

Issue 15 Editorial Collective: Vivian E. Browne, Cynthia Carr, Michele Godwin, Hattie Gossett, Carole Gregory, Sue Heinemann, Lucy R. Lippard, May Stevens, Cecilia Vicuña, Sylvia Witts Vitale.

ISSUE 15 EDITORIAL STATEMENT **(From Taped Conversation, October 21, 1982)**

So what's the point of a collective statement? What do we want it to say? (S.H.)

Well, it's not an individual statement. What I could do with another Black woman is totally different from what I can say in a collective statement. (S.W.V.)

The point of this is what we say to each other. Let's talk about what were our expectations when we joined the group. (M.S.)

When I arrived from Boston the Heresies Collective was working on the Third World Women's issue. That was apparently a very difficult issue and the word that got back to me from Black feminists was the Heresies Collective is a group of racist white women. . . . Then I read some of the issues and articles and I really liked the material. I had an article in the next issue, and decided to come to a meeting for this one. I was really happy to see so many different women. I know a lot of people from different countries, but this was a chance to focus on women. This was so different. We put in so much hard work. We tried to be so fair and listened to each other's experiences. Yet I am still shocked at the way white American women discuss racism. So many of the manuscripts we got talked about white women and sex with Black men. Sexual contact was always the starting point, which is not how I see racism at all. If we're talking about feminism, we're talking about women, so they're only interacting with me, a Black woman, through their sexual image of Black men. Perhaps this is one major barrier. I don't think about white men at all when I think about white women. Fortunately nobody here in the collective did that; it was just in the manuscripts. (C.G.)

Part of the experience is the way the women in this collective looked at that material and reacted to it. (S.H.)

Yeah, we were OK. (C.G.)

It wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be, based on the stories I had heard from other women of color about working with "those racist white girls at Heresies." Not that both white girls and colored girls don't have a lot of learning and growing to do. (H.G.)

Being on the racism issue—it was an experience. Hearing these people argue about something that's so important when you usually don't hear about it. You may read about it, but you usually don't hear other people talking about it, unless you bring it up. (M.G.)

Carole, you say now you can talk to white women? (V.B.)

Not in general, only the women in this collective. (C.G.)

So you felt some need to make some kind of contact? Was it satisfied?

(V.B.)

I don't really like to make contact with white people. (C.G.)

But you came here. (V.B.)

I didn't see the racism issue as just white people, but many women coming from many backgrounds to discuss the subject. Like at work you can not discuss racism with white people. (C.G.)

Has this experience changed your approach to white people? Affected your attitudes in any way? (V.B.)

That's hard to answer. I don't want to dismiss our work. . . . We needed to form a study group to define racism. Then, we would have had a common language. I felt that one of the stories we published is a racist piece. To refer to the West Indies as "bush" and to quote a Harlemitte expressing hatred of whites are negative symbols about Black people. The Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe, has asked white authors to refrain from creating more works like Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" in which Africans are degraded. However, no one agreed with my interpretation of the piece. Had I not solicited manuscripts from Alice Walker and other women, I would have resigned from this collective on racism. Unconscious and conscious racist imagery hurts. (C.G.)

This short-term process might not produce anything. I see that in the classrooms when I talk about racism. . . . You might see a little bit of opening up. (S.W.V.)

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A little bit of opening up is a miracle. (M.S.)

Here you had the Civil Rights Movement, you are always aware of the years of struggle between Black and white. But in Latin America, particularly in Chile where I come from, racism is simply not discussed. So I had never had the opportunity to think about racism in relation to my own experience. It was a fantastic thing to think in those terms with Black and white women. My experience in this capital of the world is that whatever art my Latin friends do, it's ignored by the mainstream. It does not exist, or it's "ethnic." Which is why I got out the issue of ethnocentrism. And I realized nobody in this collective shared this thing with me. I was disappointed that everybody said this issue is about racism and nobody was willing to go to a more general, a more cultural and ideological issue. Nobody was willing to go from the emotional level of personal experiences about racism to the more philosophical level. . . . So I adapted! (C.V.)

I remember those early meetings being very exciting, when there were Asian and other Latin women in the group too. A new experience for me too. Before that I had worked on racism in a group of all-white feminists. I think I was afraid, at first, of working with women of color on this issue but I decided I wanted to do it anyway. Afraid, I guess, that I'd unpeel new horrible layers of my own racism. Instead this was a really wonderful experience. I think I've become much more aware of racism. . . . There are shortcomings in the issue, like the lack of input from Native American women, but in general I'm proud of it. If racism is going to change, white people will have to do something to make it change. I think what we did here will be a tool for that change. What I discovered was just that simple step—that you don't just say, "Oh it's all so horrible," but that you can do something about it. (C.C.)

Me too. Another thing I got out of the whole process was a deepened sense of the complexity of racism in the U.S., how it's affected by elements of class, education, degree of color, all that. And the intense ambivalence even the most positive women of color have toward the kind of work we've been doing, and the psychological and historical roots of that ambivalence. (L.R.L.)

Working together you see how people feel and see. A lot of times white people aren't aware that we're being racist. We don't really understand how it's understood. A lot of the racism that goes on is unintentional, unconscious. It's really important to work together to undo that. . . . Misunderstanding only gets corrected when there's a chance to understand. (S.H.)

I've had white women—friends—try to talk to me about racism and tell me they just don't know what to say about racism because they're not involved. I just couldn't believe that. The problem doesn't exist. (V.B.)

That's what I meant about Latin America. People are very ready to discuss class struggle because class struggle is a term that comes from European culture that everybody shares, so this is OK. But to go beyond that conception or even discuss the implications—like racism—it's awkward. The subject of the Indians in Chile was usually treated as a problem of class struggle, not a cultural or religious difference. We have to question to what extent we've been conditioned by all this miseducation we've received. I worried about the narrowness of the experiences that were submitted. Most of the articles in this issue are individualized, separated experiences—"I felt this, you felt that." But we also have to put together our own experiences of racism with what's going on in the world, to reach a more general concept of global racism. It's the American situation. If this collective were in Latin America, we would have arrived at a totally different conclusion because we are marginal. We're always aware of the global situation because we have to be. (C.V.)

This issue of Heresies is on the situation of racism in the U.S. today. It represents who we are and what we're concerned with, and how far we could go. (M.S.)

We do need to put discussion on an intellectual plane at some point, but I do not necessarily agree that the word "ethnocentrism" for this country is on an intellectual plane. I still insist that for us here that's a cop-out. When you say how you are not chosen by the art world because it centers on here, that puts another meaning on ethnocentrism which has nothing to do with racism. It does have to do with peripheral vision. I insist on calling racism racism, a spade a spade (laughter). That's what it is and you cannot take it and water it down. I'm not saying that your relation to the word is a watering down for you, but this country has gone through so much shit, and to come up with another name on top of the shit is to say it did not happen to us. All these personal little things make up this country. (V.B.)

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The legacy of U.S. slavery is racism. The Civil Rights Movement changed some of that racist history. I didn't feel powerless and I didn't give up. (C.G.)

I use ethnocentrism to include racism and all bigotry. The basis as I see it—and this is a very deep psychological thing—is "I and my kind are superior." (M.S.)

Ethnocentrism starts to sound like the umbrella and underneath it is racism and bigotry. When I hear it, feel it, experience it, it's racism. But I'm glad you were part of the collective so we could get your perspective on the word. It's different. I was so anti the word "ethnocentrism." . . . I'm sorry we could not get more into racism and anti-Semitism—the Black/Jewish conflict—because it's about to explode again. I didn't have the courage to do it because I'd get fired up, can't take no more. Maybe sometimes it's too close. You know, having a mother named Elizabeth Cohen and whatever she went through with black skin. . . . (S.W.V.)

Most of the material is by U.S. Black women or white women; there isn't much from an identifiable Lesbian perspective. It's hard to say why. Flyers were mailed to many groups and individuals around the world; various racial and work-related and sexual-preference grapevines were utilized. This final working collective included Latina, Black and white. Two of us are Lesbians and the others are hets. All seemed to know a wide range of women and were committed to involving them in working on the issue and bringing in material reflective of a wide range of women's experiences. Still, there are many voices that should be here that aren't. This is not an apology or an excuse, just a statement of fact and concern. I guess it's also reflective of where women are right now. The problem of broadening the participation in the women's movement is very real and will not be solved in any single or simple manner. (H.G.)

Since racism comes up everywhere, every day, in all kinds of situations, I can conceive of this body of literature being used and discussed by everyone, everywhere. Teachers can use it as a discussion-stimulator or as the basis for written assignments. My past experience has shown me how white folks do not like to feel uncomfortable about racism so they change the topic. I don't want it changed. I want folks to deal with it. Discuss it. Understand it. I would hate to see racism pushed aside as a side issue. It is not. In government, schools, work, play, entertainment, racism is prevalent. I also do not want white folks to run away from the issue screaming about how they "heard enough about this already so let's move on to more relevant things." Now, what gets me about some of my Black folks is how they can say things like: "Look, I'm tired of dealing with this racism stuff. That's the white girl's problem. Let her deal with it." Or the ones who say: "I can do anything I want to do. I don't let racism hang me up. That's what's wrong with Black people today, they always. . ." Both of these Black approaches are as bad as their white counterparts. . . . On the whole, I would say that working with this mixture of women's cultures proved to be very positive for me. It restored my initial good feeling about the women's movement and the need to collaborate, network and dialogue. We were able to get through what could be labeled as very controversial topics without killing anyone, calling names or just being downright disrespectful. I was pleased. I've been in groups that have done the former. That we didn't say something real mature about us. . . . Of course, I work with integrated groups all the time, but I usually get paid for it. (S.W.V.)

This time you get glory! (M.S.)

What are your reactions to this issue? Do you have additional ideas? We'd like visual and verbal responses to publish in a new "opinion" section, starting with Issue 17.

This issue was typeset by Myrna Zimmerman, with display type by Talbot; printed by Capital City Press, Montpelier, Vt.

Special thanks to the following women who participated in the Issue 15 Editorial Collective through most of our deliberations: Yvonne Flowers, Ana Mendieta, Lorraine O'Grady, Angela Salgado. Thanks also to all the women who came to our early meetings and fed us with ideas. Finally, thanks to the women who helped in various stages of production: Linda Cunningham, Sandra De Sando, Abigail Esman, Vanalyne Green, Patricia Jones, Kay Kenny, Adrienne Weiss.

We deeply regret the death of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who was attacked and killed on a street near her apartment in lower Manhattan on Friday, November 5, 1982, in the early evening. Theresa's work appears in *Heresies* No. 14: The Women's Pages. Her recently published book *Dictee* is available from Tanam Press, 40 White Street, NY, NY 10013.

Heresies Collective Statement

HERESIES is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that HERESIES will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, as well as generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to broadening the definition and function of art.

HERESIES is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture, filmmaking, photography, and video. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff, composed of women who want to work on that issue as well as members of the collective. HERESIES provides experience for women who work editorially, in design and in production. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. HERESIES will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts, and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified, they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

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UPCOMING ISSUES

No. 16: Media—Film and Video: An in-depth look at the work of feminist filmmakers and video artists. Also offers pointed analysis of the impact of feminism on commercial films and TV. Pub. date: February 1983.

No. 17: Women's Groups—Time to Raise Hell! Projects and plans from progressive political and cultural groups all over the world. An action-oriented issue with suggestions for organizing and mobilizing the public. Pub. date: Spring 1983.

No. 18: Acting Up! Women in Theater and Performance Art: Please send us essays, original scripts, technical designs, documentation, visuals, and interviews exploring the diverse work by women in contemporary theater and performance art. Deadline: February 1, 1983. Pub. date: Summer 1983.

No. 19: Mothers, Mags and Movie Stars—Feminism and Class: We want cultural/social/economic analyses of the institutions that shape the mother-daughter relationship—to use this relationship to understand family, class, and culture. How do women's magazines and movie stars point up issues mothers and daughters are in conflict about (or agree on)? Deadline: April 1, 1983. Pub. date: Fall 1983.

Guidelines for Contributors. Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted should relate to that theme. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox or photograph. We will not be responsible for original art. All material must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for it to be returned. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for published material.

We would like to thank all the women artists who helped to make our Third Annual Benefit Art Sale at the Frank Marino Gallery in New York City a success. A full listing of all the women who donated work will appear in the next issue.

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