

obscure

NO. 1.
Jeanne Gomoll

Hello...

This is the first time I've participated in an APA; probably it's the first time most of us have participated in such a thing--but I'm really hopeful that it will go well. I am told by those who have been active in APA-publication, that first editions are mostly biographical and introductory in nature, and so by incorporating the reasons for my excitement for this experiment (that is, a feminist APA), along with a skeletal description of my history and self, I will attempt to comply. ...Actually, trying to find a beginning point for this continuing "journal," that will be read by perhaps 30 people of whom I know absolutely nothing at the moment, but with whom it would be good to commence communication with in as honest a way as possible ... such a beginning is hard to find. I've got all sorts of possible materials for the middle, but am finding myself feeling a little ill-at-ease with this introduction. Oh well, head first...

Hello. My name is Jeanne. I was born 25 years ago in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, lower middle class, Catholic; and at age 9, a member of a family that fled the urban center for safe suburbs. School was uninteresting until high school: until then, I lived in science fiction and daydreamed through classes, and was told that I'd never make it into college by a grim nun. My first sf was Madelain L'Engle's A WRINKLE IN TIME at age 9, but mostly I grew up on Robert Heinlein & Co. High school however opened worlds for me: I became radicalized and infected with what seems to have become a rather virulent and tenacious case of the academics. Books and ideas possessed an excitement to a degree that few people I knew seemed to possess. It wasn't until my Junior year in college (at the University of Wisconsin at

Madison) that I started growing emotionally. There was this woman named Sin, ...I mean Cyn (Cynthia)...But that's a long story...and everyone's got one. It will be fun to go back and talk about those days, and these days, etc., when we all get to know one another.

There is a book by three women in Portugal (THE THREE MARIAS: NEW PORTUGUESE LETTERS, by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Velho da Costa; Bantam, 1976) who met weekly and bringing contributions every week, wrote their book. The book is a combination of myth and diary and fiction and poetry and history. It is the joining of these three womens' energies into a process of mutual support and recognition and redefinition that makes the book an incredibly powerful thing to read. One of the three Marias muses on what they are doing/what they will do:

"Suddenly it happened. The encounter became a family, passion a work of love. Torment and fear turned into rules and pacts. The theme changed from fire to a piece to be forged, to an object to be situated. Encirclement, a circle, a parabola. An open parabola.

"Once hesitant sisters, each of us adorning ourselves in our own feathers, one of you in lyrical, emotional outpourings and eroticism, the other of you in 'analytical distance,' and I in ironic detachment, each of us the prisoner of her pretended strength, in the heat of what was happening, we found ourselves touched by, revealed in the common childhood that we made it our task to discover, sharing our grievances with each other, and in so doing gaining the courage to accuse and suspect each other, going on from accusing our mothers to accusing each other to

our faces, and discovering that we could tolerate this--and that is how we made each of ourselves the mother and the daughter of each of the others, and sisters determined to talk about precisely why we were orphans and suffering and destitute. A new family." (p. 106)

There are so many examples of women, of individual women, groups of women, expressing themselves in journal-like literature. Traditionally it has been put down as "Confessional" literature, and until recently with the advent of good feminist criticism, has received very little attention.



It's always been a general ambition for me to live constantly in the state of obsession (in the Ahab manner of MOBY DICK: feeling that it is better to fall into mountain crevices occasionally as a mountain eagle, than to soar above mere plains as a plain's bird). When I was very young I thought in terms of growing up and going off into the world in search of a revolution. (Maybe I'd just finished reading EXODUS or something.) But regardless, the idea of sleeping through life, losing the excitement I now feel in interaction with people and ideas, fills me with dread. Obsession (of the non-possessive sort, in connection with people I know) is the only state of mind I've found that I can be happy in.

So anyway, at the tail-end of a recent obsession with certain modern American writers of the post-1945 period in Literature (my head clearing as I graduated with over 36 credits in that narrow field of study), I headed into the following obsession, which was how the new awareness of Journal-type writing by women was taking its place as an important part of the mutating '70's literature. I got together with some other women and we formed a feminist reading group, and in the course of the first 4 months had read a good 50 books ranging in dates of publication and viewpoints, but all increasing my excitement about what was happening in the Movement, and especially what was happening in the Arts. It seemed (and seems) to me that in the process of changing our roles and expectations and life-styles, there is a tremendous amount of energy being released and going into the creation of (expression through) art. And with the long tradition of women's expression in Journal-like writings, this form is being resurrected and sculpted into a vital new art.

For instance, take Monique Wittig's extraordinary, lovely, LES GUERRILLERES (Avon, 1969), which is a fictionalized cyclic community-journal written by a band of (or all?) women who have won the war against the men and are living as Amazons, attempting to redefine themselves through their art, the "feminary," the community Journal... Each paragraph in LES GUERRILLERES is an individual entry from the feminary.

"The women are seen to have in their hands small books which they say are feminaries. These are either multiple copies of the same original or else there are several kinds. In one of them someone has written an inscription which they whisper in each other's ears and which provokes them to full-throated laughter." (pp. 14-15)

The first feminist APA. I almost decided to call my pages "Feminary," but I decided such would be an unfair metaphor since the collection of all of our writing alone could be appropriate to such a name. Nevertheless, the same excitement that led me to take a new look at my own journal

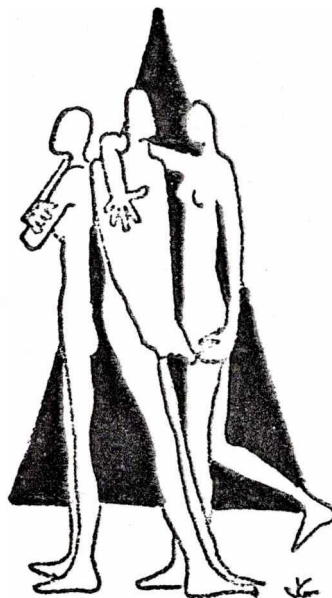
(kept regularly these past 6 years) and participate in an irregular thematic journal with my feminist reading group, and mostly to publish, write in, illustrate and change with our fanzine, JANUS --the same excitement, of participating in this on-going redefinition-through-Art, I think can be involved in this APA. (Hopefully there will be a better way to refer to it than by those three sterile initials in the future...If nominations are being accepted, I suggest "Feminary.")

"There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember. The wild roses flower in the woods. Your hand is torn on the bushes gathering the mulberries and strawberries you refresh yourself with. You run to catch the young hares that you flay with stones from the rocks to cut them up and eat all hot and bleeding. You know how to avoid meeting a bear on the track. You know the winter fear when you hear the wolves gathering. But you can remain seated for hours in the tree-tops to wait morning. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent." (pp.88-89; my emphasis)

Now, whether you take that as Wittig's allusion to a prehistorical past in which womens' roles were not degraded, or as a reference to a personal past, for each of us, when we had not yet learned to be slaves or begun to chafe against that recognition, it does not really matter. She points out a way to escape that slavery and partake in a life-giving sisterhood: through the memory or invention of autonomy. To remember or to imagine ourselves striding free and self-sustaining in the world is enough. If we can pretend in detail through our art, we can become. To me, this is the primary value of science fiction for feminist expression. We cannot complete the revolution until we know a kind of world we want to make: To remember and to invent one is an important part of the process.

The women say that even without the feminarities they can recall the time when, as was typical of them, they made war. They say that all they need do is to invent

terms that describe themselves without conventional references to herbals or bestiaries. They say that what they must stress above all is their strength and their courage." (p. 53)



This is the way I connect the potentialities of the APA with the ambitions and convictions inside of me: as a way to participate in a process I have seen in the art that is a primary part of my life. And here I am today: all degreed, much to the astonishment of that grade school sooth-sayer, Sister Mary Rupert; agnostic, lower-class, a contented but frantic urbanite, and in possession of a longish and rather colorful history... How things do change. Furthermore, I am (as mentioned before) a co-editor of JANUS: the writing and illustrating of this zine takes up the majority of my energy. However, to live, as well as to pay back my school loans and save enough so that I can go back (Journalism Grad school) -- I work at the Women's Research Institute, which is a sort of umbrella organization set up to help women design, find funding for, and carry out research. The work there is most fascinating and interesting and comfortable... Right now we're working on a project called "The Equitable Pursuit of Knowledge: Is It Possible?" for which scholars from all over the country will be brought in to Madison to participate in a conference next fall concerning the impact of the near-exclusion of women from their fields upon their areas. The papers and discussants' remarks will be published as a Women's studies text. Also, right now, I'm helping a woman research a topic she's

been funded for: the connection between handedness (right or left, you know) and cerebral lateralization and spatial/ verbal skills and why men tend to do better in mathematics than women. Julia Sherman (the researcher) is disproving the old assumption, still hanging on, that there is some biological reason for this difference. That too is exciting to do work on.

As I think I've stated though, my interests in feminism stem mainly from my involvement in art, written and to some extent from other areas, and that is the viewpoint I will no doubt project here most often. However through my connection to the WRIW, I can probably bring in some interesting announcements/anecdotes, etc..



ation deceive you. You compare yourselves privately to the fruits of the chestnut cloves mandarines green oranges but you are fruits only in appearance. Like the leaves you fly away at the slightest breeze, beautiful strong light subtle and prompt of understanding as you are. Beware of dispersal. Remain united like characters in a book. Do not abandon collectivity. The women are seated on the piles of leaves holding hands watching the clouds that pass outside." (p. 58)

↓
If anyone is interested in a T-Shirt decorated along these lines, (I've got several alternative drawings of different stylized women, same bubble), let me know. We were going to have some made for my feminist reading group, but didn't have enough members to make the printing economical. If I can get a dozen or so people (and there are about four of us here in Madison), I can have them printed up for about \$5 each. ↓



"In a high wind the leaves fall from the trees. They go on to gather them in bread baskets. Some, scarcely touched, rot. They are scattered in the fields in the woods. In the baskets there are leaves of chestnut hornbeam maple clove guaic copal oak mandarine willow copper-beech elm plane terebinth latania myrtle. Tébaire Jade scatters them in the room crying, Friends do not let your imagin-