films—but not for a living. I work as an editor for a left news magazine called *Seven Days*. This is where I learned the business of developing an audience and disseminating information. *Heresies* is an attempt to politicize the art world; a chance to attack the history of our work as opposed to "documenting" it.

I have been a feminist it seems ever since I noticed I was living with great difficulty; it came out during the 1960s—but that's a long story. In the 1970s, feminism has tendencies which serve merely to push liberal institutions to their farthest extremes. This has left many women caught in a dubious struggle; a recognition of strength and an inability to act. The feminist movement should not work towards gaining economic power, but towards developing a coherent ideology if we are to participate in change and work towards socialism. (You knew I'd say that.) The point is that an understanding of feminism without an analysis of class is like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

Capitalism is so efficient that it can sustain its own alternatives; likewise the art world—one more radical magazine. E.H.

the same power and the same intent, and indicating that word and image can be equal ingredients in politically effective art.

We found no solutions to the issues raised, but we are finding approaches that feel fresher and more satisfying. Working together toward collective decisions was entirely different from working alone or as part of conventional hierarchies. Each of us worked on every page of this magazine, a slow and frustrating process, but one from which we learned a great deal: about each other, about editorial and mechanical skills, about the collective process itself, about our subject—feminism, art and politics,—and about what it means to be political in a real, active, living situation. We mean to go on from these beginnings and we look to the larger feminist community for participation, response and criticism. Together we can work toward some answers. We have nothing to lose but our illusions.

Joan Braderman, Harmony Hammond,
Elizabeth Hess, Arlene Ladden, Lucy
Lippard, May Stevens.

I am a feminist first and a socialist second, rather than a Socialist-Feminist. Not because I don't care about what happens to the oppressed men in the world. Not because I'm against an ideally democratic socialism. But because women's oppression crosses economic-class lines. It's a matter of focus. Clearly the needs of welfare-class women are most urgent and those of upper-class women are least urgent. Some socialists say that getting rid of patriarchy won't change the world. I wonder. Even in revolutionary socialist movements women must maintain an autonomous base. Revolution for Everyman isn't the same as real social change; it has taken place in the past without solving the "woman question."

In the meantime, living in a capitalist country without a strong Socialist Party provokes an irresistible urge to kill time as a liberal feminist. Even though I'm aware of the dangers of opportunism, reformism, co-optation, and all the slimy horde, I often find myself working for reform rather than revolution because I can't bear to see *nothing* done.

Within the art world, this means I work to get women artists into a system I oppose. Outside, in the real world, this means I want the ERA passed because it's going to make a difference in women's lives. I want to see a politically aware feminist culture and I hope that *Heresies* will help create it and help destroy some of the boundaries that separate women from the power to make a better society that will fit our needs as well as men's.

(P.S. Because I'm a critic, I've been called a "class enemy" of artists, which is bullshit. I'm exploited by publishers, and perhaps editors, just as artists are exploited by galleries, and perhaps critics. I identify with artists whether or not they identify with me because long experience has shown me that our lives are more or less the same.)

L.R.L.

When we decided that each of us in the first issue collective should write an individual statement to put our political differences "out front," I thought it was a fine idea. But trying to write one page about my notion of how feminism relates to Marxism relates to making theory and making films was easier said than done: too much to argue in too little space. So what I wanted to do was write, "please see my article on page x" where I've tried to work out some of these problems in more analytical depth. But my sister-editors said, "write something personal." They chided me for my rhetorical style and my obsessive? academic? commitment to making "complete" arguments. "Who are you in all that," they asked. O.K. I'm a woman, I'm white, I'm 28. I'm a film teacher, I'm a student, I'm a writer, theorist, critic, filmmaker. I do political work—in the feminist community and with a new Coalition (July 4th) that's building toward a mass, progressive peoples' movement in this country. I guess I'm what's come to be called a cultural worker.

Often it seems there's just not enough time in each day to do all the things that have to be done. And to earn a living, and write a dissertation, and see the art I care about, and do the laundry, and talk with students, and be with the friends I love, and see the ocean sometimes. Putting it all together, I'd often like a few clones of myself to help out. I juggle what's possible with what's not.

Where does the fight for women fit with fighting imperialism? Does working in collectives really help change our deeply entrenched American individualism? How can "cultural workers" best advance these struggles? I often argue esthetics with my political comrades. Films, I say, don't have to be simplistic to communicate with mass audiences. We're all subject to subtle propaganda from Hollywood and Madison Avenue. We're all jugglers of contradictions and need to see and hear and read about alternatives to what is. We have to make films that not only say something different but say it *in a different* way. They have to be made in a practical political context, in a coherent theoretical context, and they have to be able to recapture the imaginations of masses of people being lulled to sleep by the crap that's sold as "mass art." We have to find strategies for making our alternate points of view visible, making peoples' voices heard, our ideas and films seen; find ways of fighting the commercial monopolies that own the air waves, the movie screens, the mass media, that own us.

I argue politics with my feminist sisters. No more separatism, I say. I work on HERESIES to say that and also because—another contradiction—I need community in a country that is in fragments. In short, and as labor people like my grandparents always said: women, artists, men, people; we've got to get organized.

J.B.

What kind of socialist-feminist-artist am I?

What kind of socialist artist loves Corot as well as Courbet and forgives oil painting its bourgeois origins and abstract expressionism its heraldry of U.S. imperialism?

What kind of feminist artist sees pink as a private color to be sparingly used?

To the women's movement I would like to bring, as to art, the subtlest perceptions. To political action, I would like to bring, as to art, a precise and delicate imagination.

The personal is the political only if you make it so. The connections have to be drawn. Feminism without socialism can create only utopian pockets. And the lifespan of a collective is approximately two years.

Socialism without feminism is still patriarchy. But more smug. Try to imagine a classless society run by men.

Trying to be part of a collective is a little like being a chameleon set on plaid. I may split apart before I get the pattern right. But somehow it seems worth the pain because I believe community is the highest goal.

I believe every woman's life is a little better because of what we are doing.

M.S.