

ORSESSIONS 3

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This time, I follow Avedon's example and respond as I read. Last month my procrastination resulted in my submission not being included in the #2 mailing and I don't want that to happen again.

I'd like to know about why Meg Christian was picketed too... and why you think she is a racist, Avedon. I just heard/saw her for the first time at the Freedom House here in Madison and I thought she was wonderful. Fallen Women is putting on a series of women's concerts (last year their series included Chris Williamson) to which men are "encouraged not to come." There's a wonderful sense of vibrating long-lasting excitement to be gotten from hugging a whole gym-full of women and singing at the top of your lungs to music that does not embarrass... which is part of my confusion about your calling her a racist. Her song about her college friend (Rozalyn?), about the struggles and striving to overcome socialized perceptions seemed very sincere to me. [I did enjoy Chris Williamson more though: her songs are more singable, the sense of community in the hall was therefore, more warming.]

Seth, yes, I do know Lesleigh Luttrell. I know her very well in fact. She and Hank are part of MADSTF (I say "part of" with ironic suspicion: there are rumors that they move from city to city inciting clubs and fermenting ~~cliques and conventions...~~). I'll give her your message. When I showed her my #2 submission, her major response was a glare and a low-voiced warning: "You didn't put in enough responses..." As we both know now, her admonishments are powerful things. On reading the mailing and feeling the excitement to

find feedback for my words, I understand the impetus that keeps an APA going.

I haven't read THE FIRST SEX, but I thought WOMEN'S EVOLUTION was fine, whether it was based on good research and insight or just proud imaginings. Evelyn Reed suggests in a Marxist interpretation that it was property which converted ancient stable matriarchies into patriarchies. But the most interesting parts of that book deal with the ways that male anthropologists, so enthralled with their incest interpretations of mating behaviors in primitive peoples, totally ignored the fact that these people weren't even aware of the connection between sex and birth much less the connection between sex with a first cousin and the birth of deformed infants. There's all sorts of "startling" ideas that seem to be naturally evident in the data still used today when viewed without the sexist assumptions. I liked the part where Reed speculated on the meaning of "rites of manhood"--which women never participated in, not (possibly) because they were not "men," but because they were already human and did not have to be ceremoniously cleansed. And the old anthropologists did a lot more than wrongly interpret general pronouns. The most disturbing thing is the knowledge that we are all still very much influenced in our thinking by what is studied and how it is interpreted in fields such as history and anthropology. (and thus I am so excited about what our panel at WISCON might be able to do...)

Karen, yes, I recently (a couple of years ago) read A WIND IN THE DOOR--right after I reread A WRINKLE IN TIME, and finding myself surprised and happy that it was as good as I remembered it as being. I think WIND is the better of the two. (Both are now in print in paperback.) The image of

Meg curled up under her quilt in her attic bedroom meditating upon her identity, and later, leaping to the rescue of the marvelous Charles Wallace with her log tables' chant, stayed with me through my adolescent days amid the more common rush of male images running to the valient rescue of cringing, frail, helpless female ones.

Kathi, I'm reading AGAINST OUR WILL now too. It's awful and excellent... and painful too, making me think long and hard for the first time since I was raped a few years ago and covered the sore up with layers of I-don't-want-to-think-about-it, when I should have been cauterizing the wound with anger.

Carrie; I'm somewhat confused by women who claim never to have experienced sexism (or to be able to avoid it easily). No offense, I hope, but first of all-- I usually don't believe them. Primarily, I know the disbelief comes in semantically. What I call sexism, "they" call normal-so-why-make-a-big-fuss-I-avoided-it-you-can-too. We're obviously labling things differently so that we do/don't have to deal with them. (Another semantic wiggle and a different "they"--I say abort, they say murder: a word that obliges/gives them the excuse to try to control my body.) It's a matter of perspective and reaction to one's environment I suppose. The difference between over-consciousness (letting awareness get in the way of enjoying people, understanding and looking for the good parts) and fooling yourself into thinking it's possible that by extraordinary combination of circumstances of family, education, friends, etc. one has escaped all that and exists on some paradisal island--the chasm of a difference between these two extremes is wide, and leads on either side to precipices of unreality. Awareness of limitations put on us is a tool whereby we can cut ourselves free. But however much I know that I could not be one of those who live unflinchingly/solely in the awareness of the blindness and dullness of those who restrict our lives, they are at least not offering their finger to make tying the knots a little easier for the binders. To say that it's easy

to avoid "discrimination" (the way you label it, diminishing the formidableness of the enemy) is to offer a finger for the knot.

Ann, there's a lot to respond to in your writing. You remind me of a good friend of mine, something about the way you phrase things and the topics you consider I think.

I like the reason you told of for having named your Apa, ORLANDO. As Woolf has said herself, it is the least substantial of her novels--but afterwards (for me, for some others, for you too apparently), after the plot disappears from memory--the idea stays on and we try it on and find that it fits amazingly well. (Of course: the way we used to gobble down books oriented towards and written for little boys was not by ignoring the pitiful roles little girls were left with, but by identifying with the little boys. The process of recognizing and accepting or not accepting oneself as a woman only late makes those books hurt.

As to your vital statistics...Well, um, well that's nice dear, and how's your mother? That's one response but not a totally honest one. I too debated over whether such statistics should be included along with the first sentence: Hi-how-do-you-do-my-name-is-Jeanne-I'm-25-years-old-etc. I decided finally that I'd rather let my sexual experiences slip into conversation naturally. Sexual orientation and experience certainly is important in how we define ourselves and look at others, and I would never relegate such information to a secret diary and not bring personal feelings into conversation with friends; such would only restrict our friendship and trust. But then too, went the argument in my head, I would never introduce myself to another person, no matter how likely we were to become friends with my sexual identity top-most in defining characteristics.

But in order to respond to the lovely emotional self-description that followed the statistics, and the question that follows after that, reticence loses the argument and I'll have to go back a ways and relate some of my own sexual-emotional hysteria.

My physically sexual experiences have all been with men. I have had and do have relationships with women that are sensual but I have never wanted to continue further. I am uncertain about the future: I am "open," as they say, for a sexual relationship with a woman should I ever feel enough attracted, but I am uneasy that all this is merely curiosity and mind games and a bit of what Avedon described in talking about her embarrassment at being a "white oppressor;" i.e., I don't want to be labeled as a disgustingly narrow heterosexual and not all-supportive woman to other women... Ah ego.

Until I was about 18, I was convinced that I was totally asexual, not interested in men at all, and after "researching" the alternative (checking out all the books on lesbianism I could find in the library, the same way I figured out about sex in the first place), I decided that I lacked some rather fundamental qualities for that label too. Not at all upset, however, even glad to be free of such silly games, I left home for school in Madison and met a woman there named Cyn. Cyn was about 5'2", very petite and fragile looking from my height, and the most incredibly flamboyant person I have ever known. She burst into the room where I sat reading a text and sucking on a felt tip cap, as if into a ballroom where "Entrances" were made... Dressed in a swirl of orange and red and yellow silks (she is a student of Indian culture), her arms raised, a smile flashing, black hair flowing, she announced in a low husky voice, "Hello, I'm Sin!" Well it turned out that she meant Cyn, as in Cnythia, but on such a basis was our acquaintance made. How we became and why we became friends neither of us can recall nor understand exactly, for we were certainly different sorts of people. I remember thinking as I watched her exude that she was a dangerous sort of person, not someone I was likely to want to get to know. Well, somehow that suspicion was overcome, and for two years during our boarding at the "Cochrane House" we were inseparable.

She was honest in a way I didn't know was possible, telling me things I thought she was crazy to tell me. (How could she trust me or anyone with things like that?) But she did, and after a while I returned my trust for hers, and started learning about myself, exploring but more often, awakening feelings I didn't know were around. For the first time in my life I wondered about the efficacy of the walls I'd built around myself; I grew to consider them limiting, sick things. I learned how to touch others. Cyn used to joke at the beginning about conducting touch classes for me (the joke being on the teacher-student relationship we adopted for some things, not my real flinching when it came to touching and being touched by others). [I guess this is directed at Mike Wood too.] If she were still here, rather than studying in India, I think we may have become lovers, but again, that idle speculation from my position.

After that, I fought hard to reach out to others and then, as it got easier, fought also not to lose my hold on the older obsessions of my life (like school work related activity, etc.) In the process, I have known many people and my life has been enriched a thousand-fold because of them.

There was Dave who grew with me, who was my lover, and then was Cyn's lover, and then my lover again (we joked and called him our vollyball, and as she got on the plane to leave Madison/me, I said "point. Dave had a difficult struggle with his sexuality at that time but finally, with support, he has accepted that he is gay and feeling very good about it. We both were in need of a lot of support and friendship at that time: He was there when I very much needed him (a long weird unbelievable story with pushers and storm nights and CIA and everything--the time I was raped) (That's a long but moderately interesting few paragraphs. Maybe I'll tell it next time after I've finished AGAINST OUR WILL.) I lived with Dave for two years and now do not, but he and others of that period represent to me now my desire then to become close to "safe" people--who I knew would not demand too much committment as I learned about myse?

All the gay men and married men and de-
liberate one-nighters that I out-
wardly complained about (frustrating,
I said), but inwardly was relieved about.

It wasn't so much a desire based on
unsureness that I was attracted to
"safe" people though. I think that
as long as my existence (school,
everything measured out in semesters)
was temporary, so too was my ability
to committ my emotions. As my life be-
comes regulated by less jolting, short
periods (my year beginning in January
and not September), so too does my
desire for longer committments be-
come greater.

Dave and I changed and living with
him became a bad thing (that is an
abridgement to say the least...), so
I left early this year. We had both
had lovers and very separate lives dur-
ing the last year of our co-hapitation
(yucky word) and so it was a rather
anti-climatical if not actually
soothing change. I moved into my own
wonderful one-person apartment and was
rewarded, I thought (everything going
so beautifully) by meeting another
important person: Rick.

Since the time when I lost all control
in a sexual experience (the rape)(a
very central experience: excuse me
if I keep coming back to it), I have
been rather oriented towards keeping
control at least at the beginning of
a relationship. Not to let that
subtle bit of doubletalk just hang
there; that means I do the advancing/
seducing if it needs to be done,
though I much prefer mutual agreement.
I guess that answers your question
though: When the opportunity arises,
I sleep with people when I want to.
I have found that I am much more at ease
knowing that I can and more often than
not am the one to suggest sex. I've
learned a painful lot about the
traditionally male realm of rejection
by being the initiator: but that isn't
too hard a thing to be strong about.
[Again, to Mike Wood, instead of "I
want to touch you," try "Sometime (or
sometimes) I would like to touch you."
I've used that question in situations

where I'm asking for more than permission
to touch, but it works well in either case
I should imagine. Not, I mean that it will
always be answered with an affirmative
response, but that the answer does not hurt,
since the question is indefinite and tact-
ful leaving graceful exits for all con-
cerned.]

A postscript about the abruptly and briefly
mentioned Rick, very short because that's
a whole other longgggg story, and still
too new. I seduced him, we were lovers
until he left for the summer, we correspond
ed almost daily, but his last letter told
me that he was involved with another woman.
On his return in the fall, I said that's
OK--I wouldn't ask him to make promises I
won't make. But all was not OK: he had to
make a choice he said and though we tried
for a long time to make the ideal work, it
didn't and I lost. Mumbling "autonomy"
under my breath at key breakdown moments,
I make it through and am now all balanced
and fine inside again.

So there you are: not exactly slipping
in naturally in the conversation as I had
envisioned, but a good thing if we are to
continue the topic on further as I'd
like to. For example, many of us seem to
have had experience with what I call
"safe" people. I wonder how many of
you lable them as such in your heads.

I agree with you, Ann, about the Disney
version of PETER PAN. I had exactly the
same reation to the women in the film
(even Nanny for goodness sake: the classic
case of the jealous mom). My closest emo-
tional relationships have always been with
women and I find it hideous that this
particular male fantasy is accepted so
gullibly by women who need women as
friends but instead playact and believe
and thus create the suspicion that women
are women's worst enemies.

There's a lot more I'd like to say (ORLAN-
DO sparked all sorts of thoughts and mem-
ories in me)--especially since I spent so
much time talking about important men in
my life, more than the much more important
an numerous women (it's not too descriptiv
of my emotional priorities what I did) but
that will have to wait till later.

As to your question about my writing, Ann, well...I just reread the previous few paragraphs which, yes, did just "come out," in a gush though, nothing smooth about it, complete with too-long sentences, rambling thoughts, embarrassing misspellings (I cannot spell. No other excuses.), parens, elipses and other such little-girl diary devices (well, at least I don't indulge in "cuz" and "luv" and "i"...). But I guess writing in a journal does improve writing as practice would any skill.

Hilde, I like your name, I twist my name sometimes to achieve androgynous effect (once, for example, for a notoriously sexist professor, my paper was turned in to him under the name "Gene Gomoll.") I rather like having the option to straighten people out--if I want to--rather than having my sex/marital status evident to all.

About your discussion on marriage (ah, that discussion... I've done this one so often, for friends, lovers, parents, I should have it taped and ready for distribution). I will never marry. Like you, the only practical reason I can see for it, maybe, sometimes, for people growing up now (my mother's generation are in too deeply to have the rug pulled from under them), is children. But since I am planning to have the bandaid steriliation done as soon as I have the money and/or insurance coverage, I can say without a doubt that I will not marry. (And not, as my mother wondered fearfully, eyes wide on hearing this many years ago, that I will "be missing the intimacy of a marriage." My mom's full of such things. Ah well.) I don't think multiple marriage is unnatural--though for me it would be impractical. I've proven to myself that I don't need to feel jealousy when someone I love has another lover, nor have I ever been monogomous for very long periods of time--but I more and more grow that way. I have close emotional and interest ties with a large number of people, but do want to experience more of the special kind of bond-making that comes with a long-standing emotional/sexual committment. As Ann noted,

there are all sorts of people though and everyone works out their own priorities and needs. Systems that assume a fundamental similarity in those things are bound to be silly and restrictive to quite a few people.

Alyson--the differences between men and women in math and science don't appear till mid-high school (about the 11th grade). Before that time, the differences are negligible, if not actually favoring women. But after that point, scores decrease, and the number of women participating in advanced math and science decrease to such a degree that 11th grade women's scores are actually sometimes lower than 10th grade women's scores (using the whole school population, not just those enrolled in the math and science courses). --All of which certainly supports the theories which blame outside social pressures put on women, rather than the internal genetic hypotheses of such discrepancies.

Once again the femmefan controversy is brought up. If we are voting, I will sign up in the "definitely no" column. I dislike the sound of the word (and connotations related to Suzy McKee Charnas' WALK TO THE END OF THE WOPLD, will prevent me from ever uttering the word in use). But mostly, I object to the reason for such distinctions: I'm in favor of dumping such words as waitress (for waiter in all cases), actress (for actor), etc.--not for making up new titles that refer to roles that are not intrinsically defined by sex. Such words, I think, reflect a warped sense of identity in a culture.

Victoria--When we first met at Minicon and you told me that the Women's Apa would not necessarily be restricted to feminist topics or viewpoint, but could be on anything, "eggplants for instance," you said; I was a bit put off on the idea. I must say I'm glad the tone for the Apa has settled where it has.

Shit: this is getting too long. I just keep going, keep forgetting to leave space for illos [that doesn't matter now: since I had to retype this whole Apa from the ditto stensil I had ready for the late ditto machine. They won't fix it for a month I guess.] and wondering if reactions aren't just getting a little tediously "I"

filled. Maybe I shouldn't have just begun to do reactions-as-I-read. I just came to Jennifer's CRYSTAL GRYPHON and your description of your professional situation. (I bet that felt good to say all of that. I'll make horrible faces whenever I hear the name of Osgoode mentioned. A pity though that such things are not limited to that place.)

[Really though, this whole process is getting very frustrating, typing it all over again on mimeo stensil I mean and not being able to use all the pictures I did for the ditto, etc. Especially since I started off the whole process in order to save time and everything... But anyway back to the transcribing.]

The initial explicative a couple paragraphs back though, is due to your question about my interest in Journal literature... (envisioning the pages and pages I could easily write in reply). The subject was the center of all my academic interest for about a year during an independent research project in the UW, and still takes some of my energy through a feminist reading group that I am a part of. (Right now, we're exploring the theme of cloister (family and/or nunnery), and as escape-community, alternate womanspace...) But I will attempt to be brief: [And so to Jennifer and to Gina--] I think the word "confessional" literature is a put-down label, much as the term "regional" literature was used in the early 1900's to suggest the un-universality of certain writing in a (successful) attempt to ghettoize it and diminish its importance. "Regional" literature of the 20's was mostly written (surprise!) by women (Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, etc.) as is "confessional" literature today. But I think some of the writing done by women today evidences the peculiarities of our socialization, some of which has been advantageous (in the human being sense, e.g., the emphasis on emotional awareness/ability to analyze, etc. that needs to be taught someday somehow by somebody to men...). I believe that our diaries and our fiction reflect a more sensitive and sophisticated awareness

of our own and others' feelings. The use of the form of diaries underlines the source and aims of our writing, and, I think, (!) is developing into a hybrid form of writing. I'd like to see sf breed into the act (for the "failing that, invent" reasons I've been seeing in some new fiction and mentioned with LES GUERILLERES and Marge Piercy's WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME and others)...

I have a bibliography if you are interested And one more thing: I think the form of this Apa is very close to the kind of thing I look for in Journal Literature (where form and content are one and the same at times: we say things because of the forum we are operating within...) and that we have a chance to do something really remarkable here once we've all gotten comfortable.

Susan, it sounds as if you need the handy time machine I used to dream about. You push the button and time stops for everyone but you while you get to work/sleep/think, and get generally all caught up, and then push the button again, and things start up again. Once I dreamt about it (a nice little green person gave it to me as a sort of interstellar goodwill gift) and I gratefully pushed its control button, being horribly behind in much needed sleep, and woke up an hour later, and an hour late for work. I had pushed the alarm button down on my clock.

Sandi, I love the name of your Apa--and to you and everyone else that was interested in the T-Shirt, forget my deadline announcement in OBSESSIONS #2: I won't have gotten them printed by Christmas (a hubristic idea anyway. I'm giving out coupons good for one T-Shirt to my friends...). So just send along the number of/size of/color of T-Shirts that you want, plus a check for \$4.50 each as soon as you can and I'll have them mailed out to you by March.

Jessica [a gorgeous Apa, wonderful art!] Your description of the waiting terrier started me off on a daydream and I wonder if it might not make a good story... Background: an alien observation ship, artfully disguised as a common American Metro

Bus, and one day, our hero, an alien from aboard the ship, gets off in a fit of insatiable curiosity to find out --what??: (why some children are hopping about on the pavement in some mystic code pattern, or where it is that the people disappear to when they walk down the cellar marked "subway," or where they go when accompanied by the street corner women... whatever...) This alien however, forgets to announce her intention to gather data to her cohorts and is left in a very strange place, waiting for her ship to return. All she knows is what has been observed from ship level--i.e., street behavior (walk when the light says "walk"), and cannot or is not able to reveal her intelligence to humans...

And so maybe the "bus" returns after she escapes from the kennel...

Hmmmm...I was wondering about a story for JANUS 7...Maybe....

As I wrote this tumbled mass of responses, I was thinking all along about my feelings concerning the subApa, forming ideas that I would use to sum up these pages (unless I received the post-mailing that I have heard might still come and have to do some more responses). I received not postmailing but Ctein's pre-subApa mailing...

I was and am still planning to send in a page or two for the subApa, but was and am still unsure of what I thought about it, but thinking that I could always bow out should I want to later on. One of the reasons I am unsure about the subApa is that I don't like the idea too much of reserving certain information about myself for a special group. Obviously, in writing this (OBSESSIONS #3), I decided not to reserve information about myself, and expect most of my participation in the subApa to consist of responses to others who decide to do so. I think that if I had decided to save my more private thoughts for the subApa, the other would have become less important and increasingly superficial.

As to the rationale/philosophy behind that:
(1) I agree with Ctein that the subApa does not pose the same problems or offer the same benefits as an actual Cr group because it is not direct face-to-face and is so characterized in "lags" between comment and response. Therefore, I don't think the reasons used to exclude men (rightly) from a CR group apply here. (2) With regard to avoiding the rehashing of elementary tenets of feminism, I have two thoughts: first, that it is a sad but obvious fact that there are a lot of women, not just most men who are still at the beginning stages of feminist awareness. Our group is not unrepresentative of that state of affairs. Secondly, the written form of these communications allows anyone that wants to avoid such review sessions to do so easily. Alternately, the written form also allows those whose beginner's status stems from lack of contact/awareness of the ideas, to get that contact, to become aware perhaps. The important thing is anyway, the idea that Ctein, I think, very correctly is insisting upon, is that we not assume the subApa will act as a CR group, for because of the differences (time gaps and written form) it will have quite different characteristics.

I'm not arguing this point on the basis of a dislike for reverse-discrimination. If I thought that I could talk/write more easily in an all-woman forum of the subApa; if I thought that there was some real potential for power being misused (or even used) by men in the main Apa; or if I thought there was a chance of more personal and interpersonal growth in the situation of the subApa--if I thought any of these things, I would be in favor of the idea regardless of the necessity to exclude others. I do think it is really important for women to be strong and confident of that strength in order to change things, and sometimes it means that a period of private support among women is needed. But I don't think this is one of those times.

So. Unless the idea is discontinued, which I wouldn't object to (but there doesn't seem to be a real smooth decision making process, so private action is all that is available:) I plan to participate in both Apas, but do not intend to reserve

certain information for one or the other. Obviously as the conversations of the two diverge, the result may be that I say some things in one that I do not happen to say in the other, but it won't be a constant exclusion.

Gawd. The stuff I am typing from is eight full pages long--that means I've lost almost a whole page in illustrations from this method. Well I guess I can just save them for next time... The only one I regret not being able to include here is a drawing of Cyn whirling into the room with silks and necklaces and hair flying behind her. Ah well. I sure am not going to try to fill the rest of this space with blither: As I write now, it is two days before Christmas. I have an incredible amount of things to do and know that if I don't get this Apa submission finished before Christmas, it will never be done before the February 1 deadline. JANUS 7 has to be done by then too because it is to be our program book at WisCon. So..... Merry Christmas, past tense, everybody. Next time I should have some good stuff on another research project I'm working on at the Women's Research Institute of Wisconsin, on the topic of aggression and sex roles [Have you ever noticed the difference in connotations when you say "aggressive salesman," as compared to "an aggressive saleswoman."? One is a competent, energetic, successful person; the other is that irritating bitch who won't let you alone in the department store...]. Anyway, we're working on how aggression is a learned response, mostly for males, and what responses women are supposed to utilize...

See you all in April!

love, Jeanne