

AGM SESSION:
IMPROPTU EROTICS

by
Kathy Mac

At 1:30, the roomful of people in the Senator Salon was informed that the Poetics/Feminism/Erotics/Eroticism session was delayed until 3:30. Most trotted off to the translation panel, but a few stayed in our seats, and had an impromptu workshop session.

They included Leanne MacIntosh, Ali Riley, Betsy Struthers, Jennifer Boire, Charlotte Hussy, Catherine Hunter Crozer, Mary-Lou Soutar-Hynes, Gerry Hil, and me as unofficial recording secretary.

(Please excuse the partial nature of this report — after about half an hour, I got caught up in the discussion, and my notes became, well, 'sporadic' is a polite way of putting it. I'm also avoiding putting names to ideas, because there was no discussion of making a public record before the session began.)

The session unfolded this way: someone would toss out a problem that she was having, as a woman and a poet in Canada at this time, and the rest of us would field it, saying yes, we recognize that problem, this is how we dealt with it, here's another way of looking at it, here's something else related to it, that's not been my experience....

We started with the idea "the personal is the

political."

It seemed a fine mantra in the past, but no longer represents sufficient justification for writing; we need a more profound, and profoundly effective, philosophy.

The world has changed since "the personal is the political" felt current.

Specifically, how do we, as individual women and poets, matter in the face of a global reality...

... in which the physical and the philosophical are interdependent in an unprecedented way?

A poet's place in a global ecology matters; Eros (the topic of the original session) represents not just sensuality but life force, a force not limited to individual bodies; we can strive to understand our places as individuals and women within that global energy...

...by giving voices to women, as HD gave voices to the Greek women of antiquity...

... which could get you in trouble with your editor; immured in our current prevalent culture, editors still tend to denigrate women's traditions. An old story, but no less true.

Even so, poetry is positive, and the proof of our feminism is in the writing.

But what is "feminist"? It has become so complex a term, it is practically meaningless. The feminist project becomes unpacking feminism, for ourselves and for the students we teach; the challenge is avoiding orthodoxy on all sides, on finding a way to live with ambiguity, day to day. How

do we deal with art and memory?

Feminism is an "ism", a grid -- a way of looking at the world. And feminism is a plurality — feminismsssss

Re: the grid: our culture is enamoured of dualities; polarization is popular ...

...therefore ambiguity is an asset.

We then discussed the positive aspects of artefacts of mainstream culture, from the book *The DaVinci Code* to Oprah, questioning whether they represent a destructive assimilation of feminisms into patriarchal systems, or if they indicate positive cultural change:

young women nowadays expect the right to have a career in the same way that women in the 60s expect the right to access to birth control;

female professors of today are treated much more seriously by male students than female professors of the 70s;

there's a thing called "Power Camp" for women in their teens, led by women in their twenties....

And yet, a thirteen year old girl cannot simply emulate her hero, if he happens to be Jack Kerouac; her experiences "*On The Road*" will still be gendered with danger.

Even so, teens are open to the realization that a lot of people with a lot of money and power see them as a markets, not people; they welcome learning that pop-culture society only recognizes sexual urges, not other ones (spiritual, intellectual...)

And nowadays, boys in high-school have

fewer opportunities than girls; it's hard for them like it was hard for us...

...therefore, feminist theory is good for all, not just girls. All children are vulnerable and need encouragement.

Good teachers start by trying to show students what their (the teacher's and the students') assumptions are, which is often enough to get them to consider the implications -- socially, spiritually

which gets us back to the erotic life force of the world -- can we learn to "be more and do less"?

This is where my notes begin to drop off... we discussed the frustrations of publishing, or rather, not publishing, and the ways that sharing our work with our writing groups compares to the tradition of Publish and Tour.

Soon the hotel staff arrived with the coffee-break supplies which we nibbled with gratitude — though the chocolate, strawberries and grapes seemed more apropos to the delayed erotics session....