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**Reading at Feminist Bookstores:**

**Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network**

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**Reading at Feminist Bookstores:  
Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network**

by

**Kristen Amber Hogan, B.A.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

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**Reading at Feminist Bookstores:**  
**Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network**

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Kristen Amber Hogan, Ph.D.  
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This dissertation explores how feminist bookstores have built and are building communities through and around print, the influence of feminist bookstores on the publishing industry, and the involvement of feminist bookstores in founding the fields of women's literature and women's studies. I introduce the concepts of the feminist literary sphere, to describe feminist bookstores as spaces of public discussion and activism made possible by texts, and the feminist shelf, to articulate a new way of reading women's texts through recognition of their contexts in interdisciplinary feminist literatures collected on the shelves of feminist bookstores. To develop this analysis of feminist bookstore activism and its invitation to change our reading practices, I focus on archival and oral history research of the Feminist Bookstore Network and four feminist bookstores: New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts; In Other Words in Portland, Oregon; Womanbooks in New York, New York; Old Wives' Tales in San Francisco, California. The lives of these feminist bookstores, supplemented with stories and moments from other histories, provide a sample of the foundations and innovations of the feminist bookstore movement.

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## **Introduction**

### **Why Feminist Bookstores Matter**

In 1981, the internationally distributed, San Francisco, California, based *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* (later renamed the *Feminist Bookstore News*) had for five years been connecting women working in feminist bookstores. That year, *Newsletter* editor Carol Seajay sought help from other feminist bookwomen with a situation she watched from her own feminist bookstore, Old Wives' Tales (San Francisco, 1976-1995), co-founded with Paula Wallace:

FREAKING OUT DEPT. Four women walked into the store in the same week and said things like, 'oh, what a wonderful store this is. I'm so glad I found it. You seem to be interested in exactly the same kinds of books I am.' without ever getting it that we aren't a STORE, we're a manifestation of a MOVEMENT. [...]

I truly believe that these women DIDN'T KNOW that the connection IS a feminist politic. [...] If anyone has any experience/ideas for connecting to these women and communicating to them that this is a MOVEMENT, not a retail experience, I'd be grateful (so would our movement), reach for that postcard. ...

It's not the ones that mention it to me (THEM I can talk to), that worry me, but rather the ones that are coming in and not saying one word about it. ... Carol<sup>1</sup>

Feminist bookstores emerged from the feminist movements begun in the 1960s, and feminist activists envisioned and founded these bookstores as spaces that would support and work for the larger feminist movements. The explosion of institutions developed by women in the 1960s-1980s changed the face of public culture: abortion services, publishing houses, health centers, journals, academic women's studies programs and

classes, domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, archives, feminist federal credit unions, consciousness raising groups and counseling centers, performance troupes and spaces, women's coffee houses and restaurants, employment services, women's buildings, feminist bookstores, and others. As an important thread in the far-reaching fabric of various feminist movements, feminist bookstores provided central locations and a unique form for developing feminist resources, literatures, and vocabularies.

Feminist bookstores are significant public spaces of the feminist movement, marking out the geographic location of feminist thought and action. The force of the physical space of these collections of books and resources has generated numbers of maps of feminist bookstore sites and has resulted in a recurring oral and written history trope of the feminist bookstore pilgrimage. Susan Post of the Common Woman Bookstore Collective, now BookWoman, explains that the Common Woman Bookstore began through this visiting: "Well, the story I know is, Nancy Lee [Marquis] and Cynthia [Roberts] went on a road trip the summer of '74 I guess, or '75, I'm not sure how long [the collective] met before I came in, but they visited women's bookstores in other parts of the country, and they said we should have one, so they had a call for a meeting to start a bookstore. So, that's the story I have taken as the truth."<sup>2</sup> The repetition of this trope of ritual visitation and pilgrimage emphasizes the feeling that feminist bookstores are sacred places. Feminists have dreamt of (and many women have embarked on) road trips to as many feminist bookstores as we know of; we seek out the feminist bookstores in places we travel to. Every time I work at BookWoman, women visiting Austin come in, saying

they needed to find the feminist bookstore. Sue Burns, current manager of In Other Words in Portland and former worker at BookWoman, described her pilgrimage to me:

So, I was a freshman in college, and I had elected to take [an] English class that was specifically women writers. And, my teacher was a radical feminist, and very amazing, and she required as part of our course to go to the women's bookstore in New Haven. And I completely fell in love with Golden Threads, which is no longer there. And a few years, two or three years after that, I took a summer and went to as many women's bookstores as I could in the country. Some people travel around going to national monuments or things like Graceland, and I went to every women's bookstore I could find. [...] The [FBN] magazine had a list [of feminist bookstores] in it that functioned as my map.<sup>3</sup>

Twentieth-century feminist bookstores offered on an unprecedented scale public, mappable feminist literary spaces. They offered a geographical positioning for feminism in the U.S. and elsewhere. This compulsion to map, to visit, at once emphasizes the culture of the feminist bookstore and the significance of the public and visible women's literary space. On the following page I offer my own map of the feminist bookstores still open in the U.S. today, and I indicate in italics the bookstores I have visited (some now closed) during my work on this dissertation. The map also includes one feminist bookstore each in Canada and Mexico, gesturing towards the presence of feminist bookstores in those countries and inviting further study.

The counterparts of my map, those maps that precede it, document the steady growth of feminist bookstores from 1970 until 1998, making the 20 bookstores my map

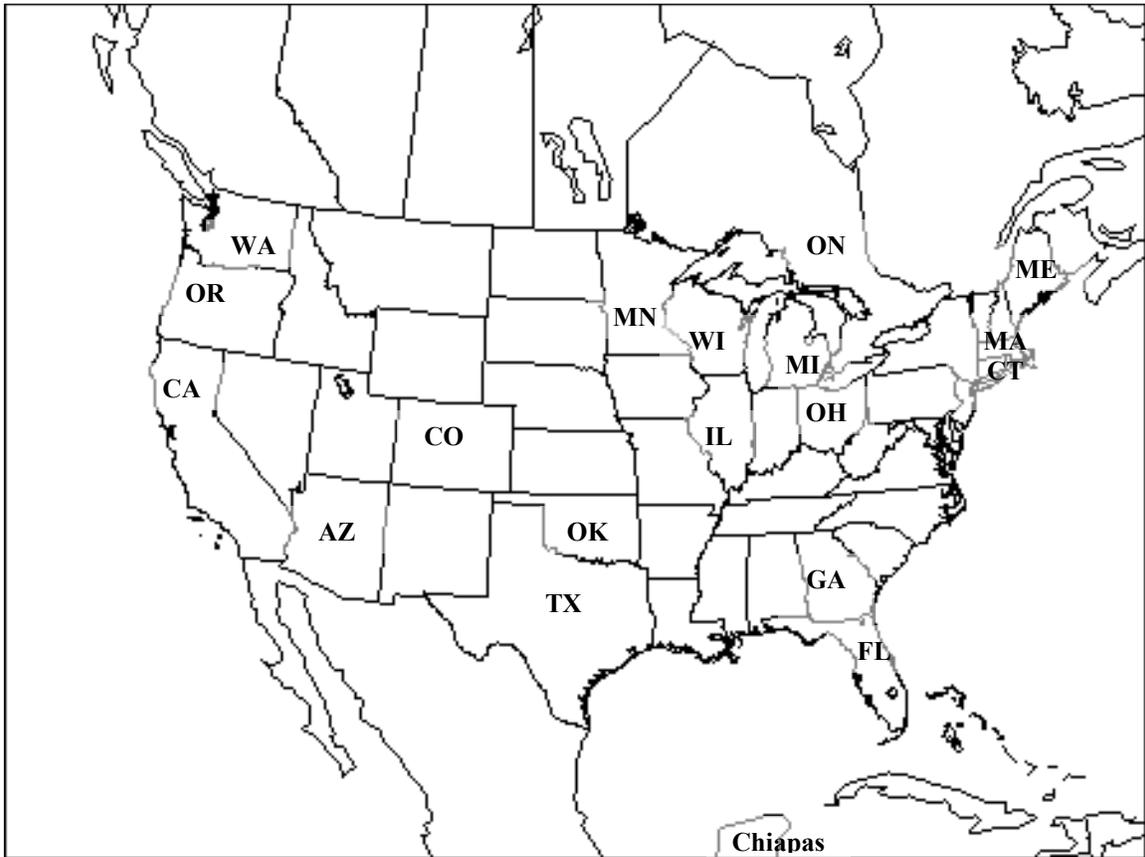


Figure 1: 2005 Map of U.S. States with Feminist Bookstores

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| AZ: Antigone, Tuscon  | MN: Amazon Bookstore Cooperative, Minneapolis; Minnesota Women's Press Bookstore, St. Paul  |
| CA: <i>Change Makers, Oakland; (Herland, Santa Cruz – closed)</i> | OH: Greater Cincinnati Women's Resource Center, formerly Crazy Ladies Bookstore, Cincinnati |
| CO: Word Is Out: Boulder  | OK: Herland Sister Resources, Oklahoma City   |
| CT: Bloodroot Restaurant & Bookstore, Bridgeport                  | OR: <i>In Other Words, Portland; Mother Kali's, Eugene</i>                                  |
| DC: <i>(Sisterspace &amp; Books, Washington, D.C. – closed)</i>   | TX: <i>BookWoman, Austin</i>  |
| FL: Wild Iris, Gainesville  | WA: New Woman Books, Kent   |
| GA: <i>Charis Books &amp; More, Atlanta</i>                       | WI: <i>A Room of One's Own, Madison; Broad Vocabulary, Milwaukee</i>                        |
| IL: Women & Children First, Chicago                               |   |
| MA: <i>Center for New Words, Cambridge</i>                        |   |
| ME: Artistic Amazon, Cape Neddick                                 |   |
| MI: Sweet Violets, Marquette*                                     |   |

*Representative feminist bookstores in Canada and Mexico:*

- ON: *Toronto Women's Bookstore, Toronto*  
 Chiapas: La Casa de la Luna Creciente, San Cristobal de las Casas

*Italics indicate feminist bookstores I've visited during the course of this project. I only list closed feminist bookstores when I have visited them; the entire list is too expansive to include here. Lists may not be inclusive. Compiled 16 October 2005.*

\*Sweet Violets closed in February, 2006, after the completion of this dissertation.

locates seem comparatively few. A list made up by Womanbooks “as an aid to traveling women” in October, 1980, lists 68 feminist bookstores in the U.S. and eight more in Canada.<sup>4</sup> In 1985, Lucille Pauline Frey, then co-owner of the Alaska Women’s Bookstore, drove to 45 feminist bookstores on a list developed by Womansplace Bookstore in Tempe, Arizona, as well as to two that were not on the list. Frey included a list of her stops and a map of her driving route in her women’s studies dissertation, *One Woman, One Women’s Bookstore: Case Study and Comments on the Place of a Women’s Bookstore in a Community*.<sup>5</sup> In 1994, Carol Seajay counted 124 feminist bookstores in the U.S., documenting at that time an increase of “26 new stores in 13 months.”<sup>6</sup> In 24 years, the feminist bookstore movement had staked out a substantial amount of public floor space for feminism in the U.S.

I started working at BookWoman in Austin, Texas, in 1998. That year the *Feminist Bookstores’ Catalog*, the “magazine” Sue Burns (who trained me to work at the bookstore) used to travel the country, listed 97 feminist bookstores in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> The *Catalog* editors, Carol Seajay and Lisa McGowan, reminded readers of the important ground this number represented: “With your active support, feminist bookstores and feminist publishers will keep focusing attention on women’s voices that won’t get mainstream attention – until we’ve given their work a place to stand.”<sup>8</sup> The place to stand began to crumble; announcements of closures seemed to pile in by phone and mail. In 1999, I made and distributed bookmarks that documented the loss for BookWoman readers: “34 Feminist Bookstores across the U.S. CLOSED last year. BookWoman could be next.” A series of public calls attended the slipping numbers of bookstores in

following years as feminist bookstores more acutely felt the decline of independent bookstores at large. In 2000, the Southeastern lesbian writers' conference Womonwrites developed and Charis feminist bookstore in Atlanta printed and distributed a flyer titled, "WOMEN IN PRINT MOVEMENT: WRITING WHAT IS WRONG." The flyer announced, "The women-in-print movement, catalyst of independent and feminist thought, is becoming a casualty of corporate capitalism." First on its list of evidence: "Local feminist and independent bookstores are going under."<sup>9</sup> University of Alabama, Huntsville, professor Rose Norman followed in 2001, taking the longtime Feminist Bookstore Network slogan as a title for her National Women's Studies Association newsletter article: "Support Your Feminist Bookseller: She Supports You!" Documenting the decline, Norman writes, "From 1999 to 2000, one-third of the country's feminist bookstores closed for good."<sup>10</sup> The Minnesota Women's Press interviewed Amazon feminist bookstore's Barb Wieser for a web article in 2002, "Book Warriors: Women's bookstores struggle for survival." That year, Wieser estimated, "About 35 active feminist bookstores are left."<sup>11</sup> And 2003 saw the publication of two articles on feminist bookstores: *Bitch* magazine published "Pushed to the Margins: The Slow Death and Possible Rebirth of the Feminist Bookstore";<sup>12</sup> and *Off Our Backs* published "End of an Era: Will the Feminist Bookstore Soon Be a Thing of the Past?"<sup>13</sup> This litany of near-eulogies suggested feminist bookstores would soon be extinct.

In the midst of both continuing urgent calls to "support your feminist bookstore" because "she supports you" and ongoing feminist bookstore cultural and political projects, I suggest a new view of the state of feminist bookstores is in order. The claim

that bookstores might “soon be a thing of the past” or the alternative claim, made in a recent NWSA program, that a city has a number of “feminist bookstores” (when it only has one), both stem from a dichotomous approach to historical, and particularly feminist, narratives: either feminist bookstores exist in the past or they exist in the present. My dissertation documents the feminist bookstore movement with an activist approach to preserving and exploring feminist bookstore history while connecting this history with the ongoing work of feminist bookstores. This connection of feminist history from the 1970s with contemporary feminist projects rejects a disconnection of historical narrative from contemporary experience. Instead, this dual narrative develops a new way of articulating and reading feminist history as present, a reading practice that might change contemporary narratives of feminist activism and practice.

Following the urgency of Carol’s “FREAKING OUT DEPT.,” my dissertation identifies feminist bookstores as part of a larger feminist “MOVEMENT” in opposition to the contemporary bookstore “retail experience.”<sup>14</sup> The narratives of pilgrimage, the personal maps of feminist bookstores, document individual feminists’ recognitions of the feminist bookstores as vital movement spaces. Throughout this dissertation, I make reference to three movements: the feminist movement, the women in print movement, and the feminist bookstore movement. In the case of the feminist movement, I sometimes use and always recognize the plural, feminist movements, to acknowledge that no one set of priorities defines a unified feminist movement. None of these three movements is separate from the others. The feminist movement resurfaced with a force in the late 1960s, not separate from previous feminist activism.<sup>15</sup> The women in print movement is

the common designation for presses, publishers, book and magazine distributors, and bookstores within the feminist movement.<sup>16</sup> While some social movement theorists claim a distinction between cultural and political movements, I follow in the tradition of feminist and queer historians and critics who identify cultural work as political.<sup>17</sup> My chapters demonstrate how feminist bookstores' cultural work is deliberately political. Some of my narrators have referred to the activism of feminist bookstores as the feminist bookstore movement,<sup>18</sup> and I follow them in identifying it as a movement in order to emphasize both the size of the feminist bookstore population and the considerable political-cultural work accomplished by these bookstores. The feminist bookstores uniquely use space, publications, and literary activism to work for feminism. As a result of their unified method of activism, their connection through an established network, and their transnational constituency, feminist bookstores emerged as an independent movement within feminism.

In 1970, the first feminist bookstore opened in Oakland, California. ICI: A Woman's Place announced with its acronym the service of feminist bookstores to the feminist movement: information center incorporate. Feminist bookstores identified as information centers for women and for feminisms, providing a robust collection of resources: shelves of theory, history, novels, and activist pamphlets by and for women; bulletin boards with fliers announcing community happenings, housing projects, classes, and services; full newsletters of bookstore events including music, workshops, slide shows, films, readings, meetings, performances, and signings; bibliographies on subject lists ranging from coming out to divorce; and knowledgeable bookwomen who connected

women with further information about abortion, single motherhood, care for lesbians with cancer, and getting published. In 1976 at the first Women in Print Conference, the feminist bookwomen delegated two women, Carol Seajay and Andre, to produce a newsletter to share ideas and sustain energy for the growing movement of feminist bookstores. Carol went on to coordinate both the publication and its national network, the Feminist Bookstore Network, until 2000. Andre (who used no last name) worked at Rising Woman Books, the feminist bookstore in Santa Rosa, which housed the printing press used for the *Newsletter* in its beginnings. The *Newsletter* (later renamed the *Feminist Bookstore News*) documented discussions among feminist bookwomen about the work of feminist bookstores and these, along with bookstore archives and oral histories, articulate the feminist bookstore movement as coordinated public spaces for feminist activism, resources, and research. These spaces are at the center of feminism, women's studies, and women's literature.

Feminist bookstores must be seen as part of the feminist movement as well as part of a history of political literary spaces in order to understand the full contribution of feminist bookstores to feminism and women's literature. Feminist bookstores draw on a lengthy legacy of U.S. literary public spheres, suggesting a close correlation between spaces of textual access and political movements. This legacy includes women's turn of the century reading circles that produced and read literature, anti-slavery reading rooms, labor libraries, African American bookstores, Native American bookstores, and Chicano bookstores. Here I briefly trace this legacy in order to place feminist bookstores within an ongoing history of public literary spaces, and with a particular focus on women's public

literary spaces. An awareness of this history describes the centrality of such spaces to the development of an informed and political, even activist, readership, and urgently suggests that contemporary readers must attend to their own spaces of book production and access.

In the early 1800s, the Boston Gleaning Circle, a women's reading and speaking group, addressed women's role in society both in their readings and in their creation of the group as a semi-public space for women's education. Mary Kelley writes, "[W]hen the Gleaners convened their meetings in the first decade of the nineteenth century, they responded to those who sought to limit them to 'stockings' and 'puddings' with a question that was entirely rhetorical—'Is not this very wrong?' It surely was, at least for women who were remapping a geography of gender based on a narrowly defined domesticity." Through the work of the reading circle, Kelley notes, the Gleaners "were beginning to define themselves as makers of public opinion."<sup>19</sup> Kelley's history contextualizes the Gleaners as part of a number of women's reading circles that existed both in connection with and independent of "female academies." Independent reading circles generated texts, discussions, and even libraries. The Ladies' Social Circle of Templeton, Massachusetts, issued a catalogue of their library in 1857. Kelley describes the library based on that catalogue: "Browsing her circle's library shelves, a member could choose from among, for example, the memoirs of Margaret Fuller, Mary Lyon, Sarah Judson, and Hannah More. She could travel throughout the United States or abroad with Catharine Sedgwick, Harriet Martineau, Caroline Kirkland, and Fredrika Bremer. [...] The library was stocked with the novels of Sedgwick, Kirkland, Caroline Howard Gilman, Susan Warner, Lydia Maria Child, Caroline Hentz, and Harriet Beecher Stowe";

Kelley's list continues with references to "Domestic Relations and Duties" and "Sermons, and Other Religious Works."<sup>20</sup> The Ladies' Social Circle's catalogue, and Mary Kelley's extensive quoting from it indicates the importance of these books by (white) women collected together.

Marking an even earlier instance of women's public literary space, Kelley connects the women's reading circles of the 1800s with their predecessor Milcah Martha Moore of the Delaware Valley in the mid-1700s. Moore generated an exchange of poetry and prose between friends: "Moore copied these compositions into 'Martha Moore's Book,' as she titled a volume that documented a literary culture based on the collective practices of reading and writing."<sup>21</sup> In fact, Moore collected and circulated a series of such manuscripts, mostly by women, generating a semi-public (because circulated only among friends) library of women's work.<sup>22</sup> Moore's documentation, collection, and circulation of these works was, in part, a political act of providing evidence of a women's literature. Catherine La Courreye Blecki writes of Moore's transcription of women's work, "The organization of the entries reveals her purpose of preserving the work of three women writers who were significant in their time, but who are lost or unknown to most modern readers: Susana Wright, Hannah Griffiths, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson."<sup>23</sup> And, as with the Gleaners, the collection of the work frames a reading of the work: "Her juxtaposition of entries in some places in the manuscript suggests her desire to provoke discussion over the leading issues of the day: the role of women and, most typically for America in the 1760s and 1770s, the issue of peace and war."<sup>24</sup> For these political

literary gatherings, as for feminist bookstores, the organization of the collection contributes to its meaning.

In the mid-1800s, the work of women creating public literary space continued in service of the abolition movement. Harriet Jacobs, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, briefly recounts her and her brother William's 1849 co-founding of an anti-slavery reading room: "He thought of opening an anti-slavery reading room in Rochester, and combining it with the sale of some books and stationery; and he wanted me to unite with him. We tried it, but it was not successful. We found warm anti-slavery friends there, but the feeling was not general enough to support such an establishment."<sup>25</sup> Here Jacobs deliberately documents in her memoir a shift from a semi-public literary space to a public literary activist space supported by sales. She emphasizes the space as a place to meet and connect with "warm anti-slavery friends," and notes the failure of the reading room and bookstore as a failure of the surrounding community to act against slavery, as indicated by the lack of "general" feeling in support of "such an establishment."

If circles like the Gleaners focused on collecting together a white women's literature and anti-slavery reading rooms focused on collecting political literature focused on discussions of race and gender, Black women's literary societies clearly articulated a theory of collecting Black literature, and particularly Black women's literature, as a means to achieving political and social power. In her study of African American literary societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Elizabeth McHenry explains the centrality of public collections of literature to Victoria Earle Matthews' 1895 call to African American women to become literary activists. At the First Congress of Colored Women, Matthews

warned, “Unless earnest and systematic effort be made to procure and preserve for the transmission to our successors the records, books and various publications already produced by us, not only will the sturdy pioneers who paved the way and laid the foundation of our Race Literature, be robbed of their just due, but an irretrievable wrong will be inflicted upon the generations that shall come after us.”<sup>26</sup> African American women’s clubs took up this call, McHenry explains, in part by “establishing physical institutions such as libraries and reading rooms that would encourage and sustain their own literary interests and that of their communities.”<sup>27</sup> These libraries, then, formed a structure to which other works and readers could refer in making sense of a body of texts.<sup>28</sup> McHenry ultimately traces the work of these and other early collections to a contemporary bookstore project: “A recognition of the importance of black bookstores and their role in the dissemination of books to black readers has been one sign of the rising awareness of publishers of the best ways to market books to black readers.”<sup>29</sup> This final link in McHenry’s book marks her recognition of the early public literary space as a precursor to modern identity-based or political bookstores.

As Elizabeth McHenry documents, not only women utilized public literary space, but I suggest that public literary space is particularly vital to and has a unique history for women. Ongoing literature about public literary spaces has yet to acknowledge a history of such spaces and the ongoing work of feminist bookstores, and this introduction thus both underscores the need for and makes a claim to the place of feminist bookstores at the center of such a history.<sup>30</sup> The collection within feminist bookstores generates a space for identity formation: feminist bookstores offer, in the ideal, a space where identities can

overlap on and off shelves. The shelves claim to offer the equivalent of a combination including both Black women's club libraries and white women's reading circle libraries. Janet Romero, events coordinator at Toronto Women's Bookstore, explains, "It's hard to find a space that fully encompasses all of you, it's always about choosing which identity you want to portray. I think that's what's great about here [the Toronto Women's Bookstore], I could come in here and be all of me and not have to tone down my feminism because it wouldn't be received in the right way or not talk of being queer because people would respond negatively to it."<sup>31</sup> Austin author Sharon Bridgforth shares Janet's experience of the feminist bookstore as a space supportive of interwoven identities: "The feminist bookstore is the specific place that I fit."<sup>32</sup> The collective force of a broadly-defined women's literature allows for the articulation of complex identities. As the catalogs and calls for collection in the history of public literary spaces indicate, the context the collection provides for its books plays a part in such identity formation. Rather than finding these books dispersed in libraries or general bookstores, the feminist collection presents a range of women's texts and argues for a diverse definition of women's literature and selves. Thus, even in the unlikely event that general bookstores begin to carry the full stock of feminist bookstores, the space of the feminist bookstore remains irreplaceable.

Finally, feminist bookstores' history interweaves with and narrates transnational feminist movements. While bookstores on various continents have not been formally joined, the fact that there have been self-identified, locally developed feminist bookstores focusing on variously defined women's issues on every populated continent indicates that

the structural form of the feminist bookstore offers something incomparable, vital, and inspiring to various feminist movements. Just as my previous brief history recounts the repeated use of the public literary space, the following history recounts the repeated and independent development of feminist bookstores transnationally. The women of Streelekha, the feminist “book place” in Bangalore, Karnataka, India, explained the origins of the book place: “It was feminist research that challenged the frameworks of mainstream research which always reflected societal assumptions and expectations about women. And this new awakening brought about through the written word, had to spread. We needed a place to do it from. That is why the bookplace – Streelekha – came into being, to spread the new body of knowledge created by feminist scholarship.”<sup>33</sup> Streelekha’s creation narrative, and its subsequent choice of book sections and projects, indicates its generation out of, connection with, and service to a local and even national feminism.<sup>34</sup>

I suggest that feminism in many ways relies on the public space and the literary public sphere of the feminist bookstore. The following overview of articles in the *Feminist Bookstore News* profiling feminist bookstores around the world tracks the widespread work of feminist bookstores, documenting and creating a narrative of the transnational reach of the feminist bookstore movement. The *Feminist Bookstore News* was distributed to nearly all of the U.S. feminist bookstores and to a majority of international feminist bookstores. This transnational distribution enabled these profiles of feminist bookstores to both produce and document connections between and histories of feminist bookstores across national boundaries. The articles engage with and record

differences in focus between feminist bookstores and mark variations in feminisms and feminist struggles. This overview provides a context for the body of my dissertation, which examines in detail U.S. feminist bookstores as one part of this movement. Thus, the bookstores I follow in the body of my dissertation provide a view of one national incarnation of a vital and energetic transnational feminist movement based around the production, distribution, and discussion of women's literature broadly defined.

### **Mapping a Transnational Movement**

*Narigrantha Prabantana, Ms. Crayonhouse, Fembooks, Binti Legacy*

*Feminist Bookstore News* coverage of international feminist bookstores from 1988 through 1999 described feminist bookstores as institutions central to building feminist movements, identified for a U.S. readership exciting international projects, and coordinated and modeled exchanges between bookstores. In the process, these articles foreground several feminist bookstore roles that reappear in my readings of U.S. feminist bookstores. This overview, then, introduces readers to a transnational context for U.S. feminist bookstores, to a vocabulary through which to understand feminist bookstore activism, and to the central role played by the *Feminist Bookstore News* in networking bookstore projects.

Narigrantha Prabantana, the self-identified feminist bookstore of Bangladesh, opened on December 9, 1989, the “death anniversary of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, the famous feminist philosopher, writer and social reformer of Bangladesh.”<sup>35</sup> The bookstore is still open and conducting a website in addition to their bookstore, restaurant, and “women’s space.” In 1993, Farida Akther and the Narigrantha Prabantana

Collective wrote a report for the *Feminist Bookstore News* on their “five-day programme and exhibition to celebrate 100 years of Bengali women as the (Bengali) century ended and the new year, 1400, began.”<sup>36</sup> Farida Akther’s article describes the work of Narigrantha Prabartana as preserving a cultural history; the article itself marks an instance of such documentation and positions the feminist bookstore as public archive. Akther writes the theme of the program both in Bengali and in English: “Sangrame Nirmane Banglar Narir Ekshaw Bochar,” or “Living Through Our Struggles and Reconstructing New Realities: One Hundred Years of Bengali Women.”<sup>37</sup> During the celebration, the bookstore carefully included “representatives from the different cultural communities” of Bangladesh: “We listened to Chakma women from Rangamanti, Garos from Mymensingh and Santhals from Rajshahi. They gave us tremendous insight into their lives as we the Bengalees gave them.”<sup>38</sup> Seventy of these women shared “autobiographical presentations” in an “attempt to reconstruct the history of women’s struggle orally.” And in an effort to both collect and make widely available women’s narratives, “Narigrantha Prabartana will eventually publish these stories in a book form.”<sup>39</sup> Here the bookstore combines both oral and written forms of women’s history. The website identifies the sale of saris at the bookstore as “a deliberate strategy to promote feminist books” located nearby, while acknowledging, “Printed media such as books and pamphlets are powerful but have their own limitation. [...] We constantly strive to reach women who cannot read or write.”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the event led Farida Akther to write,

What emerged from the oral narrative and through follow up discussion is that there is nothing called abstract, ahistorical, decontextualized history of women. The struggles of women have varied local and concrete forms: they were historically and socially determined according to the nature of the localized struggle. There are significant experiential and existential differences among women coming from different class and culture. The same idea had different effect and manifested differently in different historical conditions.<sup>41</sup>

This analysis reminds feminist bookwomen reading Akther's *News* article of the distinct differences in feminist bookstore work internationally as well as of the differences among women within national boundaries. Sections and titles in Narigrantha Prabartana's virtual bookstore indicate the specific issues facing women in Dhaka and throughout Bangladesh: Population Control (including titles *Depopulating Bangladesh* by Farida Akther; *Faces or Coercion Sterilization Tearing Apart Organs* by UBINIG; *Resisting Norplant* by Farida Akther; *RU 486, Misconceptions, Myths and Morals* by Renate Klein, Janice G. Raymond, and Lynette J. Dumble, and published by Narigrantha Prabartana; and *Violence of Population Control* by UBINIG), Rural Women (including titles *Indigenous Abortion Practitioners in Rural Bangladesh* by Shamima Islam; *Women and Trees* by Farida Akther; *Women and Work in a Bangladesh Village* by Habiba Zaman; and UBINIG's three reports on traffic in women and children), and Other Subjects (including titles *Women and Children of Bangladesh as Experimental Animals* by UBINIG; *Destroying Our Children's Brains with Lead Pollution* by Dr. Naila Z. Khan; *Declaration of Comilla: Unite Globally Against Dehumanizing Technologies* by

UBINIG; the *People's Perspectives Collection*; and *Poison Alert* by the South Asian Campaign for Toxics Free World). As these titles suggest, the bookstore takes on issues closely related to “development” as it affects women, and the bookstore is funded by a nonprofit umbrella and research program UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternatives).<sup>42</sup> Challenging “development” by producing a collection of national women’s work and a resource center for women, Narigrantha Prabartana prioritizes women’s voices and uses their shelves to argue both for the importance of Bengali women’s writing and for the significance of the feminist bookstore as a public space: “We are proud that there are many women’s [sic] writers in Bangladesh. A lot of women have written in different subjects. Such a collection of books gives us a[n] impressive picture of women’s involvement in a variety of ways.”<sup>43</sup> This sense of a collection of books making an argument for a women’s literature appears common to the feminist bookstore movement at large while the literatures differ on a local level, as Farida Akther suggests.

Crayonhouse in Tokyo started as a children’s bookstore in 1976, and later added Ms. Crayonhouse, the feminist bookstore on Crayonhouse’s third floor. The bookstore is still open and has a branch in Osaka.<sup>44</sup> In 1997, New Words (the Cambridge, Massachusetts, feminist bookstore, 1974-present) collective member Jean MacRae visited Ms. Crayonhouse and wrote an article about her visit for the *Feminist Bookstore News*. She describes the genesis of her visit: “My friends and I were warmly greeted by Keiko Ochiai, the founder and owner of Crayonhouse, and several staff members. I had met Ochiaisan once before when she visited the United States and spent several hours looking

around New Words and interviewing me and the other Wordies for an article she was writing on the women's movement in the United States."<sup>45</sup> Invested in exploring a transnational feminist awareness, Keiko Ochiai functions as both a cultural and textual translator for Ms. Crayonhouse's readers: "In addition to keeping the bookstores going, she writes novels, essays, articles and screenplays, and publishes two children's magazines. In her spare time, she translates books by women from English into Japanese."<sup>46</sup> Jean MacRae's analysis of the store was limited by her inability to read Japanese, but she explains, "I was able to see books by some familiar authors, Barbara Kingsolver for example, which had been translated into Japanese. Fiction and psychology were particularly strong sections and many of the other sections were similar to ours in the United States. A major exception was while 'lesbian fiction' and 'lesbian and gay politics' are two of New Words' biggest sections, only a handful of books on lesbian issues have been published in Japan."<sup>47</sup> While MacRae's emphasis appears chiefly on similarities between Ms. Crayonhouse and New Words or other U.S. feminist bookstores, even noting that despite her being "virtually illiterate in Japanese, the store was immediately recognizable as a women's bookstore," her narrative represents Ms. Crayonhouse as a bookstore rooted in promoting a Japanese feminist identity. Keiko Ochiai, for example, has international recognition as an important public figure speaking out on women's issues in Japan, even arriving at New Words with a "State Department Interpreter." Jean MacRae explains, "Her work often focuses on violence against women, sexual harassment and children's welfare. Just before my trip to Japan, a *Boston Globe* article on the rape of the young Okinawan woman by American servicemen included

extensive quotes from Ochiai-san about social attitudes towards rape in Japan.”<sup>48</sup> One central focus of the bookstore is helping women through employment, so the four-story multi-faceted complex of children’s bookstore, feminist bookstore, restaurant, and organic food market “employs about 60 women.”<sup>49</sup> These women translate into Japanese columns written for Ms. Crayonhouse’s newsletter *Women’s Eye* by women in the U.S. After visiting New Words, Keiko Ochiai invited collective members to “write on recent activities at the bookstore and short descriptions of 10-12 recommended new books. [...] Ochiai-san explained that while some readers of ‘Women’s Eye’ would be interested in reading the English books reviewed there, she felt many readers would simply like to know what kinds of books by women are being published and read in the United States.” Feminist bookstores here function as public spaces where feminists can find each other and exchange information about their movements. Keiko Ochiai’s invitation of the New Words columns indicates her interest in representing and interacting with a different national collection of women’s literature: Jean MacRae wrote about Susan M. Love’s *Dr. Susan Love’s Breast Book*, Alison Bechdel’s *Unnatural Dykes to Watch Out For*, Karen Kahn’s *Frontline Feminism, 1975-1995: Essays from Sojourner’s First 20 Years*, Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*, and Florence Ladd’s *Sarah’s Psalm*, covering health, lesbian politics, feminist publishing history, and fiction from U.S. feminist bookstore shelves. The *Feminist Bookstore News* article on Ms. Crayonhouse alludes to political attention to U.S. occupation and violence in Japan as well as a production of Japanese women’s literature through both *Women’s Eye* and Keiko Ochiai’s own publishing efforts. The *Feminist Bookstore News* identifies the importance of feminist bookstores

and feminist bookstore publications as spaces for transnational exchange between feminisms.

In Taiwan, Fembooks has also focused on building a women's literature, here by publishing, producing, and recovering a women's literature in Chinese. Fembooks is a project of its umbrella organization, the Awakening Foundation, started in Taiwan in 1982 and self-identified as "the first women's movement organization in Taiwan." The Foundation started by publishing the magazine *Awakening* "at a time when such foundations were banned under martial law,"<sup>50</sup> then after the lifting of martial law in 1987, the Foundation started Fembooks in April 1994.<sup>51</sup> Their website introduction announces, "As the cultural dimension of the women's movement, fembooks has created a legacy for women and all the people who believe in women's creativity and gender equality."<sup>52</sup> The preservation and promotion of this legacy takes place through publishing, stocking books, and holding classes. Publication and author support plays a central role in Fembooks stock since distribution from outside the country is difficult and since Fembooks has distinctly defined its role in part as helping to produce a Taiwanese women's literature. Beth Morgan noted in 1994, "Bestsellers at Fem Books [sic] include a history of the women's movement in Taiwan (written by founding members of Awakening), feminist cultural criticism from foremost women writers in Taiwan, periodicals from various women's groups, and lesbian journals!"<sup>53</sup> The Awakening Foundation, then, in connection with Fembooks, produces histories of Taiwan's women's movement in addition to collecting and recovering existing texts. Fembooks also hosts two lecture series a year. One of these is a monthly lecture series for women writers "in

which authors talk about their work and their experiences as women,”<sup>54</sup> thus fostering public discussion and support of aspiring women writers. This support within the bookstore as a public space has influenced mainstream reception of these women writers as well: “The effect of Fem Books [sic] on local book culture has been so strongly felt that even mainstream bookstores are now trying to stock some women authors.”<sup>55</sup> These authors, in turn, appreciate the work of Fembooks, for example, one book listed in the top thirty bestsellers of Fembooks’ first year has been marketed by its mainstream publisher with that accomplishment on the cover, and the author gives all of her royalties to the Awakening Foundation.”<sup>56</sup> While Fembooks’ stock proves a women’s literature and its sales prove a readership for that literature that has, in turn, changed the surrounding literary landscape, the work of Fembooks is not simply to have women’s books stocked in every bookstore. The space of the bookstore offers essential crossover space for discussion and activism surrounding women’s literature. During their first year, Fembooks began holding ongoing classes for “women scholars, professors, activists and lawyers” to discuss women’s issues. “The first summer 20-30 women met weekly to discuss women writers and women’s culture and literature. [...] For activists, the classes offer a chance to participate in theoretical debates and to take the information back to their particular working groups. The classes also remind academics to ground their work in the actual practices of women doing activist work, so that their theory can be useful on the street.”<sup>57</sup> This connection of activism, theory, and public discussion in literary space marks the unique value of the feminist bookstore to local and national feminist activism and theory and connections between the two. Fembooks also takes part in transnational

feminist bookstore and feminist movements by relying “on FBN for connection, to learn about other stores’ experiences and for the encouragement that that connection and support brings. Fem Books’ staff (and friends) use FBN’s list of feminist bookstores to make contacts with other feminist booksellers when they travel.”<sup>58</sup> The public space of feminist bookstores useful on a local and national level is also useful on a international level as feminists connect as feminist bookwomen through the transnational conversation of the *Newsletter*.

The Kenyan feminist bookstore, Binti Legacy, still open in Nairobi, utilizes its public presence as distributor of women’s texts and information. The store includes the feminist bookstore standard bulletin boards with announcements for women, and stocks sections including “psychological and personal development; relationships; pregnancy, parenting and childcare; yoga and meditation; law and human rights; political activism; humor; poetry and drama; gardening, home improvement and cookery; family life; health; self-image and beauty; character building; business and careers; religion; violence against women; and recovery.”<sup>59</sup> These titles mark women’s writing and participation in each of these subjects, and founder Aoko Midiwo-Odembo notes that these sections in addition to the young women’s books can offer young women a new vocabulary for their lives. Aoko Midiwo-Odembo explains, “We can make a tremendous difference in the lives of these young girls by showing them they have options.”<sup>60</sup> The bookstore is a highly visible public space; Carol Seajay writes in her report on the bookstore for the *Newsletter*, “In Nairobi ‘everyone’ knows that Binti is the place to get books for women. Women from out of town can ask anyone in the neighborhood, from cab drivers to

cobblers, where to find ‘that bookstore for women’ and get directions.”<sup>61</sup> In addition to serving local communities, the bookstore distributes their collections of women’s works regionally: “Whenever possible, Binti is becoming the East African distributor for publishers’ lines, thus earning a distributor’s discount on top of the normal bookstore discount and expanding their base of operations to distributing otherwise impossible-to-get titles to bookstores throughout East Africa.”<sup>62</sup> Binti also conducts programs distributing books to schools throughout Kenya, sending booklists out by mail, and traveling with a book mobile “to the neighboring cities of Kampala in Uganda and Arusha in Tanzania.”<sup>63</sup> During these trips, Binti draws on its book sections to support women in various areas and conducts its own version of “development,” led by Aoko Midiwo-Odembo who “has a Masters in Public Administration and Human Resource Management from Atlanta University in Georgia and a post-graduate certificate in Personnel Management from the Royal Institute of Personnel Administration in London.”<sup>64</sup> While Binti does stock development materials, they focus on “pamphlets and other materials that have been created by and for women in developing areas and are published by women, NGOs or other non-traditional publishers.” The connection of a range of women’s literature and a public space for women’s voices with the vocabulary of development challenges development proponents’ views of women’s roles. Carol Seajay explains how even titling the space with Binti, the Swahili word for “daughter, girl, or young woman,”<sup>65</sup> generates a necessary awareness of women’s lives that makes some uncomfortable: “Some people in the development community find the concept of a women’s bookstore difficult. ‘Why ‘binti?’—they ask, ‘Why just women?’”<sup>66</sup> Binti

Legacy's response, continuing as a public space built around supporting and distributing women's words, carries out what Women's WORLD (Women's World Organization for Rights, Literature and Development) author Meredith Tax, with supporting authors Marjoire Agosín, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ritu Menon, Nonotchka Rosca, and Mariella Sala, articulates in the organization's manifesta: "Cultural development—women's development as full human beings, ready to speak out and take their place in running society—is an essential part of remaking a world in which the dreadful imbalance between the rich and poor, strong and weak, men and women, humans and other species, is becoming a death sentence not only for millions of people, but for the earth itself."<sup>67</sup> Local TV and national and local papers covered Binti Legacy's opening, and Binti Legacy continues to attract "excellent coverage for its programs for women and children." As a mappable space of women's resources and voices, Binti Legacy challenges conventional definitions of development and provides texts to agencies as well as individuals to redefine the place of women in Nairobi and the surrounding region.<sup>68</sup>

The four bookstores I've discussed here just begin a discussion of feminist bookstores' transnational connections and work. Today feminist bookstores outside of the U.S. include Savannah Bay (1975-present, Utrecht) and Xantippe (1974-present, Amsterdam) in the Netherlands;<sup>69</sup> La Librería de Mujeres (1995-present, Buenos Aires), which has continued the work of former Buenos Aires feminist bookstore Saga;<sup>70</sup> the Feminist Bookshop (1974-present, Sydney) in Australia;<sup>71</sup> Toronto Women's Bookstore (1973-present) and Femmes de Parole/Mother Tongue Books (present, Ottawa) in

Canada;<sup>72</sup> Streelekha Feminist Bookplace (1985-present, Bangalore) in India;<sup>73</sup> and the Women's Bookshop (1989-present, Auckland), which continues the work of former New Zealand feminist bookstores and received the New Zealand Independent Bookshop of the Year award in 2005.<sup>74</sup> The fact that single feminist bookstores in a country or even a region sustain a feminist community with public space suggests that even if the U.S. had only one bookstore remaining, that bookstore could carry out important work. My map of feminist bookstores in the U.S. as a part of this transnational list of feminist bookstores indicates the widespread and continuing work of feminist bookstores. The *Feminist Bookstore News* articles about the bookstores mentioned in this overview identify the *News* as a central information source about feminist bookstores and as a space for creating transnational connections between feminist bookstores by researching and writing or soliciting articles, by calling for contributions to bookstores (like books to Streelekha's library, Kavya for Women), by marketing bookstore-produced literature or sidelines (like Binti Legacy's annual calendar), and by distributing the publication internationally. I also see this collection of references to transnational feminist bookstores as an invitation to further work. These *News* articles provide a strong textual basis for teaching and studying transnational formulations of feminism and women's literature, and further study of these bookstores will provide an essential narrative to the history of feminisms and national (or even transnational) literatures.

That the feminist bookstore form has been reproduced to carry out the goals of a range of feminisms indicates the broad usefulness and variety of instantiations of this institution for social change. The brief case studies above emphasize four essential

services feminist bookstores uniquely provide to their communities, each of which I examine in this dissertation in the context of U.S. feminist bookstores. Feminist bookstores provide publicly accessible spaces for discussion, resources, and a women's literature; this public articulation of women's literature can impact the surrounding culture by providing an obvious place to find spokeswomen for women's issues, by proving a market for women's literature, and by providing resources to women that change their lives. Feminist bookstores publicly model how to link academic and community based feminisms through public classes, readings, the backgrounds of women working at the bookstore, and the range of literature on the shelves. Scanning the shelves at feminist bookstores can introduce readers to a particular shape of women's literature and feminism; the feminist bookstore always proves, by its publicly accessible collection of women's texts, that there is a full, interdisciplinary body of women's literature. And feminist bookstores actively contribute to a body of local, national, and international women's literature by collecting models of feminist authorship, conducting writing workshops, stocking and distributing local authors' texts, and even writing, publishing, and translating women's works. The combination of these features is unique to bookstores among feminist organizations and describes the importance of feminist bookstores as a movement, not a retail experience.

### **Gathering Bookwomen's Words**

This is an activist dissertation in the sense that I intend to contextualize feminist bookstores as a complex and continuing movement. In my chapters I have struggled to offer in-depth case studies of U.S. feminist bookstores while maintaining those studies as

representative of larger trends in the feminist bookstore movement. And I have worked to offer a history without relegating these bookstores to the past; there are today around 20 feminist bookstores in the U.S., and several are taking on exciting new projects. At least six U.S. feminist bookstores have closed during the three years I have been writing this dissertation; one has opened. I am optimistic that existing feminist bookstores can be saved for readers, for feminist movements, and for me by teaching readers about the book market and feminist bookstores' role in supporting and co-creating women's literature, women's studies, and even the practice of feminist reading. I am also optimistic that existing feminist bookstores can and are changing to address longstanding places of conflict in the feminist movement. Understanding feminist bookstores as part of a long legacy of political literary public spaces, I also believe that even if all feminist bookstores closed, we would find a need for them again. I intend this dissertation to attend to all of those urgencies, and I want readers to leave the dissertation with a new appreciation and use for feminist bookstores.

My dissertation, like this introduction, offers feminist bookstore histories as case studies that themselves articulate new ways of reading both the bookstores and the books on their shelves. I seek to foreground the bookstores' own formulations of these new reading practices in order to posit the bookstore as producing a theoretical framework through which to read the bookstore, the book market, women's studies, and women's literature. My work, then, has been to gather and choose information to present and to offer my reading of how the bookstore produces this framework. In this version of the dissertation, then, most chapters have three parts. First, the chapters begin with an

introduction to the chapter that uses a text from feminist bookstore history, such as an oral history quotation, a *News* article, or a bookstore map, to explain how that text indicates and frames the substantial feminist bookstore narrative around the issue it introduces. Second, the chapters offer a discussion of scholarly conversations around a particular practice, such as public activism, publication, women's studies, or reading, interwoven with feminist bookstore commentary that intervenes in that conversation. Third, the chapters generally include a final section that follows one or two feminist bookstore case studies with a focus on the practice introduced in the chapter in order to describe how feminist bookstores challenge and redefine current understandings of those practices. This third section reads as a history but also uses feminist bookstore texts to theorize feminist bookstore practice. This history should demonstrate how the theory is articulated through the space of the bookstores.

Because my interest is in recovering and foregrounding the histories of feminist bookstores, I develop the bookstore interventions within each chapter using oral histories I have conducted with women who have founded or worked with feminist bookstores (I refer to these women as feminist bookwomen)<sup>75</sup> and using documents attendant to the functioning of those bookstores (for example, fliers, letters, forms, and meeting notes). Over the course of this project, I have conducted over twenty interviews with feminist bookwomen, and another ten with feminist scholars and authors connected with feminist bookstores. These interviews were broad oral histories of the narrator's work with their bookstore and connections with other bookstores, and my questions varied according to the bookstore with which the narrator worked. There have been studies of single and even

groups of feminist bookstores on the social science model, where standard interviews examined organizational structure or practice.<sup>76</sup> My study breaks new ground by using oral histories to narrate the histories of these bookstores with an emphasis on how the bookstores and bookwomen taught readers to interact with literature. As a result of this focus, I document the recollections of these narrators as feminist bookstore history. This dissertation thus produces a new archive of oral histories in addition to the written document. I have focused my interviews on feminist bookwomen in service of my emphasis on the bookstores; my intention here is to introduce the voices of feminist bookwomen into various feminist conversations. In order to preserve the sense of each narrator's voice, I have not edited out the oral character of the interview excerpts; I maintain this orality to preserve the narrators' voices and in order to present oral texts as equal to written ones. After first introducing them, I refer to bookwomen by their first names throughout in order to emphasize the inclusion of their voices, to give a sense of the intimacy of oral history research, and to indicate the personal relationship of bookwomen's lives to feminist literatures. Because of my own work at BookWoman, the feminist bookstore in Austin, Texas, from 1998 until 2005, my narrators understood my commitment to the work of feminist bookstores, and the travel related to this dissertation served in part as a (much less effective) kind of post-FBN connection as I shared news about feminist bookstores, their histories, and the movement at large between feminist bookwomen across the nation.

A small number of feminist bookstore archives are available in institutional collections which I visited for this project; these archives mark the newly gained

understanding of feminist bookstores as a viable subject of research. Radcliffe College's Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on Women's History holds the archives for New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from its beginnings in 1974 through its transition to the Center for New Words in 2000. The San Francisco Public Library's (SFPL) San Francisco History Reading Room holds the archives for the Feminist Bookstore Network (1976-2000). And the SFPL hosts the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society's collection of the San Francisco feminist bookstore, Old Wives' Tales (1976-1995). The Lesbian Herstory Archive in Brooklyn holds the archives for one of the New York feminist bookstores, Womanbooks (1975-1987), and some papers of Oakland's ICI: A Woman's Place (1970-1984). Many feminist bookstore archives are privately held by bookwomen who were close to the store; perhaps this dissertation will encourage them to secure a holding for their archives and encourage institutions to seek out and preserve the archives of their local feminist bookstores. Even these archives are not entirely private, since they are accessible by contacting the women who curate them in closets, filing cabinets, storage sheds, under beds, and, in some cases, in living bookstores. During this dissertation I have heard tell of a number of such collections that I was not able to use, but I hope someone will. I did explore the papers of the Common Woman Bookstore, renamed BookWoman, the Austin, Texas, feminist bookstore, both at the bookstore and at Susan Post and Dana Markus Wolf's home. I also researched the papers of In Other Words, the Portland, Oregon, feminist bookstore, from that bookstore's comfortable chair. I am grateful for those bookwomen curators who refuse to throw anything away, and I hope it will all be available to read again. The

materials I have drawn from are otherwise not available in print. The majority of feminist bookwomen have not written their own analyses or accounts of this history outside of the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* or *News*,<sup>77</sup> and the ephemera of the bookstore archives have not yet been collected and published. Much of this dissertation begins work with new archives and with the Feminist Bookstore Network publications, so the dissertation should also identify for readers texts and archives for study and teaching.

Finally, the field of literary studies has been a perfect foundation for this dissertation, and the interventions made by feminist bookstores and examined here should be of particular interest to feminist readers, literary scholars, and literary historians. Feminist bookstores have used spaces built around and through women's literature to work for feminist social justice for over thirty years. Neither the literary production of the feminist movement nor the political goals of the feminist movement should be seen separately from the frameworks provided by feminist bookstores. This dissertation offers a primer on how to understand feminist bookstores as central agents for producing a new reading practice that has changed both women's literature and literary history at large.

### **Learning from Feminist Bookstores**

Chapter one, "A Feminist Literary Public Sphere: Activist Bookselling and the Feminist Bookstore Network," examines the U.S.-based Feminist Bookstore Network (FBN, 1976-2000), co-founded and run by feminist bookwoman Carol Seajay. While the 1976 inaugural Women in Print Conference brought together feminist publishers, authors, and booksellers, only the booksellers developed a sustained organization and publication. The resulting national public presence identified feminist bookstores as cultural spaces.

Feminist bookstores developed a public literacy through events and workshops, framed a reading of women's literature through catalogs and local newsletters, and generated a language for discussing women's literature through the national *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter*. These features outline the public need for activist spaces of book access and map the feminist bookstores as constituting what I call a "feminist literary public sphere."

Chapter two, "Feminist Bookstores in an Emotional Marketplace: The Contemporary Book Market 1993-2003," tracks feminist bookstores' use of the feminist literary public sphere against book market corporatization. In 1993, the FBN put forth and supported resolutions at the American Booksellers Association (ABA) Convention that transformed the ABA into an advocate for independent bookstores. The chapter follows feminist bookstores' subsequent commentary on three court cases central to understanding today's book market. In 1994, the ABA filed a suit eventually including six major publishers, all of whom settled amidst accusations that their advertising dollars funded chain bookstores' fast growth. In 1998, the ABA sued Barnes & Noble for soliciting and receiving illegal terms from publishers and distributors. And in 1999, on behalf of Amazon feminist bookstore (1970-present), the ABA sued Amazon.com for trademark infringement. While literary studies has not examined these suits, the renamed *Feminist Bookstore News* argued that the changing book market threatens the viability of women's literature. *Publishers Weekly's* use of the *News* as a source and feminist bookstore co-owner Ann Christophersen's two elected terms as ABA president (2002-2004) indicate feminist bookstores' public presence on the forefront of book market activism.

Chapter three, “Learning the Trade: Feminist Bookstores Building a Women’s Study,” analyzes feminist bookstores’ contributions to women’s studies classrooms and to feminist scholarship. The last decade has seen the publication of numerous histories of the women’s studies movement, but none acknowledges feminist bookstores’ contribution to women’s studies. Here I bring into print the undocumented history of collaborations between women’s studies and feminist bookstores, and I identify the largely unrecognized ongoing work of feminist bookstores in partnership with contemporary women’s studies projects. I locate the basis of both the historical and the current functions of feminist bookstores in their identities as crossover spaces, spaces that serve both academic and community feminisms. Of community feminist organizations, feminist bookstores uniquely serve as women’s studies sites because they constitute literary spaces parallel to the textual focus of academic women’s studies. Through a case study of Womanbooks (New York, 1975-1987), the chapter examines feminist bookstores’ essential service to the founding of women’s studies courses and programs: for example, a Womanbooks customer log records feminist teachers using the bookstore to research for women’s studies resources and connect with other teachers. And through a second case study of In Other Words (Portland, Oregon, 1993-present), the chapter tracks the continuing value of feminist bookstores as resources and models for women’s studies: for example, today’s Portland State University women’s studies professors use In Other Words as a prime community partner for feminist capstone courses. Ultimately, this chapter both provides feminist scholars with the vocabulary to recognize the collaborative histories of feminist bookstores and women’s studies and invites feminist

scholars to reconnect with community feminisms through feminist bookstores as public sites of women's studies.

Chapter four, "The Feminist Shelf: Bringing Feminist Books Together in One Place," names the feminist shelf, the collection of feminist texts together in a feminist bookstore, proves a women's literature and produces feminist activist readers. This chapter thus contributes to reader-response criticism by claiming that the space in which a reader accesses a book shapes her reading of that book. Drawing on feminist and literary geography as well as on framings of feminist anthologies, the chapter takes the reader through a case study of New Words (1974-present) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a feminist bookstore that constantly attended to and theorized literary space as argument in the feminist bookstore. For example, in 1986, feminist geographer and New Words collective member Joni Seager drafted a map of the bookstore. The letter accompanying the map guided readers to see bookstore sections framing new categories of information, suggesting even regular visitors will "find at least one section you didn't know about." After receiving a Ford Foundation grant in 1999 to study new forms for feminist bookstores' work, New Words closed its bookstore and became the Center for New Words, a non-profit organization that actively develops and webstreams site-specific community events with attention to what Joni Seager terms the whole women's "word cycle," including literacy, authorship, and media presence. New Words' history of shaping a reading of women's literature describes how physical space impacts reading and how feminist bookstores produce readers.

Chapter five, “Feminist Reading Practice: Selections from Feminist Bookstore Shelves,” generates a list of books made possible in part by feminist bookstore activism, reads the books on this list as a feminist shelf, and analyzes how these books collected in a feminist bookstore develop a new kind of reading practice. The *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* coordinated a national feminist bookstore effort to maintain a women’s literature through letter writing campaigns to trade publishers, distributing remaindered out-of-print books to keep them available, and supporting feminist authors and publishers through funding, publicity, and networking. This activism co-produced the republication of books like E. M. Broner’s *Her Mothers*, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, and Joanna Russ’ *The Female Man*, and the publication of books like Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* and Sharon Bridgforth’s *love conjure/blues*. In three sections of readings, the chapter describes how to read a feminist literary heritage and how this heritage provides a space for feminist experimental writing, how a collection of texts as feminist life stories makes possible the writing and reading of women’s autobiographical and biographical narratives, and how combining women’s words together remakes words as safe-spaces into a writing practice that can be shared and handed over to transform women’s lives. These three readings emphasize the importance of the individual books and authors, the force of the books collectively read, and the significance of the feminist bookstore as a publicly accessible collection of women’s words. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that reading and teaching women’s texts in relationship to their history and place in feminist bookstores emphasizes the otherwise isolated books as part of a carefully constructed history of women’s literature.

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- <sup>1</sup> Carol Seajay, Letters, *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* IV.6 (Apr. 1981): A-D, C.
- <sup>2</sup> Susan Post, personal interview, 29 Jan. 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Sue Burns, personal interview, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Womanbooks, "Women's Bookstores," Flyer, Oct. 1980, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.
- <sup>5</sup> Lucille Pauline Frey, *One Woman, One Women's Bookstore: Case Study and Comments on the Place of a Women's Bookstore in a Community*, diss. the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, 1985, 129.
- <sup>6</sup> Carol Seajay, "Notes from the Computer Table," *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.6 (Mar. 1994): 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Carol Seajay and Lisa McGowan, *Feminist Bookstores' Catalog*, 1998, 27-30. The *Catalog* lists a total of 110 feminist bookstores, including those outside of the U.S., as members of the Feminist Bookstore Network.
- <sup>8</sup> Seajay and McGowan 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Womowrites and Charis Books and More, "WOMEN IN PRINT MOVEMENT: WRITING WHAT IS WRONG," Flyer, 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> Rose Norman, "Support Your Feminist Bookseller: She Supports You!," *NWSAction* (Fall 2001): 30-32.
- <sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Noll, "Book Warriors: Women's Bookstores Struggle for Survival," *Minnesota Women's Press: Articles and Commentary*, 28 Aug. 2002, 20 Jan. 2003 <<http://www.womenspress.com/newspaper/2002/11812book.html>>.
- <sup>12</sup> Kathryn McGrath, "Pushed to the Margins: The Slow Death and Possible Rebirth of the Feminist Bookstore," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* 21 (Summer 2003): 61-67, 93.
- <sup>13</sup> Randie Farmelant, "End of an Era: Will the Feminist Bookstore Soon Be a Thing of the Past?," *Off Our Backs* xxxiii 5.6 (May-June 2003): 18-22.
- <sup>14</sup> I take part here in an ongoing discussion about the "communities" in bookstores. Laura J. Miller writes that the commercialization of books has resulted in bookstores waging "manipulative marketing campaigns." She writes, "[T]heir notion of community can be a highly restricted one, limited to the groups of people which are most likely to buy books" (388). Feminist bookstores, as politically-identified bookstores serving "communities," define these communities differently. Kathleen Liddle explains feminist bookstores' significance to lesbian communities: "There is a sense that the stores offer a deeper, historical connection to the community rather than simply being a place to find out what is happening in the present. Some women [...] lament the lack of other meeting spaces for lesbian-feminists and cite the continuing need for 'safe space'" (151). Laura J. Miller, "Shopping for Community: The Transformation of the Bookstore into a Vital Community Institution," *Media, Culture, & Society* 21.3 (1999): 385-407. Kathleen Liddle, "More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Community," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9.1/2 (2005): 145-159.
- <sup>15</sup> See Kimberly Springer for a counter-narrative to the wave analogy (Springer 8-9). *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History* generates another narrative that describes a continuous feminist movement: editors Gwendolyn Mink and Barbara Smith write,

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“Women have acted collectively to contest their subordination throughout U.S. history” (192). Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005). Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Steinem, eds. *The Reader’s Companion to U.S. Women’s History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> See Bertha Harris’ introduction to the new edition of *Lover* for her personal narrative of the first women in print gathering. Harris also notes a tangible way in which Daughters shaped the look of publishing: “The elegantly designed covers and the dimensions (eight and a half by five and a half) of Daughters’ paperbacks have now been adopted by nearly every good publisher—Virago, for example—both here and in Europe, but it was Daughters’ designer, Loretta Li, who created the look” (xliv). And she notes the importance of feminist bookstores to the viability of feminist presses: “Except for gay and women’s bookshops (and there were then [in 1974] relatively few), other, general-subject book dealers and their customers were still wary of taking a chance on such unfamiliar, sometimes openly lesbian, writing” (xlvi). Bertha Harris, *Lover* (Plainfield, VT: Daughters Press, 1976; New York: NYUP, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Mary Bernstein speaks directly to this split and the connections between cultural and political movements. Mary Bernstein, “Identities and Politics Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement,” *Social Science History* 26.3 (Fall 2002): 531-581.

<sup>18</sup> Including Joni Seager and Kay Turner. Joni Seager, personal interview, 28 April 2004. Kay Turner, personal interview, 3 July 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Kelley, “‘A More Glorious Revolution’: Women’s Antebellum Reading Circles and the Pursuit of Public Influence,” *The New England Quarterly* 76.2 (June 2003): 163-196, 170.

<sup>20</sup> Kelley 185-6.

<sup>21</sup> Kelley 165. Catherine La Courreye Blecki introduces a recent edition of *Milcah Martha Moore’s Book*, explaining, “Just as *Milcah Martha Moore’s* commonplace book opens a window into the historical life of colonial and revolutionary America, it offers modern readers a unique perspective on the development of early American literature through a manuscript collection transcribed for sociable circles of writers and readers” (59). Many of these readers, Blecki notes, “were Quakers (members of the Society of Friends), who already believed in the equality of men and women as persons in the spirit, so reading a collection of writing chiefly composed by women presented few barriers based on traditional ideas of gender” (60). Catherine La Courreye Blecki, “Reading Moore’s Book: Manuscripts vs. Print Culture, and the Development of Early American Literature,” *Milcah Martha Moore’s Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, edited by Catherine La Courreye Blecki and Karin A. Wulf (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997): 59-106.

<sup>22</sup> Here I draw on Ann Cvetkovich’s take on Michael Moon’s term the “semipublic” sphere in which she describes grassroots movements “making private spaces—such as rooms in people’s homes—public” (245). Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

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<sup>23</sup> Blecki 105-6.

<sup>24</sup> Blecki 106.

<sup>25</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: written by herself*, 1861, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987) 189.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 197.

<sup>27</sup> McHenry 242.

<sup>28</sup> This spatial context was emphasized perhaps most overtly by The Dark Tower, “a literary organization created in 1928 by A’lelia Walker, daughter of Madame C.J. Walker,” and named after Countee Cullen’s “The Dark Tower.” This literary organization “met in A’lelia Walker’s Harlem mansion,” surrounded by literature on the walls: Cullen’s poem and Langston Hughes’s “The Weary Blues” were painted on the walls of their meeting room (McHenry 271). The Dark Tower’s meeting room implies that collecting a literature into (and onto) a single space proves a body of (African American) literature and influences future reading practices.

<sup>29</sup> McHenry 302. For more on women creating the “modern book shop,” see Edward Bishop, “The Sunwise Turn: The Modern Book Shop,” *Make It New: The Rise of Modernism*, ed. Kurt Heinzelman (Austin, Texas: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 2003) 124-126. For more on Chicano bookstores, see Deborah Sengupta, “A History of Resistance: An Interview with raulsalinas,” 4 Aug. 2001, Resistencia Bookstore, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.resistenciabooks.com/>>. For a narrative visit to a Black bookstore and a discussion of reaching Black readers, see, Elizabeth Maguire, “University Presses and the Black Reader,” *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*, ed. The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 317-324.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Chris Dodge’s 1998 overview of the emerging “infoshops,” an anarchist version of the political bookstore, and Arthur S. Meyers’ description of the relationship between labor libraries and public libraries in the mid-1800s. Significantly, both of these articles come out of the field of library studies, indicating a need for awareness of the overlap in function between political bookstores and libraries, especially when bookstore forms include libraries, as have many feminist bookstores. Chris Dodge, “Taking Libraries to the Street: Infoshops & Alternative Reading Rooms,” *American Libraries* 29.5 (May 1998): 62-4. Arthur S. Meyers, “A Fifty-Five Year Partnership: ALA and the AFL-CIO,” *Library Trends* 51.1 (Summer 2002): 36-49.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Romero, personal interview, 26 July 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Sharon Bridgforth, personal interview, 22 July 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Streelekha, “Some Aspects of the Feminist Book Trade in India,” speech delivered at the 1988 Feminist International Book Fair, Montreal, 2-20, 3, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records. While certainly it is significant that this speech is written and typed in English and that I found it in the archives of New Words, a U.S. feminist bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the speech acknowledges the complications of language and seeks to both translate and produce books in the Kannada language, and it counts as vital a network between feminist bookstores.

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<sup>34</sup> The women write of Streelekha's sections: "Besides our focus on feminist literature, we also stock titles in green politics, development studies, questions of disarmament and peace, and caste politics, because we believe the feminist movement to be inextricably linked to all peoples' movements that fundamentally challenge the power relations between the rich and the poor, between women and men, the upper and lower castes, the blacks and the whites" (6). The speech outlined projects for translating books into the Kannada language of their region (8), publishing literature in Kannada (8), and recording and distributing tapes of women's oral histories (9).

<sup>35</sup> Narigrantha Prabantana, homepage, 11 Aug. 2005  
<<http://membres.lycos.fr/ubinig/nari/index.html>>.

<sup>36</sup> Farida Akther and the Narigrantha Prabantana Collective, "Bengali Bookstore Celebrates 100 Years of Women's Work," *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.3 (Oct. 1993): 53-55, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Akther 53.

<sup>38</sup> Akther 54.

<sup>39</sup> Akther 53.

<sup>40</sup> In the U.S., Amazon Feminist Bookstore co-founder Mev Miller currently develops women's literacy projects, drawing on her connections with feminist bookstores as resources. Miller wrote to "Feminist Booksellers," "As you know, feminist/women's/lesbian bookstores have long been centers of feminist activism and organization in many communities. [...] However, in our efforts to promote women's literature and women's causes, as a movement we have paid too little attention to the readability of many of these texts for women who struggle with limited literacy proficiencies. [...] As some of you know, I have worked in a number of capacities in the Women in Print movement since 1983. It was from these experiences and my own awareness of women's literacy issues that I have founded WE LEARN to promote women's literacy as a tool for personal growth and social change through networking, education, action and resource development. I now call on my colleagues in feminist bookstores to once again take the lead in bringing voice and visibility to women's basic literacy as a vital concern for the feminist women's movement, and necessary for the pursuit of social justice for all women." Mev Miller and WE LEARN, letter to Feminist Booksellers, 5 Jan. 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Akther 53-4.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the relationship between women, development, and literature, see Meredith Tax with Marjorie Agosin, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ritu Menon, Ninotchka Rosca, and Mariella Sala, "Power of the Word: Culture, Censorship, and Voice," *Dangerous Intersections: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development*, A Project of the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment, ed. Jael Silliman and Ynestra King (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999) 108-132.

<sup>43</sup> Narigrantha Prabantana, bookstore, 11 Aug. 2005  
<<http://membres.lycos.fr/ubinig/nari/index.html>>. Making an argument for the "impressive picture of women's involvement," the bookstore participates in a radical redefinition of "development" that attempts to provide strength, history, and connection

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to women within their own local networks and for the purpose of informing their choices. Contemporary “development” theory’s use of “social capital theory” in microfinance models depends on local “solidarity” groups to generate economic stability regardless of the potential restrictive nature of groups patterned on, generated among, or funded through patriarchal structures of community. However, the bookstore generates a discussion of the focus and practices of such “development” projects while offering an important public space for women’s access to and discussion of such work. This public space for information also exists as women’s activism and organization in contrast to top-down or patriarchal “development” models. In her study of women in Nepal, Katherine N. Rankin comes to a similar conclusion: “This kind of social network – a solidarity grounded in women’s own analysis of dominant cultural and political ideologies – can provide the surest foundation for ‘development,’ in collective strategies for challenging the social basis of inequality” (19). Katharine N. Rankin, “Social Capital, Microfinance, and the Politics of Development,” *Feminist Economics* 8.1 (2002): 1-24.

<sup>44</sup> Crayonhouse, homepage, 11 Aug. 2005

<<http://www.crayonhouse.co.jp/home/index.html>>.

<sup>45</sup> Jean MacRae, “Ms. Crayonhouse The Tokyo Feminist Bookstore,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 19.5 (Jan./Feb. 1997): 19-22, 20.

<sup>46</sup> MacRae 20.

<sup>47</sup> MacRae 20-21.

<sup>48</sup> MacRae 20.

<sup>49</sup> MacRae 19.

<sup>50</sup> Beth Morgan, “Fem Books [sic]: The First Chinese-Language Feminist Bookstore,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 18.5 (Jan./Feb. 1996): 17-22, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Fembooks, homepage, 10 Aug. 2005 <<http://www.fembooks.com.tw/>>.

<sup>52</sup> Fembooks, “Introduction,” 10 Aug. 2005

<[http://www.fembooks.com.tw/indexaboutus.php?showarea=1\\_2](http://www.fembooks.com.tw/indexaboutus.php?showarea=1_2)>.

<sup>53</sup> Morgan 19.

<sup>54</sup> Morgan 19.

<sup>55</sup> Morgan 21.

<sup>56</sup> Morgan 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Morgan 20.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan 22.

<sup>59</sup> Carol Seajay, “Africa’s First Feminist Bookstore: Binti Legacy,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 19.4 (Nov./Dec. 1996): 15-17, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 16.

<sup>61</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 17.

<sup>62</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 16.

<sup>63</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 16-17.

<sup>64</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 17.

<sup>65</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 15.

<sup>66</sup> Seajay, “Africa’s First” 17.

<sup>67</sup> Tax 130.

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<sup>68</sup> Seajay, "Africa's First" 17.

<sup>69</sup> Profiled in Shelley Anderson, "Vrouwenboekhandels van Nederland: Women's Bookstores in the Netherlands," *Feminist Bookstore News* 15.5 (Jan./Feb. 1993): 56-58.

<sup>70</sup> Profiled in Carol Seajay, "Saga: Librería de la Mujer," *Feminist Bookstore News* 12.5 (Jan./Feb. 1990): 39-45.

<sup>71</sup> Profiled with other formerly open Australian feminist bookstores in Carol Seajay, "Touring Australian Feminist Bookstores," *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.3 (Sept./Oct. 1994): 25-31.

<sup>72</sup> Profiled in Jacqueline Dumas (Orlando Books/Edmonton, Alberta), "Report from Canada," *Feminist Bookstore News* 22.3/4 (Fall 1999): 15-16.

<sup>73</sup> Connected with the FBN in Donna for Streelekha, "Kavya For Women: Streelekha Needs Book Donations for Library," *The Feminist Bookstore News* 10.5 (Feb. 1988): 15-16.

<sup>74</sup> Former New Zealand feminist bookstores profiled in "New Zealand Feminist Bookshops: Reprinted from *Herstory 1988*," *The Feminist Bookstore News* 11.3 (Sept. 1988): 29-32.

<sup>75</sup> Men in the book trade have traditionally been called "bookmen," which is, in part, why the women of the Austin, Texas, feminist bookstore named it "BookWoman." During a short period in 1980, the store was called "BookWomen: Everywoman's Bookshop." BookWoman owner Susan Post remembers, "When we had a logo done, a linguist advised us to make it singular. That women in mass quantities are hard enough to take, it should just be singular, it was a stronger statement. Both visually and psychologically." Referring to the women of the feminist bookstores as feminist bookwomen both recuperates the power of the plural title and establishes the feminist bookseller as a particular political identity. Susan Post, interview.

<sup>76</sup> See Frey. Also see Lynnette J. Eastland's study of the feminist bookstore Twenty Rue Jacob (named after Djuna Barnes' address in Paris). Amanda C. Gable and Saralynn Chesnut use oral history to document the life of Charis Books and More in Atlanta. They explain their use of the history: "We argue, then, that in the 1970s the store-community relationship was reciprocal and dialectical, with each entity both supporting and being supported by the other in an ongoing process of change and growth" (242). Lynnette J. Eastland, *Communication, Organization, and Change within a Feminist Context: A Participant Observation of a Feminist Collective*, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991. Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda C. Gable, "'Women Ran It' Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981," *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard, New York: New York UP, 1997, 241-284.

<sup>77</sup> Feminist bookwomen have not published their bookstore experiences with the exceptions of Carol Seajay, co-founder of the Feminist Bookstore Network and of Old Wives' Tales feminist bookstore open in the seventies and eighties in San Francisco, and Mev Miller, co-founder of Amazon Bookstore Collective, founded in 1970 and still open in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Carol Seajay has produced a number of articles for industry publications, including brief entries in her own *Feminist Bookstore News*. And Mev Miller produced a radio broadcast on the occasion of the joint twenty-fifth anniversary of

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the Feminist Press, Amazon Bookstore Collective, and *Off Our Backs*. Other feminist bookwomen have written feminist literature, documenting their work as bookwomen in their author bios. Irene Zahava, editor of the lesbian romance short story collection *Love Shook My Heart*, ran Smedley's Bookshop, a feminist bookstore in Ithaca, New York, for 13 years. Kiriyo Spooner, author of *From Sacajawea to Sojourner Truth*, ran a feminist bookstore for seven years and worked in Womanbooks, a feminist bookstore in New York. Mev Miller, *A Labor of Love: A 25 Year History of Feminist and Lesbian Bookstores and Publishing*, Self-Produced Cassette, 1995.

**Chapter One**  
**A Feminist Literary Public Sphere:**  
**Activist Bookselling and the Feminist Bookstore Network**

I'd gone to the West Coast Lesbian Conference, and I came home with a book from Diana Press. I had wanted the *Edward the Dyke* book, from the Womens Press Collective and didn't have enough money for it. But I also got one called *The Lesbian Sleeping Beauty*. It was published out of North Carolina—or out of Atlanta. I brought those books back and said to friends of mine, "These are the lesbian books with *good* endings. These are going to change our lives." And they all looked at me, like, "Yeah, yeah, Carol. All about books, Carol, again. Yeah, yeah, yeah." "No, these are going to change our lives. No, you have to *read* this. *Songs to a Handsome Woman*, you have to read these!" They did read them. And it changed some of their lives and not some of them. But I do think that there being lesbian books changed even the lives of the women who didn't read. Because it changed the lives around them.<sup>1</sup>

Feminist bookstore movement activist Carol Seajay here describes the transformative work that collections of texts undertake. At the West Coast Lesbian Conference she found not only "lesbian books with *good* endings," she found numbers of them together, a force in a stack. Both the existence of the books and the collection of them together prompted Carol's promise that these books would "change our lives." Further, Carol indicates that the conversation built around these books changed the lives even of those who didn't read them. Feminist bookstores created permanent and public collections of

life-changing books, and the bookstores consciously generated an active public sphere around this literature that would educate and train readers to become aware of women's issues and to work for social justice. One marker of the breadth of the feminist bookstore movement was the Feminist Bookstore Network, the bookstores' membership organization. From 1976-2000 the Network, supported by its member stores and under the leadership of Carol Seajay, distributed a publication that fostered dialogue among the bookstores in order to support feminist books, to conduct discussions about the work of feminist bookstores, and to teach women how to build feminist bookstores in their own neighborhoods. This publication involved numbers of feminist bookwomen in a public conversation about women's literature and social justice that then grew to include bookstore visitors and readers. By its second year, 1977, the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* listed 94 feminist bookstores in the U.S. as well as feminist bookstores in Berlin, Lisbon, and Montreal.<sup>2</sup>

Feminist bookstore history in archives, oral histories, and the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* (later renamed the *Feminist Bookstore News*), maps feminist bookstores' formation of a broad public community which constantly discussed its boundaries, its values, and its purpose. A narrative of feminist bookstore history, then, offers not only a view to a yet unrecorded part of the feminist past, it also offers a theory of how a feminist public constitutes itself and takes action. In order to guide my readers through this understanding of the historical-theoretical narrative at the end of the chapter, I begin the chapter with an overview of key terms in the ongoing debate about what makes a public sphere and what a public sphere does. I define in this first section a new kind of public

sphere, articulated by feminist bookstores: feminist bookstores function as a framework for feminist literary public sphere, a discussion comprised of diverse interactions fed by literature and working to explore and further public feminist projects.<sup>3</sup> This first half of the chapter allows readers to understand the second half as a narrative theory of the feminist literary public sphere through an abridged narration of the life of the Feminist Bookstore Network. This narrative documents how the Feminist Bookstore Network as a feminist literary public sphere made its structure the subject of constant discussion and struggled with connecting women of different identities into a diverse public. This understanding of feminist bookstores not merely as stores but as publics conveys the significance of the bookstores to the feminist movement and to important change in women's public lives.

### **The Feminist Literary Public Sphere**

In incorporating public sphere theory into a discussion of feminist bookstores, I am guided by two questions: what does it mean to see feminist bookstores as publics rather than as *stores*? And how does this kind of seeing influence our relationships to books? Scholars use public sphere theory to articulate the structure, history, and impact of social movements as they change who gets to take part in the public and what gets talked about there.<sup>4</sup> For example, Nancy Fraser has observed the feminist movement in general constitutes a kind of public sphere because it introduced new words (like rape, incest, etc.) into U.S. public discourse, thus affecting the way our society deals with those issues.<sup>5</sup> This chapter claims that the extensive work of the FBN and its impact on mainstream print culture merits its recognition as an independent and influential public

sphere. I begin by explaining how a bookstore works as an overlooked site of public sphere production.

### *Public Sphere*

Current definitions of the public sphere respond to Jürgen Habermas' foundational text for this term, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, in which he explores the origins and definition of the public sphere through the rise and fall of a particular, European, bourgeois public sphere. Habermas roots his concept of the public sphere in increased access to written texts that share public news: "In the phase of the ascendancy of the public sphere as one with a political function, even the newspaper enterprises consolidated in the hands of publishers continued to give their editors the kind of freedom that in general characterized the communication of private people functioning as a public."<sup>6</sup> For Michael Warner the texts distributed created a public out of their readership, since publics "exist by virtue of their address."<sup>7</sup> That is, if a group of texts addresses a particular audience, that audience is a public. Rosa Eberly disagrees. She posits that "for a public to recognize itself, action is required; a public in [John] Dewey's terms requires that people not only consume communications that convince them of their common interest but also produce communications—speak or write in common—about that interest."<sup>8</sup> That is, for these private readers to function as a public, they would have to interact around or through the texts. These two definitions note an important difference between what is often referred to as a "book-buying public" (people who enter a public through purchasing books)<sup>9</sup> and a politically-based literary public (people who engage

with a public through reading and mutual communication). Eberly's definition better describes the latter, and I use her definition to differentiate the function of feminist bookstores from that of profit-focused booksellers; the extensive communication network among feminist bookwomen and their readers position feminist bookstores as a public, while profit-focused booksellers who prioritize sales over communication are not publics.

Since Habermas sees the public sphere beginning with newspapers purchased, not simply shared, an analysis of the relationship between production and publics will help differentiate types of seemingly capitalist spaces. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge critique the imagined universal inclusion of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere in these terms. They see the bourgeois public sphere itself as a product, one whose "process of production disappears." That is, the bourgeoisie invested in such a public sphere publicly develop "the market, property, and the subsumption of labor power under capital," then, once the goal of such a public sphere is achieved ("the production of social wealth"), the public "tends once again toward privatization."<sup>10</sup> In this case, what has been produced is not the ideal public sphere, one in which all voices are heard. Negt and Kluge point out, "If the representative public sphere were a living reality, this sphere would become a site for the production of social critique, because the inadequacy of legitimations would be clear to everybody."<sup>11</sup> Instead what is produced is the existing social hierarchy talked about as, but not functioning as a public.

In order to see how the existing hierarchy gets falsely presented as a public, it is necessary to uncover the "disappeared" process of public sphere production. For this chapter's examination of specifically literary public spheres, that site takes place in

bookstores, sites strikingly absent from discussions of textually-based public spheres. For example, Jürgen Habermas, upon the publication of the eighteenth edition of his foundational text, offers this explanation of the need for the edition:

There are two reasons that may justify the decision in favor of an unrevised new printing of the eighteenth edition, which had gone out of print. For one, there is the *continuing demand* for a publication that in a variety of programs of study has become established as a sort of textbook. For another, there is the contemporary relevance bestowed on the structural change of the public sphere by the long-delayed revolution occurring before our eyes in central and eastern Europe. The current relevance of this topic—and of its multifaceted treatment—is *confirmed by the reception of the book* in the United States, where an English translation finally appeared last year.<sup>12</sup>

Here Habermas claims that the book is reprinted unchanged because there is a “continuing demand” for the book, and because of its “current relevance [...] confirmed by the reception of the book,” which translates also into continuing demand. So, relevance is assumed to be proven by who purchases the text (and how many), without a discussion of how the text becomes available or where the text is purchased. What is erased along with the site of purchase is the mechanism by which only specific kinds of books are made available. The availability of the book, if dictated by demands for it within a changing public sphere, is influenced by the identity of such a public sphere. Habermas, again contextualizing the republication, acknowledges what Warner calls “a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle class, the normal” in the

public sphere at large.<sup>13</sup> Habermas writes, “[T]he growing feminist literature has sensitized our awareness to the patriarchal character of the public sphere itself, a public sphere that soon transcended the confines of the reading public (of which women were a constituting part) and assumed political functions.”<sup>14</sup> If the public sphere has been produced as patriarchal (male, white, middle-class, normal), that narrows the kinds of texts widely disseminated within such a sphere.

This figuration establishes texts as a kind of politicized commodity, and Warner offers a view of commodities (for our focus, texts) as a feminine tool, the tradeable capital of publicity: “Even from the early eighteenth century, before the triumph of a liberal metalanguage for consumption, commodities were being used, especially by women, as a kind of access to publicness that would nevertheless link up with the specificity of difference.”<sup>15</sup> But he amends this sense of an early public: “Where consumer capitalism makes available an endlessly differentiable subject, the subject of the public sphere proper cannot be differentiated.”<sup>16</sup> Warner sees a contrast here between the difference provided for through capitalism and the “subject of the public sphere proper” which “cannot be differentiated.” Feminist bookstore history interrupts this theory with an exception, that individuality and difference are supported in a literary public mediated through the purchase of feminist texts at feminist bookstores. The exchange of feminist texts at feminist bookstores is different from the kind of commodity exchange Warner and Habermas speak of in which women interact with an unmarked (male) public by purchasing news or commodities as expressions of such a patriarchal

public. I use Luce Irigaray's suggestive description of a parallel break in which women refuse to be exchanged as commodities:

*But what if these 'commodities' refused to go to 'market'? What if they maintained 'another' kind of commerce, among themselves? Exchanges without identifiable terms, without accounts, without end ... Without additions and accumulations, one plus one, woman after woman ... Without sequence or number. [...] Utopia? Perhaps. Unless this mode of exchange has undermined the order of commerce from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>*

The possibility that commerce could be undermined by existing exchange emphasizes Negt and Kluge's warning against ignoring the ways in which publics are structured and seen. The exchange of feminist texts similarly "undermines the order of commerce" by producing a feminist literary public sphere not utopic but compiled of diverse voices in conversation (woman after woman).

### *Literary Public Sphere*

It follows that if identities shape (instead of becoming irrelevant in) public spheres, interaction among diverse identities and around texts constitutes a *literary* public sphere, implicating books not simply as commodities but as vital tools of such a public. Here I position the literary public as a means of undermining capitalist (and thus western national) practice. Several theorists argue that reading a shared literature (feminist or otherwise) in a capitalist society erases individual identity. Benedict Anderson, for example, claims that the rise of "print capitalism" created a sense of anonymity, of a homogeneous public to which one could belong by reading.<sup>18</sup> Michael Warner explains a

shift in the early eighteenth century into our present sense of readership in which the reader “incorporates *into the meaning of the printed object* an awareness of the potentially limitless others who may also be reading. For that reason, it becomes possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading, becoming part of an arena of the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediating imaginings.”<sup>19</sup> Benedict Anderson makes these mediating imaginings particular to fiction which “seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.”<sup>20</sup> But just as the feminist literary public sphere undermines commerce, it thwarts the cover of anonymity through its constitution not of sameness but of difference. This may be particular among feminist publics to feminist literary public spheres, since diverse feminists author texts then collected in feminist bookstores even when feminist communities attempt exclusionary practices.

The unique work of the literary public sphere, passed over by the nation-builders and the chain stores, is the ability of texts to confront readers with difference. Rosa Eberly traces public discussions of texts to argue that a literary public sphere is constituted not by private, anonymous interaction with texts but is located where “private people can come together in public, bracket some of their differences, and invent common interests by arguing in speech or writing about literary and cultural texts.”<sup>21</sup> By gathering together a range of texts (sometimes critical of each other), feminist bookstores form a more complex literary public sphere, one which does not require private people to bracket their differences, but instead confronts them with difference.<sup>22</sup> Issues of

importance to the numbers of diverse women involved in the feminist movement have been accessible through texts in feminist bookstores. This conversation through differences constructs the feminist literary public sphere as one distinctly different from Eberly's bracketed literary public sphere or from Habermas' or Warner's public spheres engaged through nondiscursive reading.

Feminist bookstores' focus on advocacy of and through literature of various kinds marks their work as literary activists.<sup>23</sup> Their collaborative activism, in large part coordinated through the FBN, qualifies their public specifically as a literary public sphere. For Habermas, and for me, the word "literary" does not carry a valuation of the kind of "literature" written, discussed, or exchanged; instead, people (specifically "women and dependents") who were "factually and legally excluded from the politically public sphere" could access a public sphere through the exchange of writing.<sup>24</sup> However, in keeping with Eberly's definition, simply reading does not create a public sphere. The *Feminist Bookstore News* serves as a vehicle for the Feminist Bookstore Network to produce a feminist literary public sphere out of national dialogic conversations among feminist bookwomen, modeling a practice then carried out within the bookstores with readers. The literary public sphere at feminist bookstores thus uses women's texts, including the *News*, to educate and inform readers who then interact with the movement by talking with each other at the store and by writing their own texts.<sup>25</sup> A handwritten note from Carolyn Heilbrun on the occasion of National Feminist Bookstore Week 1997 points out that the feminist revolution "is a revolution that has written more in 20 years than most do in 200 years."<sup>26</sup> As a result of the feminist movement's voluminous textual

production and reclamation, feminist bookstores served a central role in the distribution of the feminist movement by distributing its literature. This long overlooked literary public sphere produced out of the feminist movement was central to achieving the social change feminists sought.

The literature associated with, generated through, and recovered by feminist movements serves as both an historical and an affective record of our various lives and struggles; the presence of this literature also documents women's history. The feminist movement shares this vital connection to texts with other ongoing social justice movements. Elizabeth McHenry explains the political work of sharing books in her book *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. “[Mary Church] Terrell’s concern for making literature, including literary figures and texts about members of her own race, accessible to African Americans of different ages and educational levels is representative of black clubwomen’s commitment to what I will call public literacy.”<sup>27</sup> Here Elizabeth McHenry identifies a public through familiarity with a community of texts. For Mary Church Terrell, suffragist and, starting in 1896, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, familiarity with African American literature and literary figures preserves a rich collective history and, thus, enables possible futures. Carol Seajay emphasized her work with the FBN by explaining that availability is the only assurance that we can maintain these texts. “I’m just incredibly aware of the impact of the closing of bookstores and the loss of a lot of publishers and that you only have a literature when people can find it.” Feminists and

women find our literature in feminist bookstores, literary public spheres promoting a public literacy.

### *Feminist Literary Public Sphere*

Because the feminist movement has a particular investment in the literary public sphere by relying on texts as spaces for critiques of an imagined coherent national body, I designate the literary public sphere at feminist bookstore as specifically feminist: the *feminist* literary public sphere. In their designations of feminist counterpublics and subaltern counterpublics, respectively, Rita Felski and Nancy Fraser recognize the political work of feminist texts and bookstores as integral parts of the text-rich feminist movement and beyond simple capitalist exchange. Rita Felski makes a case for a feminist counter-public sphere as necessary to feminist literary analysis: “In investigating the conditions of possibility for the recent appearance of a large body of feminist writing, the model of a feminist counter-public sphere can be drawn upon as a means of theorizing the complex mediations between literature, feminist ideology, and the broader social domain.”<sup>28</sup> For Nancy Fraser, too, the feminist movement exists in opposition to a more hegemonic public sphere; she identifies “journals, bookstores, and publishing companies” among the features of the influential “late-twentieth-century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic.”<sup>29</sup>

I find it important to emphasize the need for the feminist naming of this literary public sphere in order to differentiate it from other forms of print exchange that look like public spheres, but that are profit-based or are simply not motivated by social justice. In crafting the term feminist literary public sphere, I draw on Rita Felski and Nancy Fraser,

and I intend that their public sphere prefixes of “counter” and “subaltern counter” not to be lost but to be clearly implied in my identification of a feminist literary public sphere. That is, a feminist literary public sphere is one that is necessarily politically *counter* to existing normative patriarchal public spheres where differences are claimed to be bracketed. (A claim often used to discount the need for feminist bookstores, as in, “Why do you need a separate bookstore when Barnes & Noble has everything?”) I also intend that the public sphere without prefix will assert the diversity of the feminist literary public sphere. Here I make a brief claim to the stark differences between feminist and chain or online bookstores: feminist bookstores function as literary public spheres, therefore the book sales that take place are points of political activism that have a palpable impact on women’s literature.

Were we to lose feminist bookstores, in fact, we would lose a tool to promote an activist state. Mary P. Ryan explains what is at stake here by arguing that alternative public spaces indicate the health of the general public. “As long as the distributive issues of justice remain unachieved civic goals, this proliferation of publics is a particularly significant measure of the public wellbeing.”<sup>30</sup> Earlier rights-related U.S. bookshops also depended on the “public wellbeing” for their work to be successful: Harriet Jacobs announced in 1851 that the failure of her and her brother’s anti-slavery reading room was due to a lack of general support for such a proliferation of publics. She writes of the reading room in Philadelphia, “We found warm anti-slavery friends there, but the feeling was not general enough to support such an establishment.”<sup>31</sup> A general, national feeling in support of difference (like the general, national readership she addresses through her text)

is a radical request. In her critique of a society that cannot support an activist reading room, Jacobs' implied claim echoes Mary P. Ryan's, that, short of a utopian democracy, the maintenance of such a reading room, like a proliferation of publics, is the mark of a successful society. As a result, the life of feminist bookstores supports a public that advocates for social justice in ways that simple access to feminist books accepted by the mainstream do not.

### *Queer Capitalism*

Each of the above sections has taken up a challenge to equations of texts with capital, of book buying with capitalism; this repetition bears some exploration here. Social justice at a purchasing point may seem an unusual construction; avoiding this possibility has made it easier for feminist movement histories to emphasize publishers (who do not directly 'sell') rather than bookstores. However, the question of capitalism is closely tied to a sense of publicness; there is a tension between publics made possible by capital and the foreclosure of public spheres by valuing profit over democratic exchange. Jürgen Habermas notes that "newspaper enterprises" began the consolidation of a public just as John D'Emilio notes that industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century provided independent means, through work and travel, and commercial spaces through which to generate gay and lesbian identity.<sup>32</sup> In both of these moments, capital generates a public. However, French anthropologist Marc Augé tracks the work of capitalism as foreclosing public spheres by replacing places with non-places:

Non-places are those locations in the contemporary world where the transactions and interactions that take place are between anonymous individuals, often

stripped of all symbols of social identity other than an identification number: a pin number for a cash card for example, or a passport number. ... In these spaces, our individual social attributes and our membership of a social group become irrelevant: as long as we have the money, of course, to make the cash transaction or purchase the ticket to travel.<sup>33</sup>

Here non-places take to the extreme Habermas' ideal public sphere in which differences are bracketed; chain and online bookstores are non-places, and these non-places are where Michael Warner's and Benedict Anderson's fears of a homogenizing imagined public come true. Feminist bookstores, on the other hand, foster the development of identity and difference, thus undermining both the traditional definition of publicness and the unifying machinery of capital.

To clarify my definition of the feminist literary public sphere as embodied at feminist bookstores, I term the exchange that takes place there *queer capitalism*. That is, feminist bookstores do sell products, but the fact that they are *places* with a political purpose and an activist function makes them vital spaces for the resistance against capital cooptation of our books and identities. Here I remember Miranda Joseph's caution that constructions of communities can feed capitalist power structures: "the work of community is to generate and legitimate necessary particularities and social hierarchies (of gender, race, nation, sexuality) implicitly required, but disavowed, by capitalism, a discourse of abstraction and equivalence."<sup>34</sup> Joseph's warning echoes Nancy Fraser's claim that inequalities have never been bracketed in public spheres, but pretending to bracket inequalities "functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the

plebian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers.”<sup>35</sup> So, for Miranda Joseph, communities produce identities that attain a fabled equality through capitalism (as hierarchies are disavowed) but that equality is a fiction (as community legitimates social hierarchies). This allows the exploitation of said communities: “The problem with the Gap-ification of gay culture, or with the incorporation of hip-hop into sneaker ads, is not that someone has stolen a cultural form that properly belongs to one group but that corporate deployment of the given form or style makes it at least in part alien to and against those who generated it.”<sup>36</sup> So, too, are the “women’s studies” sections in chain stores and the rise of a mainstream women’s literature in part alien to and against the feminist movement that fought for them.<sup>37</sup>

However, echoing Irigaray’s configuration of the commodities gone to market, Miranda Joseph offers us a way out: “The diversity of groups useful as niche market consumers can turn around and understand themselves, assert themselves, as producers.”<sup>38</sup> This is exactly what happens in a feminist bookstore. Simultaneously, Miranda Joseph tells us, those producers, if engaged in political work, must critique capitalism.<sup>39</sup> And her conclusion gives us a view to how this can take place: “I have shown not that there are no sites of potential resistance but a great proliferation of sites of weakness, of contradiction and crisis, in the circuits of capital and that those sites are us, in our desires and discontents.”<sup>40</sup> Appropriately for my work here, Miranda Joseph’s introduction finds some of those articulations of desires and discontents in feminist books.

The publication of works such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*, Audre Lorde's collected essays *Sister Outsider*, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, and bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman*, among many others, raised doubts about singular identity categories as an organizing principle for social change. These works make it very clear that to imagine that women are a community is to elide and repress differences among women, to enact racism and heterosexism within a women's movement.<sup>41</sup>

Joseph appropriately warns of constructing restrictive singular definitions of women's community or of feminism, and she points out that imagining a particular kind of community of women risks making violent exclusions. However, she also identifies through this list of books a collection of women's literature identifying the diversity of women. Here Joseph argues for me that feminist books (available in feminist bookstores) challenge Warner's, Anderson's, Habermas', and Eberly's ideas of a unified reading public; that is, the very books that they tell us could elide our identities into a bracketed homogenous readership, in fact point out our differences and resist the sense of a unified community. Where Joseph's listed feminist books are assembled together and purchased (all of them have been reissued in new editions, indicating both successful sales and important content),<sup>42</sup> I argue that a place of "weakness, of contradiction and crisis, in the circuits of capital" occurs and produces a feminist literary public sphere.

These assembled books provide a safe space for coming out and being queer in a variety of ways, thus identifying a feminist project as a queer one.<sup>43</sup> Queer theory, as Warner's and Joseph's work in the field indicates, has developed interesting tools with

which to articulate such shifting relations with capital, and I draw on queer theory to emphasize feminist bookstores' roots in queer work and their subsequent queering of capital. There is a danger here of abstracting the sense of queer desire implicated in the long and frustrated history of the word queer; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, claims that "there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only *when attached to the first person*."<sup>44</sup> In order to use the term here in the third person, then, I will establish the queer (in the usual sense, if there is one) work of feminist bookstores. One of the most frequent narratives of political work at feminist bookstores is the coming out story (a narrative of incipient publicness). Like Carol's visit to the West Coast Lesbian Conference, the discovery of lesbian books with good endings, and their more permanent availability through a growing network of feminist bookstores, changed the lives of the lesbians who read them and changed the lives of other women and men whether they read those books or not. In public perception feminist bookstores are often considered lesbian bookstores, and it is true that the majority of feminist bookwomen have been lesbians and that the availability of lesbian books has been a central motivation for feminist bookstores' work. But feminist bookstores articulate their work in service of all women by making queer texts available amidst a range of feminist literature. Narratives of feminist bookwomen repeatedly explain how "coming out," in a broad sense, in feminist bookstores works for lesbians, for men, and for otherwise-identified women.

Nina Wouk, one of the thirteen co-founders of the Common Woman Bookstore, now BookWoman, in Austin, Texas, remembers, "My partner, Jessie, moved to Austin because her friends that she was living with in San Antonio came to Austin, came to what

was then the Common Woman, and brought back a bunch of proof that lesbian culture exists. And they were so excited about this.”<sup>45</sup> Recalling interactions at her bookstore, *Old Wives’ Tales*, Carol Seajay expands the sense of coming out:

With the lesbians books it was most easy to see: you can watch somebody come out, cut off her hair, become a dyke! But, women who would just come in, straight women in relationships that they stayed in, you could see their back bones getting stronger, you could see boundaries forming, you could see limits happening, you could see pride, you could see self esteem. Some women read psychology and get that, some women read self-help books and get that, and a lot of women read fiction and get that.

For Gilda Bruckman at New Words in Cambridge, coming out was a family affair:

We obviously had a huge following in the emerging lesbian-feminist community in our age peers, women from the age of, I don’t know, eighteen to forty, most of whom were in their twenties at that point. It was a very blue-jeans, Frye boots, workshirts set in the early seventies. But there were always straight women, and they were always welcome. There were guys always, and we learned early on—I mean, we were inclined not to make judgments, anyway, but it was a real lesson to me that there was a guy who would come in very frequently and would go straight to the lesbian fiction. He had a sister living in some place in the middle of the country who couldn’t get anything to read, and he was providing her with books. Or, there was another guy who came in, and he was a therapist, and he was looking for literature that would help him support his clients. So, it was a real

lesson that whoever wanted to come in and be supportive and take advantage of the resources, we wanted to support.<sup>46</sup>

In this provision of positive lesbian resources, feminist bookstores have always been queer, even for “straight” readers. This means that reading at feminist bookstores is a different experience than reading at other bookstores because they are sought out as sites of possible transformation, politically-charged sites of information about various types of coming-out as well as about rape survival, incest survival, divorce, parenting, mourning, and more.

Out of this queer-identified history and work emerges another definition of queer. Reading two different attempts by Sedgwick to define “queer” suggests the centrality of queerness both to a distrust of capitalism and to a political reading practice. In *Tendencies* she offered what is likely her most-cited explanation of queer: “That’s one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically.”<sup>47</sup> To make this dispersed possibility concrete, she offers the example of Christmas, when “they all—religion, state, capital, ideology, domesticity, the discourses of power and legitimacy—line up with each other so neatly once a year, and the monolith so created is a thing one can come to view with unhappy eyes. What if instead there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other?”<sup>48</sup> It is convenient and perhaps not by arbitrary selection that Sedgwick lays out an equation including capital, suggests that capital works with

“religion, state, capital, ideology,” and etc., to generate a monolith. I suggest that feminist bookstores enact that queer moment in which the meaning of purchasing at a feminist bookstore is “at loose ends” with a market-based appearance of such a purchase. In a later work, Sedgwick herself moves beyond the first person to describe what might make a queer reading: “It seems to me that an often quite, but very palpable presiding image here—a kind of *genius loci* for queer reading—is the interpretive absorption of the child or adolescent whose sense of personal queerness may or may not (*yet?*) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice, aim, site, or identification. Such a child—if she reads at all—is reading for important news about herself, without knowing what form that news will take.”<sup>49</sup> Certainly this kind of reading practice is central to the feminist bookstore space where a woman can find “important news about herself.” Then, the space of reading can be as important as the reading itself. If, as Sedgwick’s edited collection *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* suggests, scholars/readers can practice queer readings, they can also be made aware of queer ways of acquiring or accessing the texts that they read queerly. That is, the readings embrace the moments that don’t line up, and these literary moments are much like the moment of distribution that interests me here.

I repeat that I do not intend to use “queer” recklessly, but I do want to use its rich theoretical body and its powerful sense of shock to displace readers’ conceptions that the place of purchase is of negligible importance. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write that “*queer*” is not “an umbrella for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered.”<sup>50</sup> For Berlant and Warner, “part of the point of using the word *queer* in the first place was

the wrenching sense of recontextualization it gave, and queer commentary has tried hard to sustain awareness of diverse context boundaries.”<sup>51</sup> I suggest that feminist bookstores have been central to defining this practice of queer capitalism because of their initial inception as politically and social-service based women’s centers and because of their widespread presence and network. While the majority of Feminist Bookstore Network members were feminist bookstores, both lesbian and gay bookstores subscribed to the *Feminist Bookstore News*.<sup>52</sup> Theresa Corrigan writes, “The chains are also capitalizing on the lesbian and gay markets since they discovered we buy so many books. However, they primarily stock mainstream press titles, so don’t expect to find most of your favorite authors at the superstores. [...] Most lesbian authors now published by the big houses, such as Dorothy Allison, Sarah Schulman, and Jeanette Winterson, established their track records through the feminist presses and bookstores.”<sup>53</sup> Corrigan here marks the distinct difference between marketing and supporting a literature. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed similarly critique the cooptation of queer identity, warning about the impact of capitalism on politics: “It is too early to tell whether concrete, day-to-day political action in the gay community will change as well, coming more into line with the typical politics of groups led by individuals who feel they are faring well under capitalism. But it is already clear that in some important ways, the gay moment is more of a hurdle for gay politics than a source of strength.”<sup>54</sup> Feminist bookstores, then, also participate in a queering of the cooptation of queerness by employing and supporting lesbians, feminists, and LGBTQ populations (and combinations of the three) where any (small) profits return to those communities and bolster support for feminist literatures and readerships. This

broad readership of the *News* identifies the FBN as an unprecedented, queer organizing body negotiating a queer feminism for bookstores. This motive and effective (trans)national presence enabled feminist bookstores as a collective force to queer capitalism in the book market more thoroughly than any other bookstore variant. This combination of queer theory and public sphere theory articulates feminist bookstores as feminist literary public spheres practicing queer capitalism in order to prepare readers to recognize feminist bookstores as sites of political (text-based) work.

### **Carol Seajay and the Feminist Bookstore Network**

On my first visit with Carol Seajay, sitting at her broad wooden kitchen table next to the window out on endless rows of San Francisco houses, she explained how she found out feminist bookstores existed. Growing up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Carol had gotten involved with Kalamazoo Women's Liberation. Her feminism was fueled by the thriving feminist print culture that would articulate and define the movement: "[M]y lover was editing a newspaper, and they had exchange subscriptions, we got to see everything." Carol saw most of the movement papers of the time, including *The Furies* (subtitled "lesbian/feminist monthly" and started in 1972) and *Ain't I a Woman* (started in 1970). These papers carried ads for feminist bookstores, which, along with suggestions from friends, introduced her to the growing national feminist bookstore movement.

When I was still in Michigan, there was a women's bookstore in Ann Arbor, which I never got into. I got outside of, at night, when they were closed, but never got into the store. When I went to New York to do a site visit for abortion clinics, I got to go into Labyris bookstore, which at that point was a ring the doorbell and

they decide if [they'll] let you in or not place. Then, later, in '73, I went to the West Coast Lesbian Conference. [... And a friend] took me to A Woman's Place in Oakland, and I went to Sisterhood in L.A. while I was there.

Carol's encounters with numerous feminist bookstores suggests the communication network that spread the word about these spaces as important to the movement; each time Carol visited a feminist bookstore, she had been brought to that city by events of the feminist movement. This personal map identifies the work of feminist bookstores growing out of and in service to a central feminist movement.

Attracted by the feminist culture fostered by the California bookstores, the year after her visit she "got on a motorcycle and headed west," to San Francisco, stopping in at Amazon Bookstore in Minneapolis along the way. Her friend Forest, then Gretchen Milne, also lived in San Francisco and had co-founded the Oakland feminist bookstore, ICI: A Woman's Place, during the first year of US feminist bookstores, 1970. ICI stood for Information Center Incorporate, indicating the work of feminist bookstores as clearing houses of information. Carol began volunteering, then working at the store. Carol describes the ICI collective as representative of its community:

It was a very diverse group of women. There was my friend Forest who taught philosophy at State, and there were the women in high school, [... and] several women that hadn't finished any kind of formal schooling. There were Asian, Filipino, Black, white [women], it was a real mix. The only thing that wasn't strongly represented were straight women; there were a few straight women and a

few kind of asexual women, and mostly a bunch of dykes that had this vision and were going to make it happen.

Carol describes a near-ideal community of women here, and the reality indicates the fallacy of the Habermasian public sphere, one in which differences are bracketed for public interaction. In her description, Carol prizes the diversity of the feminist bookstore collective, indicating a push to accept differences within this instantiation of the public sphere. However, as feminist bookstores attempted to work out this new kind of public, differences erupted.

Traumatic breaks (or near-breaks) around issues of race and racism compromised some feminist bookstore collectives. These breaks indicate the diverse range of women invested in and working on the feminist bookstore project, and they document some of the failures of the idealized feminist literary public sphere to define itself through difference. Feminist bookstores thus became stages for conversations (and arguments) about intersections between movements and identities. At ICI: A Woman's Place, three collective members changed the bookstore locks and effectively shut out four other collective members. The "Locked Out Four" self-identified as Italian, Jewish, Black, and Asian and described their dispute as a reaction against hegemonic feminism.<sup>55</sup> Three women arbitrators agreed upon by both parties resolved the struggle in a process that supports a definition of feminist bookstores as public spaces. The revised collective made copies of the decision available at the store, and an open letter also detailed the decision:

I.C.I.—A Woman's Place, a feminist bookstore and information center in Oakland, California, has been through a seven-month long dispute over ownership

and control of the bookstore and the conduct of the collective members. We're glad to announce that this dispute has been resolved as of April 15, 1983. [...] The decision awards management of the bookstore to Keiko Kubo, Jesse Meredith, Darlene Pagano, and Elizabeth Summers, who are to immediately incorporate the business. These four will leave the corporation, two within one year and two within two years. Alice Molloy, Carol Wilson and Natalie Lando are to immediately disassociate from the business and are awarded the equivalent of one month's pay.<sup>56</sup>

The store closed in 1985. Alice Molloy and Carol Wilson went on to found Mama Bears' in Oakland, which closed in 2003.

By 1976, the two or three hour bus ride from San Francisco to Oakland drove Carol to start thinking about opening a feminist bookstore nearer to home. So she and her partner, Paula Wallace, applied for a loan at the Feminist Federal Credit Union,<sup>57</sup> and that summer Carol headed out to Omaha, Nebraska, for the first Women in Print Conference, organized by Daughters Press. The first night of the Women in Print Conference, women involved with feminist bookstores formally pooled their resources for the first time, developing a dialogue that became a public focused on the distribution of women's words what would become the foundation for a national network. Each shared one question they had and one area of knowledge with which they could help others. Carol asked, could she start a feminist bookstore with \$6,000-\$8,000 and live on the bookstore? "The next day this woman, in the swimming pool, where everyone's naked—this naked woman came up to me in the swimming pool and said, 'Yes, you can.' And I had no idea what she was

talking about!” Trying to stay “cool,” Carol listened to the woman’s advice, “‘You can, you know, we had about eight-thousand dollars, and it’s supporting me half time.’ That was Karyn London who’d started Womanbooks. Later in the day, Gilda Bruckman came up to me, with clothes on, and told me what they had done at New Words.” The force of the collective feminist bookstore movement inspired Carol. “Just the fact that they had done it made it so much easier. Clearly, we were all inventing the same thing in our different parts of the world. And I’m sure it would’ve worked if I hadn’t known that, but for them to say, ‘Yes. You go do it, girl,’ was great.” On her return to San Francisco, Carol and Paula left ICI: A Woman’s Place and opened Old Wives’ Tales on Valencia Street.

While feminist presses created the texts, feminist bookstores ensured the development of the literary public sphere. More than simply selling the books, they made the books available in response to requests for information and around meetings and other group discussions. Feminist bookstores educated women in preparation for authorship and for interventions in the larger, state-dominated, and often discriminatory public.<sup>58</sup> One December newsletter from Old Wives’ Tales lists three events that indicate the range of services and preparation for intervention in a larger public that occur at feminist bookstores:

- ◆ Thurs., Dec. 3 Tenant’s Rights Workshop for Women by the Housing Rights Outreach Project of the SF Tenants Union and People’s Law School.  
Discussing: Repairs, deposits, evictions, harassment, leases & rent increases as well as answering any questions you may have. For women. Free.

- ◆ Thurs. Dec. 10 Readings from WOMANBLOOD: PORTRAITS OF WOMEN IN POETRY AND PROSE, edited by Aline O'Brien, Chrys Rasmussen and Catherine Costello. This is a locally published book, containing works of 38 writers from across the country. Local writers who will be reading are Mary TallMountain, Carol Tarlen, Lauren Liebling, Conna Lane, Ann Cox and Catherine Costello. 7:30
- ◆ Thurs. Dec 17 Nine short films by new women filmmakers of the Bay Area: "Women in Gear", "Hallways", "Heart Piece", "Seven Years", "Insides", "Sappho", "Women's Body Images", "Dream Menagerie", and "Face to Face". \$2.00 donation. 7:30
- ◆ And last but not least, our traditional holiday reminder: When giving gifts, remember that we can support our culture and our communications network by supporting feminist writers and publishers and the stores that make this work available. This movement exists because we make it!<sup>59</sup>

The combination here of the tenant's rights workshop, an explicitly educational workshop, the poetry reading, advertised here as a support of specific local writers, and the nine short films by local filmmakers, at least one, "Sappho," drawing on a woman literary icon, connects the literary space of the bookstore with political activism, community support, and visual representation. The final entry institutes an alternative holiday tradition with the "traditional" reminder to practice queer capitalism: "we can support our culture and our communications network by supporting feminist writers and publishers and the stores that make this work available." The reminder also marks the

feminist literary public sphere comprised of feminist bookstores’ “culture” and “communications network.”

At the same Women In Print Conference that saw the beginning of *Old Wives’ Tales*, Carol agreed to co-publish the distribution and networking engine of the feminist bookstore movement. The *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* would solidify and define this unique public sphere. Carol remembers there being about eighteen bookstores at that conference, and to utilize feminist bookstores’ collective knowledge to broaden distribution and even publishing networks they needed a reliable communication network. “It was so exciting to talk to each other and just ask these questions, like, ‘What’s a book for a little girl who needs this?’ and ‘Do you know of anything about incest?’ There was one pamphlet that you could order from this woman in Sacramento, California, and it was such an incredible resource.” Though the conference produced plans for three newsletters, the bookstores were the only ones to create a sustained network and publication. Carol remembers, “I started it with a woman named Andre, who has no last name; she worked at Rising Woman Books in Santa Rosa.” The success of the FBN suggests the vital life of feminist bookstores and their importance to distribution of the women in print movement.

This distribution identifies feminist bookstores as sites of a specifically literary public sphere as the bookstores collect together, and thus identify, a body of feminist texts shared by a literary public through performances and discussions at the bookstores (as described in the *Old Wives’ Tales* events list above) as well as through reading the texts. My interview respondents repeatedly describe the collection of a diverse body of

texts as a means of challenging a hegemonic women's movement. However, the lack of a consistently diverse group of women working in the bookstores in proportion to the range of feminist authors on the shelves troubles the definition of a diverse public sphere at feminist bookstores. Feminist bookstores as productive sites of sometimes troubled community acknowledged difference and made possible shared conversation around the common interests of their public sphere and simultaneously attempted to broaden the scope of that common interest. Carol explains how the bookstores maintained a collection of texts that would make this literary public possible:

[I]t was while we were in [A Woman's Place] that Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* came out, and we had Jade Snow Wong's biography [*No Chinese Stranger*] that we would order from her in case lots out of her basement because it had gone out of print, and that was the only way they were available anymore. We went to those kinds of lengths to get what existed; we started having those books, and, as soon as they would exist, we would hear about them, and grab them.

Here Carol emphasizes the need for feminist books, they were able to get "what existed," and wanted to "grab" feminist books as soon as they were available. She also describes the bookstore's prioritization of texts by women of color. Because feminist bookstores sometimes functioned as distributors of out-of-print texts, they became a unique site of a literary public, maintaining a literary history and culture not visible in records like catalogs or Books In Print or the inventories of mainstream bookstores.

A short list of the incredible number of women's presses that grew up around this time illustrates the significant body of literature fostered by the women in print movement, made into a public by their collection in feminist bookstores. I list here a few press names, the dates they were founded, and a prominent text that each published: Diana Press was founded in 1972 (publishers of *A Plain Brown Rapper* by Rita Mae Brown), Daughters Press also in 1972 (publishers of *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown), Persephone in 1976 (publishers of *The Wanderground* by Sally Gearhardt), Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1981 (the first women in print movement press organized by and for women of color, and publishers of *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* edited by Barbara Smith), and Third Woman Press also in 1981 (founded as a journal and publishers of *My Wicked Wicked Ways* by Sandra Cisneros). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa was initially published by Persephone, picked up by Kitchen Table, and is still in print with Third Woman Press. With the exception of *A Plain Brown Rapper* and *Home Girls*, all of these books are still in print. This short list begins to suggest the culture of a public sphere peopled by a variety of literatures, readers, and responses to these texts produced and distributed by women to women.

Feminist bookstores supported and enabled the work of feminist presses by facilitating distribution of their texts and making a place for such texts to congregate together and, thus, to form a shared body of women's literature. Distribution happened most regularly under the aegis of the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* and then the *News*, in which a section called "From Our Own Presses," regularly made visible the various

offerings from feminist presses, either new titles or new and backlist titles if the *FBN* issue addressed a particular issue (such as recovery books or children’s literature). And feminist books were prominently displayed in feminist bookstores. Andrea Dworkin, who published with Frog in the Well, a California-based feminist press, as well as non-feminist-specific small presses, explains how placement of books in feminist bookstores supported feminist presses and authors: “I think [feminist bookstores] had a tremendous impact on my work. The first thing that they did was that they made it visible. You go into a regular bookstore, commonplace bookstore, and there are a lot of books, and the feminist books don’t necessarily stand out. Or, if they carry them [...] they’re hidden away somewhere. When you would walk into a feminist bookstore, you would see everything that had been published that was of importance to you.”<sup>60</sup> Alta, owner of Shameless Hussy Press, describes in a 2001 interview with Irene Reti how feminist bookstores distributed Shameless Hussy books, and thus supported her press. “Alma Cremenese physically schlepped the books around in boxes to the women’s meetings. That’s how we sold our books until 1974. Just about that time I published *Ntozake Shange* and *George Sand*. *George Sand* had been out of print for eighty years. By now there were things called women’s bookstores. There were maybe ten or twelve in the whole country, and they all ordered Shameless Hussy books.”<sup>61</sup> Distribution became more effective and collaborative through what began as the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter*; the exchange of information about feminist books indicated a clear shared focus on the books that would build a movement. The first editions of the *Newsletter* laid the foundation for the format of later *FBN* publications, including letters from

bookstores, lists of new feminist books from trade and feminist publishers, queries about out of print books, and advice on how to run a bookstore. The mutually constructed forum represented in these pages tracks the national project of feminist bookstores not as isolated enterprises but as a coordinated lifeline for feminist literature and literary spaces.

Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press' negotiation of distribution emphasizes the dependence of independent publishing on alternative distribution networks and literary public spheres invested in their work; this story indicates the ways in which a diverse feminism and feminist literature depends on a healthy feminist literary public sphere. In a 2002 phone interview, Barbara Smith noted the difficulties of securing distribution for small feminist women of color press books in a mainstream book culture. "[T]owards the end of the time that I was involved with Kitchen Table, I had really wanted us to get a sales rep. Inland [...] bundled their many independent presses and did a consistent marketing job with titles by feminists. But, generally, they responded to demand as opposed to going out and trying to create demand."<sup>62</sup> Consortium was a distributor that did more active marketing, but they would not represent Kitchen Table because, as Barbara Smith recalls, "we didn't publish often enough, and we didn't have enough staff to meet their deadlines. You had to be on a real publishing schedule; everything's predictable, everything's really precise. And the thing is, Kitchen Table never really could meet that level, because there was only one person to do it, and that was me."

Barbara Smith was aware of the *Feminist Bookstore News*, and took part in the feminist literary public sphere both through her work as an author and publisher and through her advocacy for African American women's texts. She repeatedly wrote to the

*Newsletter* and then to the *News* with information about new books and journals she wanted to see in the FBN's publication. In March, 1980, Barbara Smith wrote to "recommend that you assign for review" *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* "by the Black Lesbian feminist writer, Joan Gibbs"; *Lorraine Hansberry: Art of Thunder, Vision of Light*, "a special issue of the Black quarterly *Freedomways*"; and *In the Memory and Spirit of Frances, Zora and Lorraine: Essays and Interviews on Black Women and Writing*, edited by Juliette Bowles. She further advocates for women of color, urging the FBN to make its publications inclusive: "If necessary, you may contact me if you would like suggestions of Black women reviewers." *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* appeared in the "From the Feminist Presses and Mimeographs" section of the next *Newsletter* along with a quote from Barbara's note. And in 1982 Barbara Smith wrote again to the *Newsletter* to announce the reprinting of *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* and to request activism through the *Newsletter*: "Besides keeping your orders up to date bookstores might inform the Feminist Press that many sales were lost when the book was unavailable and mention any other inconvenience that the book's unavailability may have caused." This letter was copied in full, including letterhead reading "From the desk of Barbara Smith," in the next issue, November 1983.

That year, the publication changed format from being stapled in the corner to being stapled in booklet form, and in 1984 the publication changed its name to the more professional trade title *Feminist Bookstore News*. The mailing list included feminist bookstores as well as publishers and authors for a total of 300 addresses in countries including the U.S., Canada, England, and New Zealand.<sup>63</sup> The collaboratively written and

read *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* (and then *News*) functioned as the outward marker of a connected international public of feminist bookstores. From the beginning, the publication included articles, announcements, and letters exchanged between, shared with, and in response to feminist bookwomen. The *Feminist Bookstore News*' "Organizational Information" from a Chicago Resource Center (CRC) grant application explains how this works: the *News* "supports the bookstores and is a support system masquerading as a magazine. It keeps the far-flung bookstores connected and reflects back to them a sense of what they are doing and ties the stores together into a network -- an international network of women making and bringing the books to women that change our lives -- personally and globally."<sup>64</sup> This statement positions the *News* as the expression of a public rather than simply an industry trade publication. The work of this public designates it as a specifically *feminist* literary public sphere, one in which the books collected, shared, and talked about are meant to "change [women's] lives."

The *Feminist Bookstore News*, then, served a dual purpose, as communication platform for feminist bookstores, and as the ideal tool of the public sphere to, as Habermas puts it, "[make] use of its reason" and intervene in policy and language.<sup>65</sup> This dual focus generated a tense discussion about who should receive FBN publications. According to the CRC grant application, feminist bookstores' "reason" impacted the mainstream public as entities outside the public, including publishers, magazine editors, librarians, and wholesale distributors, read the FBN publication. But the February 1981 *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* outlines concerns about the growing circulation.

[T]o whom should the Feminist Bookstores' Newsletter go? This has been asked before, and some who answered strongly advocated that the circulation be limited to bookstores and publishers who are feminist and women-owned and operated. The feeling was that the [*Newsletter*] could better be a forum for controversial and vulnerable material if it was available only to feminist women--also that straight stores receiving this information might undercut feminist stores in their area by ordering materials found in the [*Newsletter*].<sup>66</sup>

Defining feminist bookstores as publics rather than as *stores* is central to understanding what is at stake here. If, as I argue in this chapter, feminist bookstores' stock of books prompted mainstream publishers to continue to support these books, that support would disappear when feminist bookstores closed down. The influence generated by a successful feminist bookstore network required that feminist books be distributed as a collective body of texts structured as a public sphere rather than through isolated women's studies sections in general bookstores.

A 1981 letter from Lorraine and Anne of Mother Kali's feminist bookstore in Eugene, Oregon, to the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* highlights how the conversations of a bookselling *public* are different from those of a bookselling enterprise. "We at Mother Kali's, and Mary from Book & Tea (the other feminist bookstore here in Eugene) would prefer that you restrict distribution to feminist bookstores + feminist woman-owned publishers. Restricting other stores to the booklist section would not be helpful to us since it is precisely that portion of the newsletter which would help [...] other stores compete with us in the major area in which we have an 'advantage.'"<sup>67</sup> But Lorraine and

Anne also note the need to get information out about feminist books. “One of the things we all want to do is make feminist literature more available than it is. So, if you decide to go public, it’s probably ok.” And they explain how this will change the publication. “The character of the letters will change if you do. [.. T]here will be less sense of informal intimacy.” Ultimately, the FBN balanced the need to sustain the feminist literary public sphere through conversation among feminist bookstores with the need to use the influence of that public sphere to impact a larger institutional public. The FBN Catalog was only distributed to feminist bookstores, and a publication called *Hot Flashes* hosted “inside” conversations without circulation to the general public at large. The *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* and *News* was distributed widely in order to use the collective force of the feminist bookstore public to pressure mainstream publishers and general bookstores to acknowledge and respond to a robust field of women’s literature.

Feminist bookstores mobilized the force of their feminist literary public sphere to ensure mainstream publishers continued to publish women’s texts and to get out-of-print women’s texts back into publication. A 1979 letter from Esther Broner, author of *Her Mothers* and known in print as E. M. Broner, indicates the influence of feminist bookstores on mainstream publishing houses. Typed under a Wayne State University, Department of English letterhead, the letter reads:

Dear Carol Seajay: How are you? I read [from my book] about a year ago last Spring at Old Wives’ Tales. In the meantime, Her Mothers (Berkeley Publishing Corp.) has gone out of print. Shebar Windstone, that great ... scholar, has insisted that I write to you about it. She said that you were insistent enough to get a reprint

of Joanna Russ's book. ... You know [Her Mothers] and know that it is taught in almost every college in the country. ... I would appreciate your pressuring Victor Tamkin of Berkeley Publishing Corp. ... or/and Rolleen Saal, Bantam Books, Inc ... to reissue Her Mothers.<sup>68</sup>

Harper reissued *Her Mothers* in 1983, perhaps in part as a result of FBN advocacy. The existence of the letter itself, regardless of the motivations for Harper's reprint, indicates the publicly acknowledged literary advocacy work of the FBN for both community- and academe-based feminists.

The *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* functioned as a vehicle for coordinating letter-writing campaigns calling for the reprint of books like Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's *Lesbian/Woman* (1991), Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman*, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, and E.M. Broner's *Her Mothers*. Carol Seajay explains, "We did it for a lot of books. [...] And, being the troublesome, rowdy women we are, we don't take no for an answer." She describes how she imagined the effect, "We could get together 15 or 20 and sometimes 25 letters about a book that mattered to us, as a community. Of course, the sales guy and the money people making the decisions in New York, they don't know we're all networked together, they just see these things coming in from all over the country. [...] So we had impact way beyond our numbers." Eventually, the mainstream publishing industry did have a feel for the significant impact of feminist bookstores. Gilda Bruckman, co-founder of New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, describes her ability to affect the publication of women's texts: "We even did things like, a publisher had come to visit us, brought in by one of our sales reps, just to find out what was new,

what was interesting, what did we have to recommend. And, at the time, I had read Ella Leffland's *Rumors of Peace*. And it was out of print. I said, 'You should bring this back, it's a great book.' And they did. Harper published it. And it's still in print." Bruckman sees this as a time "when savvy book reps were asking feminist booksellers, what's happening? what should we know about? and passing it on to their presses because this was the place where things happened first. [...] This was the place where the voices of women began to be heard and made it into the mainstream."<sup>69</sup>

Carol Seajay explains the particular role that feminist bookstores played in keeping these books in print by continuing to remind publishers that women's books do sell. "I remember, real early on, [...] one of the sales reps [...] did us the courtesy of coming in, but he said, 'I really don't have anything for you because, you know, the women's thing is kind of, over. [...] We don't think there's a market anymore.' And I just looked at him, and I said, 'My sales have doubled in the last eight months.' [...] And, next season, they'd have books for us." Seajay credits the extensive women in print network: "We would prove that market, and every time they said there's no more interest, we would laugh at them. [...] So, either our laughter embarrassed them, [...] our numbers convinced them, or they just saw they were missing sales and didn't want to. So they kept publishing year after year." The sustenance of a feminist literature, then, is the significance of maintaining a feminist literary public sphere. After supporting feminist literature through the conversations of the FBN and its *Newsletter*, the feminist literary public sphere exerts its strength on the mainstream book market, changing the availability of books for the public at large.

Though the Feminist Bookstore Network's connections and publications already acknowledged a shared political enterprise on an international scale, in 1993 it became urgent to announce the FBN as a formal organization.<sup>70</sup> One project of the formally-recognized FBN was to restore to public association the original identity of feminist bookstores as women's resource centers, information centers incorporate. The FBN developed a public relations campaign called National Feminist Bookstore Week. The first spanned May 13-20, 1995, and, as Nicole Keller of *Publishers Weekly* reports, "The primary aim of the week is to gain attention for feminist bookstores, many of whose owners, like Carolyn Gabel of The Readers Feast in Hartford, Conn., fell 'under attack by corporate superstores.' [... The] participating booksellers hope to remind customers that feminist stores are 'community centers' where they can seek emotional support and empowerment."<sup>71</sup> After a severe decline in the number of feminist bookstores in the U.S. during the late 1990s, the Feminist Bookstore Network closed in 2000. The *Feminist Bookstore News*' readership offers one gauge of the force of the feminist literary public sphere: Claire Kirch reported in *Publishers Weekly*, "When Seajay stopped publishing FBN in July 2000, the magazine had approximately 900 paying subscribers and at least five times as many actual readers."<sup>72</sup> These numbers and feminist bookstores' narrative intervention in public sphere theory invites a look at the book market as more than just a market.

The feminist literary public sphere continues, sustained by the feminist bookstores operating today. Certainly the strength of the movement has decreased with the number of feminist bookstores and the closing of the FBN, but that does not mean that feminist

bookstores are doomed to extinction. Feminist bookstores are a recent instantiation of a long-standing feminist literary public sphere, and as such a revised formation of this public sphere will certainly develop from the work of feminist bookstores. In the meantime, the designation of feminist bookstores as public spheres requires us to interact differently with the history and future of those spaces. Our purchase of texts supports (or fails to support) a feminist literary public sphere that still locates feminist texts in conversation with each other, collected together in rich detail next to which the paltry “women’s studies” offerings of large general stores pale in comparison. My subsequent chapters argue that feminist bookstores’ activism supported the rise of women’s studies as well as that of women’s literature. By neglecting the history of feminist bookstores, current scholarship and historiography erases the mechanisms by which these larger feminist publics have been developed. To reinstate the history of this public production by remembering the history of feminist bookstores develops a set of tools with which to document and discuss a whole body of feminist literature (with a long past) and with which to imagine new constellations of women’s literature, literacy, and studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Seajay, personal interview, 17 July 2003.

<sup>2</sup> “Bookstores,” *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.2 (1977): 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> Identifying feminist bookstores as purveyors of a feminist literary public sphere also calls up a history of references to a women’s sphere. Linda Kerber identifies the problems with the rhetoric of the women’s sphere: “When they used the metaphor of separate spheres, historians referred, often interchangeably, to an ideology *imposed on* women, a culture *created by* women, a set of boundaries *expected to be observed* by women. Moreover, the metaphor helped historians avoid thinking about race; virtually all discussion of the subject until very recently has focused on the experience of white women, mostly of the middle class” (37). The public sphere differs from the women’s sphere in that it has a particular political implication at all times and, by necessity, confers agency at all times. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s

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Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *No More Separate Spheres!*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas suggests such uses within *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Theorists have used Habermas' text, as he suggested, "to attain [...] a sociological clarification of the concept [and] a systematic comprehension of our own society from the perspective of one of its central categories" (5). Other authors have taken up public sphere theory on behalf of groups including the working class (Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge) and the feminist movement (Nancy Fraser and Rita Felski). Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, 1972, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oskiloff (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993). Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, 1992 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) 109-142. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Fraser 123.

<sup>6</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation* 183.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14.1 (2000): 49-90, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Rosa Eberly, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000) 21.

<sup>9</sup> Significantly, though, according to *The Guardian*, women make up seventy percent of "the American book buying public." Lawrence Donegan, "'Brand name' novel loses its appeal," *The Guardian Unlimited* 15 Dec. 2002, 27 Nov. 2004

<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,860259,00.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Negt and Kluge 8 n.15.

<sup>11</sup> Negt and Kluge 74.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," trans. Thomas Bugar, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 421-61, 421. Emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) 377-401, 383.

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, "Further Reflections" 427.

<sup>15</sup> Warner, "Mass Public" 384.

<sup>16</sup> Warner, "Mass Public" 385.

<sup>17</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1977, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 196-7.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 1991) 40.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990) xiii.

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson 36.

<sup>21</sup> Eberly 9.

<sup>22</sup> Janice Radway refigures Stanley Fish's notion of "interpretive communities" in a way that emphasizes the kind of cultural force such communities can have. Where Fish finds them intentional and specifically academic, Radway posits they might be "much larger collections of people who, by virtue of a common social position and demographic character, unconsciously share certain assumptions about reading as well as preferences for reading material" (54). While many feminist readers *consciously* share certain assumptions about reading (these would be those readers about which Radway says they "*know* they belong" (54)), I also make a claim throughout this dissertation that feminist bookstores change the reading climate even of those who do not visit the stores. Janice Radway supports this kind of influence when she suggests, "All components of literate behavior, including the desire to read, the decision to read a certain kind of material, the interpretation of that material, and the uses to which both the interpretation and the act of constructing it are put, may well be a consequence of the diverse material and social features that characterize the lives of real individuals" (71). Janice Radway, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading," *Deadalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 113.3 (Summer 1984): 49-73.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth McHenry takes up "literary activism," a term developed by Victoria Earle Matthews, a black woman writer and speaker in nineteenth-century United States. McHenry uses this term to illustrate "the ways that other black women in the last decade of the nineteenth century used public forums to articulate their understanding of the political implications of literary work" (190). And she tracks the development of literary spaces through this activism: "Another manifestation of their literary activism and their commitment to public literacy can be seen in the clubs' dedication to establishing physical institutions such as libraries and reading rooms that would encourage and sustain their own literary interests and that of their communities" (242). Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation* 56.

<sup>25</sup> I draw here on Fraser's description of subaltern counterpublics: "in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (124).

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Heilbrun, untitled note, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>27</sup> McHenry 241.

<sup>28</sup> Felski 9.

<sup>29</sup> Fraser 123.

<sup>30</sup> Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 195-222, 218.

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<sup>31</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: written by herself*, 1861, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987) 189.

<sup>32</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 11.

<sup>33</sup> Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity & Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999) 6.

<sup>34</sup> Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002) xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph 119.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph 44.

<sup>37</sup> I offer one small example of how such mainstream representations of women's studies section turn against us. Reluctantly visiting my first Barnes & Noble, the one in Chelsea in New York, in desperate search for a book by Andrea Dworkin to have her sign when I met with her (the meeting was scheduled after I left home, so my Andrea Dworkin books were all on my shelves in Texas), I was directed to the "women's studies" section. There I found no Andrea Dworkin books, but I did find Phyllis Schlafly's 2003 *Feminist Fantasies*, which, despite its fabulously misleading title, is not about feminist utopias or other, more sordid, fantasies, but is descriptive of Schlafly's personal fantasy, as printed on the book jacket: "No assault has been more ferocious than feminism's forty-year war against women. And no battlefield leader has been more courageous than Phyllis Schlafly. In a new book of dispatches from the front, feminism's most potent foe exposes the delusions and hypocrisy behind a movement that has cheated millions of women out of their happiness, health, and security." This is not the women's studies I fantasize about.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph 53.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph xxxi.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph 174.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph xxii.

<sup>42</sup> *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* is again out of print after the closing of Third Woman Press in 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa identifies the prolonged invisibility of vital queer advocacy within feminism: "Lesbians feature prominently in *Bridge* but our role has been downplayed. Though it's queer folk who keep walking into the teeth of the fire, we have not been given our due" (xxxiv-xxxv). Gloria Anzaldúa, "Foreword, 2001," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 1981 (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 9.

<sup>45</sup> Nina Wouk, personal interview, 4 June 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Gilda Bruckman, personal interview, 23 July 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 8.

<sup>48</sup> Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 6.

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<sup>49</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You," *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 1-37, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" *PMLA* 110.3 (May 1995): 343-349, 344.

<sup>51</sup> Berlant and Warner 345.

<sup>52</sup> One FBN mailing list from the early 1980s includes gay and lesbian bookstores such as Gay's the Word in London, Giovanni's Room in Philadelphia, and Friends of Dorothy in Charlotte. Feminist Bookstore News, mailing list, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>53</sup> Theresa Corrigan, "Feminist Bookstores: Part of an Ecosystem," *The Woman-Centered Economy: Ideals, Reality, and the Space in Between*, ed. Loraine Edwalds and Midge Stocker (Chicago: Third Side Press, 1995) 181-188, 183.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed, "The Gay Marketing Moment," *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life*, ed. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed (New York: Routledge, 1997) 3-9, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Darlene Pagano, Elizabeth Summers, Jesse Meredith, Keiko Kubo, "An open letter regarding the LOCK-OUT AT A WOMAN'S PLACE BOOKSTORE," 18 Sept. 1982, ICI: A Woman's Place Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Darlene Pagano, Elizabeth Summers, Jesse Meredith, Keiko Kubo, Flyer, n.d. 1983, ICI: A Woman's Place Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Feminist Federal Credit Unions are still open in San Diego, Ottawa, and Dallas.

<sup>58</sup> Habermas observes that literature proved the precursor to a widespread public sphere, but he sees the literary public sphere as apolitical. "Even before the control over the public sphere by public authority was contested and finally wrested away by the critical reasoning of private persons on political issues, there evolved under its cover a public sphere in apolitical form—the literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain. *It provided the training ground for a critical public reflection* still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness" (*Structural Transformation* 29, emphasis mine). Elizabeth McHenry takes this process of preparation a step further and identifies the political purposes of literary public spheres made up of African American reading societies in which members delivered papers as part of their analysis of texts. "What was 'literary' and educational about the club papers was not only their subject matter, although the dissemination of information on a variety of topics was clearly an important aspect of their work. Through the club paper, black women drew on myriad rhetorical skills, all of which they would need to be successful in their public service work. Not the least of these was the ability to work collectively" (209).

<sup>59</sup> Old Wives' Tales, Flyer, Dec. n.d., Courtesy Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, the Old Wives' Tales Bookstore Collection.

<sup>60</sup> Andrea Dworkin, personal interview, 12 Dec. 2003.

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<sup>61</sup> Alta, *Alta and the History of the Shameless Hussy Press, 1969-1989*, ed. Irene Reti and Randall Jarrell (Santa Cruz: U of California, Santa Cruz, University Library, 2001) 21-22.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara Smith, personal interview, 17 May 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Feminist Bookstore News, mailing list, 1984, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>64</sup> Feminist Bookstore News, Chicago Resource Center Grant Application, 1986, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>65</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation* 202.

<sup>66</sup> Jesse Meredith for the F.B.N., letter to readers, *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* V.5 (Feb. 1981): 1-2, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Lorraine and Anne of Mother Kali's, letter to the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter*, n.d. 1981, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>68</sup> Esther Broner, letter to Carol Seajay, 2 Nov. 1979, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>69</sup> Among others, Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls*, published by Shameless Hussy in 1975 and The Women's Press Collective in 1976 was picked up by its current publisher, Macmillan (now Scribner's), in 1977. Sandra Cisneros' *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, first published by Third Woman press in 1987 was picked up by Knopf in 1995. Rita Mae Brown's classic lesbian coming-of-age novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, was published by Daughters Press from 1973 until 1977, when Brown signed on with Bantam. Dorothy Allison published *Trash* in 1988, and *The Women Who Hate Me* in 1991 with the lesbian-feminist Firebrand Press before signing on with Dutton to publish *Bastard Out of Carolina* in 1992.

<sup>70</sup> The press release on the formalization of the network reads: "During the Feminist Bookstores Conference, May 27 and 28, 1993, the feminist bookstores formalized their professional organization, The Feminist Bookstore Network. The Network represents 125 feminist bookstores in the United States and Canada with collective sales of over \$35,000,000. The purpose of the Feminist Bookstore Network is to support feminist bookstores, to increase our visibility in the bookselling and publishing industries, and to promote feminist bookstores world-wide. We are working for higher industry awareness of the strength and impact of feminist bookselling in the U.S. and Canada.

The Network will serve to encourage publishers to increase their selection of feminist books by and about lesbians, women of color, old women, and all women who are inadequately represented. We will be a lobbying force with the publishers in relation to author tours, co-op advertising, and discount policies. The Network will also organize educational programs, conferences, increase communication among the bookstores, share resources and information and create publicity and promotional materials. We will be an advocate for independent bookselling in the 90's as we continue to promote feminist bookstores.

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The steering committee of the Feminist Bookstore Network consists of Barbe Szlavko, Womansline Books, London, Canada; Barb Weiser, Amazon Bookstore, Minneapolis, MN; Alison Cunningham, Golden Thread, New Haven, CT; Theresa Corrigan, Lioness Books, Sacramento, CA; and Linda Bryant, Charis: Books and More, Atlanta, GA.” Feminist Bookstore Network, “Press Release,” 29 May 1993, *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.2 (Aug. 1993): 34.

<sup>71</sup> Nicole Keller, “Feminist Bookstores Celebrate First ‘Week,’” *Publishers Weekly* 15 May 1995: 19.

<sup>72</sup> Claire Kirch, “Books to Watch Out For,” *Publishers Weekly* 15 Mar. 2004, 22.

## Chapter Two

### The Contemporary Book Market: An Emotional Marketplace, 1993-2003

Greetings to all of you who are picking up FBN [Feminist Bookstore News] for the first time at the ABA [American Booksellers Association's Annual Convention]. FBN is the trade magazine for the Women-In-Print movement. It's read by booksellers, publishers, and everyone who cares passionately about books that tell the truth about women's lives.

[...] Turn to page 31 for Convention Watch 93, FBN's short-course on getting around the Convention floor and all of the convention related events. Don't miss ABA's annual Membership Meeting on Sunday afternoon at 4:00. ABA's fence-sitting position vis-à-vis the war between independent bookstores and chain stores has not done anything to cheer its (largely independent) bookstore membership. Many see this year's meeting as a chance to knock ABA off that fence and into action for independent bookstores.<sup>1</sup>

In this *Feminist Bookstore News* editor's letter, Carol Seajay alerts readers to the significance of the 1993 ABA Convention, the convention that became a major turning point in the U.S. book trade. The opening greeting identifies an audience "picking up FBN for the first time," marking the *Feminist Bookstore News (News)* as both a communication vehicle for and the public face of the feminist literary public sphere. Seajay's reading of the upcoming meeting plays an important role in the public history of the book trade because the *News* was read by members both of a general bookselling public and of the ABA board itself, so that Carol here is simultaneously informing a

readership and arguing directly to the ABA that it should get “off that fence.” The ABA board members read and responded to pieces in the *News*, and *Publishers Weekly* reporters read and referred to the *News* in their columns; the *News* functioned as a respected book trade publication. No other group of specialty bookstores has developed a professional network and international publication, much less one that charted the work of the book trade and made the voice of its constituent bookstores a force in the industry.<sup>2</sup> The *News* made visible to booksellers a body of women’s literature and thus substantiated the work of “everyone who cares passionately about books that tell the truth about women’s lives.”

Carol Seajay’s editor’s letter also marks the Feminist Bookstore Network’s participation in the ongoing “war between independent bookstores and chain stores” (pointedly not referred to as bookstores), and identifies two foundations of the independents’ stake in that struggle. First, independent bookstores claim to care more about books while chain stores care about profit margins. Regular *News* readers care primarily about “books that tell the truth about women’s lives” rather than what sells. While sales are an issue of survival for feminist bookstores, bookstore mission statements, the political work of bookstores, as well as this editor’s letter, prioritize a *passionate* care for books in choosing and promoting the books they sell. Second, independent bookstores claim a right to active representation in the book trade by the ABA. Though the uncharacteristically objective language (“many claim”) of the second excerpted paragraph of the editor’s letter refrains from distancing readers doubtful of the independents’ right to survive, Carol Seajay adds a subtle follow up: “This issue’s Trivia

column asks a related question: ‘Does ABA *need* bookstores – or might it function perfectly well without them?’” Where “bookstores” are “independent bookstores” (since chains are merely stores), this barb makes independent bookstores’ continued involvement in the ABA contingent on its activism on their behalf. According to independents, then, the national organization has a responsibility to protect independent bookstores against the “war” brought on by chain stores: “Many see this year’s meeting as a chance to knock ABA off that fence and into action for independent bookstores.”

In 2005 we are at a crisis point for independent bookselling: the number of chain book superstores in the U.S. has increased from 499 to 1,122 over the past decade, while the number of independent bookstore closings is indicated both by the decline in ABA bookstore members from 3,600 to 1,800.<sup>3</sup> While in 1994 there were 124 feminist bookstores in the U.S., today there are around twenty, and the *News* no longer circulates.<sup>4</sup> Now is the time for savvy readers to find out if independent bookstores are the only ones that “care passionately” about lives, books, and readers. Interviews, essays, and press releases have argued strenuously to the contrary, but this chapter makes the case that independent bookstores have unique emotional investments (to intentionally infuse the exchange with emotion) in bookselling that protect feminist literature. Readers of all kinds, and especially literary scholars, whose careers traffic heavily in the book trade, should understand how the distribution side of the book trade works and how where we buy our books can affect what books get published.<sup>5</sup>

In 1995 publishers asked courts to dismiss legal action by the ABA on behalf of independent bookstores on the grounds that the suit constituted “emotional reactions to

competitive changes in the marketplace.”<sup>6</sup> This legal filing for the separation between emotion and competition supports the association of independent bookstores with emotional investment and large trade institutions with unemotional business practice. However, public statements from those institutions attempt to blur this too-easy designation. In 1997, the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* published interviews with the staff of Borders chain bookstore, including “Linn” (no last name given), the “gay and lesbian buyer,” who defends the chain: “We are not trying to put anyone out of business. Many of the remarks that get made about Borders bother me after a while because we are book people here. We are not just punching numbers in on a screen and looking at sales. But I suppose the chain bashing will not go away in the near future.”<sup>7</sup> Linn’s official title combined with the emotional rhetoric of “chain bashing” invokes the term “gay bashing,” the name given to violent hate crimes against queer people;<sup>8</sup> thus Linn uses the emotional strength of the shape of a term used to leverage for legal protection against hate crimes to identify chain stores as similarly discriminated against by independents. These two comments indicate the emotional pitch of the debate around the future of the U.S. book trade.

This chapter takes part in the ongoing public debate about the literary integrity of chain stores and the resulting impact of book market changes on the availability of a diverse literature and of women’s literature in particular. First, the chapter maps the legal underside of trade publishers, chain bookstores, and Amazon.com, to establish the very real threats of these institutions both to “free trade” and to independent public discussion. Second, the chapter claims that the *Feminist Bookstore News* (1976-2000) effectively

acted as a critical commentator on these developments, thus articulating the importance of the feminist literary public sphere as an advocate for women's literature. In the previous chapter I discussed the decision of the feminist bookstores to make the *News* public, and I explained that one feature of a public sphere is that it makes use of its interactions to impact the public at large. Here I explore that impact through the framework developed by the *News* for interpreting book market activity. This chapter's significance to a critical history of feminist bookstores is simultaneously to chart the threat posed to the bookstores by the current trade (and thus to posit a theory about their decline), and to map what public literary discourse loses when trade practices shut down feminist bookstores and, thus, the feminist literary public sphere.

This chapter draws on two journals as its primary texts. The first, the *Feminist Bookstore News* (initially called the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter*), as indicated in the previous chapter, maps the feminist literary public sphere by acting as a connecting and collaborative forum: "For all that FBN looks like a magazine, each issue is actually a compilation of phone calls, notes, letters and longer pieces. Some are formal, some are spur of the moment. FBN wouldn't exist without these communications and the commitments that stand behind them."<sup>9</sup> This publication also represents the feminist literary public sphere as one that has political intentions, "commitments," to alter the public sphere at large. It is appropriate to look to the *News* as a significant commentator on the book trade because, while there have been other politically-motivated independent bookstores, only feminist bookstores have had a sustained and internationally distributed publication as well as a professional organization. ABA board members and *Publishers*

*Weekly* reporters have recognized the *News* as a source of information and as a forum for discussion, conferring outside recognition of the publication's status. In 1993, the year with which this chapter begins, the *News* offered a sense of the range of the publication's influence: "FBN reaches 500 feminist and feminist-inclined bookstores in the U.S. and Canada as well as feminist booksellers in England, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, India and Japan. Librarians, women's studies teachers, book reviewers, publishers and feminist bibliophiles comprise the remainder of the subscribers."<sup>10</sup> My second primary text, *Publishers Weekly (PW)*, describes itself as "The International News Source for Book Publishing and Bookselling."<sup>11</sup> Founded in 1872, the publication claims it "reaches more than 27,000 paid subscribers in bookstores, libraries and publishing, as well as media and literary agents, and movie and studio executives – more than any other publication – delivering a total audience of nearly 100,000."<sup>12</sup> This publication serves as the trade's standard news source as well as major book marketing vehicle.<sup>13</sup> Dual references to *PW* and the *News* indicate the crossover of reporting and differentiate *PW* as a trade journal while the *News* also serves as arbiter of the feminist literary public sphere.

The following critical history of the contemporary book market focuses on Feminist Bookstore Network (FBN)<sup>14</sup> advocacy for women's literature alongside and through the American Booksellers Association. As a longstanding trade organization, the ABA has a broad and visible public presence, and feminist bookstores used their feminist literary public sphere to carry on a critical conversation with the ABA that allowed feminist bookstores to impact ABA policy and the shape of the book market. The advocacy of feminist bookstores within the ABA was unique among its membership

since the Feminist Bookstore Network was the only formal organization of specialty bookstores and thus provided a singular and collective voice within the ABA. I begin with an overview of feminist bookstores' relationship with the ABA in order to establish the activist role they play within the organization. I then describe the 1993 seachange at the ABA when its membership charged the organization with actively protecting independent booksellers. At this point, the ABA itself begins to describe independent bookstores as forums for social debate. This reformulation is spurred on by the information-limiting practices of large trade publishers, chain bookstores, and online bookstores. After the ABA shift, I examine in turn three major law suits carried out by the ABA against these three institutions. Throughout the chapter, the commentary of the *News* identifies the stakes of the FBN in the changing book market and the advocacy of the FBN for women's literature. Ultimately, the chapter argues for readers' active attention to the book market and attention to the vital work of a literary public sphere as embodied by the FBN.

### **American Booksellers Association**

This section sets the stage for the chapter by mapping both the early relationship of the ABA with feminist bookstores and the shifting identity of the ABA from an organization of general booksellers to an organization of independent booksellers. Feminist bookstores have been members of the ABA, and the FBN has been agitating to make the ABA accountable to progressive bookstores' communities since the late 1970s. The ABA, however, has resisted recognizing the feminist bookstore as a specific political genre of independent bookstore. Documents tracking the FBN's struggle for

representation within the ABA illustrate how unfamiliar the queer capitalist configuration of the political bookseller is to the trade at large, detailing the unique role of feminist bookstores as political advocates with a serious commitment to the survival of women's literature.

As early as 1978 feminist bookwomen were using the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter*, then just two years old, as a forum for discussion of the ABA. Letters and articles from bookwomen across the country were common fare in the *Newsletter*, each marking literary work as inseparable from political work for feminist bookstores. In 1978 Darlene Pagano from A Woman's Place in Oakland, California, wrote the letter appearing on the first page: "The first thing is, what are we going to do/say/demand around the fact that the ABA is being held in a state that refuses to ratify the ERA? And following that--what do we want to do around the ABA decision to hold the 1980 convention in Chicago, Illinois, being another non-ERA state. (1979 is scheduled in Los Angeles.)"<sup>15</sup> Pagano's letter indicates that the *Newsletter's* users (like herself) intended the publication to take up issues of the feminist movement at large and to use the FBN and institutions of the book market (like the ABA) to discuss and take action on the issues.

By 1989 the ABA was still unprepared to take feminist issues seriously. For the second year in a row at the annual convention the ABA sponsored a "feminist bookstore roundtable" without inviting a feminist bookseller to lead it.<sup>16</sup> A write-up of the disaster in the *News* caught the eye of ABA board member (and future president) Bernie Rath, who wrote a letter to Carol Seajay to justify the roundtable structure: "[I]nadvertently or

otherwise ABA does not wish to create an environment where there are capital ‘F’ Feminist Booksellers (whom we might define as those who own specialty bookstores) and small ‘f’ feminist booksellers (whom we might define as those who wish to build a department of quality materials in general stores).”<sup>17</sup> The letter, by virtue of its address to the (“capital ‘F’”) *Feminist Bookstore News*, recognizes an existing network of “capital ‘F’ Feminist Booksellers,” but it also points out that the ABA denied the difference between the literary activism of an entire store filled with women’s literature versus a section, however made up of “quality materials,” in general stores. Here Rath, who came to the ABA from a position as national sales manager of Macmillan of Canada, reads both as business ventures, defining even “capital ‘F’ Feminist Booksellers” as “those who *own specialty bookstores*,” with the emphasis on the store rather than on the, by Rath, unnamed specialty.<sup>18</sup>

A year later, in 1990, the ABA articulated this refusal to see a difference on a grand scale in their unwillingness to advocate for independent bookstores as a body. The ABA Convention had held a series of Specialty Roundtables to “ask for feedback on the ways ABA could better serve the needs of specialty bookstores,”<sup>19</sup> and Sandy Torkildson of A Room of One’s Own feminist bookstore in Madison, Wisconsin, wrote up the report for the *News*. The report attracted the attention of Joyce Meskis, owner of the Tattered Cover, a general independent bookstore in Denver, Colorado, and then-president of the ABA. At this time Meskis continued to hold that the ABA was not responsible for the independents’ survival; she divided independents up into a hierarchy of size that elided the independent/chain distinction. Meskis wrote of the ABA, “While the majority of its

members by far are small general stores in communities large and small throughout the country, it also serves the mid-size and larger general stores and specialty stores.”<sup>20</sup> Since the ABA would not officially distinguish between chain bookstores and independent bookstores, grouping the former with “larger general stores” and dispersing the latter by size, the official position of the ABA President was that the publishers, not the ABA, should take the appropriate action to create a “level playing field”: “The ABA takes the position that a publisher (whose terms tend to be volume driven) should be mindful of the important role that bookstores, large to small, specialty to general, play in the distribution of books.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the ABA would not openly support independent bookstores. By 1993 this situation was untenable, and feminist bookstores were at the forefront of a sea-change at the ABA, mapping the significant role of small specialty bookstores as a network to book market activism.

*PW*'s ABA guide announced the city in capital letters, “ABA 1993 MIAMI,” with a palm tree emblem layered beneath the year. John Mutter wrote, “the weather at the end of May will be either hot or miserably hot,” and similarly warns, “the program does not directly address the main concern of independent bookstores at the moment—the rapid growth of chain superstores.”<sup>22</sup> When the record number of publishers, booksellers, authors, and other book people crowded into the convention center on May 29<sup>th</sup>, booksellers received a pamphlet reminding them not to discuss prices or discounts. Titled “ABA Guidelines for Antitrust Compliance,” booksellers promptly renamed the pamphlet, printed on pink paper, The Pink Sheet. The Pink Sheet explained that “ABA’s members compete with each other; and any meeting among competitors has the potential

to lead to antitrust violations, whether intentional or inadvertent.” The “Guidelines” required that ABA members not discuss a bulleted list of items including “Current or future booksellers’ prices,” “Allocating territories or customers,” and “Refusing to do business with companies whose business practices they disapprove.”<sup>23</sup> Carol Seajay explained in the *News*, “The Pink Sheet, although *perhaps* not intended to inhibit discussion, was quoted and used to stop almost every reference to price and discount or to limit other legitimate bookseller discussion in almost every ABA event I attended.”<sup>24</sup> The proscriptive language passed down from the FTC by the ABA to member booksellers positioned bookstores as competitors rather than as a collection of movements fostering diverse literatures. While the flyer factually reports legal restrictions on a commodity trade, it is significant that the ABA chose 1993, the breaking point of the tension between independent and chain bookstores, to distribute such a flyer. The flyer indicated that the ABA was leaning towards a business model for the book trade, and the independents were in danger. Audrey May, owner of Meristem feminist bookstore in Memphis, Tennessee, reminded the meeting on the floor that “many of us in the Feminist Bookstore Network are fighting for our lives,”<sup>25</sup> while the wording of the ABA handout and FTC law forbade independent bookstores’ strategic collaboration. The distribution of “Guidelines” heightened the tension Carol Seajay had anticipated at the Sunday membership meeting. *PW* reported on the “articulate, heartfelt debate at a packed annual meeting in Miami Beach,” mentioning Audrey May’s emphasis.<sup>26</sup> Audrey May’s publicly recorded impact indicated the FBN’s active relationship to the ABA and to the shape of the book market. If the bookstores could not legally collaborate to circumvent and

survive despite suspect trade practices, the ABA would have to take on an activist role on the independent bookstores' behalf.

The Feminist Bookstore Network strategically chose the 1993 ABA Convention to officially announce the previously informal (though always effectively organized) network. Choosing this year for such a public naming marked the FBN claiming wider public recognition in order to affect a broad change in the book landscape. Backed by its newly public official structure, the FBN submitted one of two motions to the ABA floor that would change the environment of bookselling. Jennie Boyd Bull, owner of 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bookstore, a feminist bookstore in Baltimore, Maryland, made the motion that would require the ABA to “develop and implement, in 1993, a national promotional and advertising campaign in major media educating the American public about the necessity and importance of independent and specialty bookstores to the preservation of free speech, First Amendment rights, and diversity in the United States,” the *News* reported.<sup>27</sup> Recording this motion in the *News* provided a public record, so that FBN members' public language at the ABA could have the double impact of the speech act and its written form, since the *News* was read by the ABA board. The language of Jennie Boyd Bull's statement draws attention to the different stakes held in the book market; while Joyce Meskis had talked about a “level playing field,” Bull talked about “rights” and “diversity.” Quoted in *PW*, ABA president Chuck Robinson explained that the promotional campaign would emphasize “the First Amendment, access to information and the importance of bookstores in the community,” toning down Boyd Bull's connection of bookstores with “diversity in the United States” at large.<sup>28</sup> The ABA

accepted Bull's motion, which ultimately resulted in selling the annual convention to start the Book Sense program, a serious action that indicated the ABA's new commitment to independent bookstores.<sup>29</sup> The still-viable ABA-funded national program runs national ad campaigns for independent bookstores, promotes a monthly set of books recommended by independent booksellers, hosts websites for member stores, and coordinates transferable gift certificates among member stores across the nation, thus offering independent bookstores resources and technical support previously available only to large bookstores.<sup>30</sup>

Two changes within the ABA marked the Association's new activist identity. First, the ABA became a public force for discussions about how the public sees the effects of bookselling practices, and, second, the FBN gained ground within the ABA. In May of 1994 *PW*'s John Mutter reported on significant ABA changes in the days before the 1994 ABA Convention. ABA Executive Director Bernie Rath, who had often been "a lightning rod for some [ABA] membership dissatisfaction," came out in support of independent bookstores in a letter to the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* in which he noted that 90% of the *Journal*'s bestseller list came from the seven major publishers: "Since it is common knowledge that major publishers pay money to obtain favorable positions in chain bookstores for their leading titles, it seems that your list (and many other bestseller lists) serves more to perpetuate industry hyperbole than to accurately reflect the diverse and eclectic tastes of American readers." And two paragraphs later, Mutter referred to a second significant change at the ABA: "The board is being opened to more points of view than in the past. As *Feminist Bookstore News* pointed out recently,

for the first time in the 25-year history of feminist bookstores—whose partisans tend to clamor for change within the ABA—a feminist bookseller will join the ABA board. (She’s Sandy Torkildson of *A Room of One’s Own*, Madison, Wis.)” Mutter’s inclusion of both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Feminist Bookstore News* as sources indicated the significance of the *News* as a source for bookselling information, and here Mutter acknowledged that feminist bookstore “partisans tend to clamor for change within the ABA,” recognizing the activism of the Network on the ABA, the new engine for the changing book market.<sup>31</sup>

Later in the month, John Mutter and Bridgit Kinsella edited a “Bookselling” section of *PW* that spatially recognized the significant public voice of feminist bookstores within the independent/chain struggle. An article by Kinsella titled “Bookseller, Sell Thyself” appeared on the page and reported on Longmeadow Press’ attempt to profit through a bookseller writing contest conducted through its parent company, Walden (acquired in 1994 by Borders).<sup>32</sup> The analysis of this mall store project was accompanied on the page by an Alison Bechdel *Dykes to Watch Out For* comic strip, featuring one of its regular scenes of action, Madwimmin Books, a feminist bookstore run by lesbians and owned by Jezanna, a black lesbian, here in the throes of superstore attack. Madwimmin bookwoman Mo explains of Jezanna’s frustration at customer apathy, “She’s upset about that new superstore. She’s spent years building up our customer base, then Bunn’s & Noodle waltzes into town and starts luring folks away with their massive selection and big discounts.” Bechdel’s slightly disguised version of Barnes & Noble is harmful, Mo explains, because “[t]hat place is owned by a gigantic corporation! Books are just a

commodity to them, like small appliances, or... or health insurance! They don't care about literature, or ideas, or community!"<sup>33</sup> The caption below the cartoon explains, "The above comic is part of an Alison Bechdel strip recently syndicated in approximately 50 U.S. and Canadian feminist, gay, lesbian, and alternative media. It was sent to *PW* by an anonymous reader after Tom Tomorrow's cartoon on superstores appeared in our March 7 issue. The note accompanying the strip read: 'Another cartoonist weighs in about superstores.'" Feminist readers, possibly even feminist bookwomen, sent in the strip, and Mutter and Kinsella's inclusion of it here spatially critiques the Walden writing contest and keeps feminist bookstores in the trade public's eye on the pages of *PW*.

At the close of the ABA, the Feminist Bookstores/Publishers Dinner emphasized the importance of FBN visibility as an influential tool. Waiting for a disorganized dinner, "Barb Wieser [of Amazon Bookstore Collective in Minneapolis, Minnesota] suggested that each table think of awards for our work while we waited to place our orders," and the "Feminist Bookstore Network Award" listed two runners up as well as a winner.<sup>34</sup> The award "goes to the women who did the most to increase public awareness of The Feminist Bookstore Network at ABA." Runners up were "Theresa [Corrigan] of Lioness [in Sacramento, California] at the Publishing Triangle meeting" and "Audrey May at the ABA Membership Meeting." Jennie Boyd Bull earned the winner's spot "for mentioning the Feminist Booksellers [sic] Network twice at the ABA Membership Meeting."<sup>35</sup> The FBN here recognizes Theresa Corrigan, Audrey May, and Jennie Boyd Bull using the feminist literary public sphere to change a larger public, drawing on the strength of the feminist bookstores within ABA.

In addition to the public relations campaign, the ABA agreed on a second resolution at the 1993 convention. The second project promised to take legal action to purge the book market of illegal practices, and the FBN would be a primary commentator on and public advocate for these suits. I focus the remainder of the chapter on this second tier to the 1993 shift. An examination of the legal action of the reformed ABA demonstrates how feminist bookstores are essential to maintaining what Jennie Boyd Bull termed “diversity in the United States at large.”

### **Publishers**

During the spring of 1994, booksellers and publishers prepared for the ABA convention scheduled for May 28-31, slated to weigh in as the “biggest ABA convention ever.”<sup>36</sup> During the last moments of preparation, the day before the event, the ABA announced its first legal campaign on behalf of independents. The lawsuit named five major publishers: St. Martin’s, Houghton Mifflin, Penguin USA, Rutledge Hill, and Hugh Lauter Levin. *PW* documented the tension in the bookselling world. According to *PW*’s Jim Milliot, publishers angered at the suit and its timing “hinted darkly at curtailing, or possibly even eliminating, their presence at future ABA shows,” unhappily surprised by the suit announcement during their public position as attendants of the ABA convention. An Arnie Levin cartoon in *PW* described the publishers’ position: under a welcome banner at a podium reading “ABA Los Angeles 1994,” an announcer tells his audience, “And it’s wonderful to greet you all—booksellers, agents, publishers, authors, defendants.”<sup>37</sup> Outgoing ABA president Chuck Robinson quipped in response to attacks on ABA’s timing, “No one gave us notice that they were engaging in illegal activity.”<sup>38</sup>

The anger of large trade publishers was balanced by independent bookstores' appreciation during the first ever ABA Town Meeting, an informal conversation between members and board members. Jim Milliot reported, "Because of the suit, the tone was so friendly and jovial that at least one observer called it a 'love-in.'"<sup>39</sup> Theresa Corrigan opened the meeting with an FBN statement, presenting the FBN as an active agent and concerted group within the ABA. The *News* reported, "Feminist Bookstore Network Committee member Theresa Corrigan opened the meeting by reading the resolution FB-Net passed on Friday commending the ABA for taking this stand."<sup>40</sup> The statement inserts official documentation of the FBN's support for the ABA's lawsuit: "Your continued vigilance on behalf of the financial welfare of independent/specialty bookstores is greatly appreciated by our 140 bookstore member network throughout the U.S. and Canada."<sup>41</sup>

To sue the publishers, the ABA used the law firm Jenner & Block, a Washington, D.C., firm with experience in antitrust suits against telephone monopolies. The July/August 1994 *News* explained that among the charges of the suit, the legal action identified a concerted practice to narrow the field of books promoted to the public. "The suit [...] alleges that the defendants routinely make payments to bookstore chains so that the chains will advertise and aggressively promote the publishers' books and place them in favorable locations in their stores, but that these payments are not proportionally available to all booksellers."<sup>42</sup> Not only did these publishers allegedly pay chain stores to promote specific books, the payment for this promotion may have kept chain bookstores

in business, generating an artificial market that closed independent bookstores and threatened the feminist literary public sphere. The *News* continued,

To illustrate the significance of these illegal discounts, Bernie Rath noted that Barnes and Noble had said in 1993 it had received \$11 million in coop money from publishers, an amount that is substantially more than the chain's profits. Many industry observers believe that the illegal discounts and other advantages that the chains are receiving are, essentially, shoring up their bottom lines and keeping them open. [...] Why would publishers want to do this?

Carol Seajay offered an explanation: "Perhaps because the chains, collectively, owe publishers so much money that corporate publishers' survival could be jeopardized if those debts became uncollectible."<sup>43</sup> That is, these publishers that Joyce Meskis' ABA claimed should create a "level playing field" were instead gambling for big profits with chain bookstores.

In July, 1994, the five defendant publishers requested that the suit be dismissed, claiming in part that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) had already undertaken a case that addressed the same issues. In 1979 the FTC had filed an investigation of a number of publishers and renewed its investigation at the request of the ABA in 1987.<sup>44</sup> The investigation of Random House, Simon & Schuster, the Hearst Group, Putnam Berkley, Harper Collins, and Macmillan (none listed in the ABA suit) charged that "through discriminatory pricing practices, the respondent publishers sold or distributed books at lower prices to some retailers than to others. [...] F]avored retailer purchasers included the nation's [then] three largest bookstore chains – Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, and Crown

Books – and [...] the disfavored purchasers included most, if not all, of the nation’s independent booksellers.”<sup>45</sup> In 1992, according to Donald S. Clark, former Secretary of the FTC, “the six matters were withdrawn from adjudication so that the Commission could evaluate nonpublic proposed consent agreements signed by complaint counsel and each of the respondents.”<sup>46</sup> When by 1996 the proposed consent agreements had not yet been made public, the FTC dismissed the agreements and the complaints against the publishers, making vague references to the ways in which it considered the complaints outdated, but offering no assurance that this means illegal practices have ceased. Clark quotes the FTC:

The industry has changed appreciably since the consent agreements were signed. [...] Moreover, it appears that major book publishers generally have modified pricing and promotional practices. Finally, the respondents generally have replaced the principal forms of alleged price discrimination that prompted the complaints – unjustified quantity discounts on trade books and secret discounts on mass market books – with other pricing strategies.<sup>47</sup>

In 1994 this dismissal was still in the future, but the ABA noted that the book market had been waiting for an FTC decision since 1987 and alternative action needed to be taken to protect diverse literatures. The request to dismiss the suit was denied.<sup>48</sup>

In 1995 Hugh Lauter Levin became the first publisher to settle with the ABA, and the five remaining publishers filed series of motions to dismiss, including the claim that the ABA’s suit was founded on “emotional reactions to competitive changes in the marketplace.”<sup>49</sup> Publishers played for emotion in other motions that claimed “chainstores

have been hurt as much or more than independents” and called themselves “small publishers,” despite *PW*’s ranking of “Penguin as fifth among U.S. publishers, St. Martin’s ninth, and Houghton Mifflin tenth.”<sup>50</sup> In 1996 the ABA added a suit against Random House, now released from its FTC suit, to the ongoing legislation; four of the five original publishers had settled by 1996, leaving only St. Martin’s as a defendant. *PW* reported,

ABA president Avin Domnitz said Random had been chosen, among the other publishers investigated by the FTC, ‘because it is the publisher that has strayed furthest from what we thought was fair in terms of its dealings with chains and independents.’ He and [ABA executive director Bernie] Rath noted that other major publishers, including HarperCollins, Bantam Doubleday Dell and Simon & Schuster, now offer flat discount schedules, whereas Random’s, they said, still shows a four-point spread between larger and smaller customers.<sup>51</sup>

The eventual settlement with Random House, then the largest publisher in the nation, was the most significant in providing an impetus for other publishers, not named in the suit, to reform prior to legal action. According to a *PW* interview with Bernie Rath, “since the ABA began its lawsuit against five publishers in 1994, many publishers have adopted flatter discount schedules that will benefit booksellers.”<sup>52</sup>

All five publishers settled with the ABA between 1995 and 1996. The ABA counted these settlements as victories both for the concrete change in book-dealing practices and a public acknowledgement that large trade publishers have the ability to close down independent bookstores through unfair practices. Jim Milliot of *PW* explained

in 1996, “Although no publisher admitted to any wrongdoing in settling with the ABA, the terms of the agreements, as well as the fact that the ABA received approximately \$2 million in court costs, suggest that the weight of evidence favored the association.”<sup>53</sup>

Carol Seajay similarly concluded that the lawsuit’s outcome “validates independent booksellers’ concerns that unfair and illegal discounts have routinely been available to a wide variety of competitors.”<sup>54</sup> The weight of this evidence, then, indicated that mainstream publishers did offer illegal deals to chain stores. The work of the ABA here serves as an example of how a proliferation of public spheres (politically-based bookstores, and especially the feminist literary public sphere of the FBN, working within the ABA, in this case) ensures a healthier larger public, one in which texts can be more freely exchanged.

The need for the continued pressure of such proliferated publics was reinforced in 1997 when Penguin was found in violation of its 1995 settlement and was required to offer remuneration in the amount of \$25 million to independent booksellers.<sup>55</sup> This enforcement occurred as a direct result of ABA pressure, despite both an internal investigation by Pearson, Penguin’s parent group, that claimed “no senior Penguin executive was aware of wrongdoing,”<sup>56</sup> and Penguin USA executive vice president Marvin Brown’s defensive 1994 protest that “Penguin is well known as being especially vigilant in maintaining a level playing field with regard to its discount policies and promotional allowance policies.”<sup>57</sup> Penguin was the only publisher whose settlement included monitoring, and the Penguin-watch ended in 2000. This violation suggests the problem of illegal closed-door deals may be larger than the ABA can take on, and the

FTC remains reluctant to investigate the book market. At the prodding of bookstores, including those represented by the FBN, the ABA has drawn attention to possible shortcomings of a profit-focused book market; in the absence of the FBN and of continued ABA activism, readers must remain aware and vigilant to protect their literatures.

### **Chain Stores**

Carol Seajay quickly saw and articulated the continuing danger of backroom industry deals and the connection between legal infringements by publishers and chain bookstores. She wrote in the *News* in 1997,

It's important to keep the context of this [the Penguin] settlement in mind: This is the first time that *any* remuneration has been made to independent booksellers for the enormous damage done to independents nationwide by illegal and unfair trade practices that favor the chains and superchains. In just this one case, Penguin acknowledges that, over six years, it gave \$77M in discounts to a handful of accounts, presumably superchains. Independents will get a \$25M settlement. Superchains and independents did roughly the same amount of business during the period covered, but the chains got \$77M—three times as much as the indies. [... I]ndependent booksellers' everyday heroics in simply staying in business despite such phenomenal illicit dealings—that's next year's media story. Be proud. Do the math, then be angry. Don't give up the fight and take time to cheer ABA and its lawyers. Renew your membership.<sup>58</sup>

A focus on booksellers was the next year's story. In 1998, fortified by its temporary success with the publishing industry, the ABA took on chain bookstores for illegal trade practices. The trade practices are an issue for the feminist bookstores in part because of market share but more significantly because chain bookstore practices support consolidation of publishers and a decreased diversity of literature available. In the interests of keeping women's literature in print, then, the *News* continued to report on and support the ABA suit against the chains, making sure feminist bookwomen had the information to pass on to readers so that they could make more informed decisions about supporting their literature.

In 1992, then twenty-seven-year-old Barnes & Noble claimed to be an independent bookstore. While at the time the chain was still privately held, the bookstore had a wide market base and used the title "independent" as a public relations strategy unsupported by its business practices. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, Barnes & Noble founder and president Leonard Riggio asserted "that the company's philosophy is to broaden readership in this country."<sup>59</sup> Joyce Meskis, after her term as ABA president, told *PW* she had a similar goal: "The book business is particularly unique and not comparable with other forms of retail in that we have an opportunity in this country to expand the market."<sup>60</sup> But she ultimately saw Barnes & Noble "taking existing market share" from independents. A few months later, Nora Rawlinson, then *PW* Editor in Chief, wrote an editorial that corroborated this view of chain store strategy as predatory: "[T]he overall strategy for expansion of superstores increasingly appears to rely [...] on moving into areas that already have a number of bookstores. It strikes us as naïve to think that a new

superstore within the vicinity of an already established bookstore will simply expand the market and create a whole new group of buyers.”<sup>61</sup> Rawlinson went on to identify the danger not only to economic viability but also to cultural diversity: “We think the spate of chain superstore openings could have an impact reaching all the way back to the publishing decision. The growth of large independent bookstores has supported the enormous diversity represented by American publishing. If the superstores reduce the number of independents, publishers will be forced to rely on just a few routes for getting their books to market—a potential stranglehold.”<sup>62</sup> I intend this chapter to effectively amend Rawlinson’s claim here to assert that both “large independent bookstores” and small, networked feminist bookstores have “supported the enormous diversity represented by American publishing,” as asserted by Jennie Boyd Bull in her 1993 ABA motion.

Chainstores have masked their monopoly of the industry by insisting that readers aren’t sophisticated enough to miss the unpublished books. Again in 1992, Tom Simon, then Waldenbooks vice-president of merchandising for specialty stores, told *PW*’s Joseph Barbato, “Customers don’t know the difference between a small and a big publisher. They want good books. And that’s the sort of book that will do best in the superstore: a good book. I can’t emphasize that enough.”<sup>63</sup> Vincent Altruda, current president of Borders stores worldwide, brought Simon’s concept of the “good book” to the present day superstore; according to a *PW* report by John Mutter, “Altruda will use category management ‘as a tactic for continuous improvement,’ asking, ‘What better way to do so than by *working with vendors to find out what customers want?*’ The goal is to create a

better environment for customers.”<sup>64</sup> That is, the “vendors” will tell us what the “good books” are, the books we “customers” want. The language here sets up a clear capitalist relationship in which the “customer” is assumed to be the homogenous, anonymous reading public. We all want the same “good book.” There is no exchange here between readers and booksellers, the exchange is between vendors and booksellers; the consumers simply consume. This relationship denies the “customer” access to a discussion about which books are good, thus foreclosing a potentially public sphere.

Rather than overtly censoring the books they carry, chain stores have used several tactics to monopolize publishing and distribution mechanisms in order to narrow the kinds of books actually available to the public. For example, the focus of the superstore is on a bestseller. *PW*'s Jim Milliot reported in 2004 that Leonard Riggio of Barnes & Noble told “analysts that the industry appears to be more tied [than] ever to hot media books. The positive side, he said, is that when the books hit they drive customer traffic that leads to sales of other titles.” And these other titles are increasingly homegrown in chain store-affiliated publishing outfits. Barnes & Noble cultivates its own publishing company around “steady backlist sellers such as its baseball encyclopedia [...] B&N also has its own Da Vinci title, *Cracking the Da Vinci Code*, released as a \$9.95 hardcover.”<sup>65</sup> This business model means that small press books, those most often taking risks on new authors or challenging issues, are not carried or are not promoted.

Despite the benefits for publishers of making it into chain stores, the size of the stores leaves publishers bearing the brunt of big-store costs. Jim Milliot used Carol Seajay's research, as published in the *News*, for his 1996 *PW* article exposing the returns

practices of superstores: “‘What do you get if you double the sales space in a low-growth industry?’ Seajay asked in her article [...]. Her answer: ‘Basically: wallpaper—books that are used for decoration, books that make stores look full and rich but that can’t possibly sell. And then, when the books begin to get dusty, they’re returned and, inevitably, replaced with newer, fresher titles that will also, in turn, get dusty and turn into returns. [...] The irony is that some (many?) of the publishers who are suddenly on the receiving end of this first wave of returns helped to finance the super-chains’ expansion with new-branch store discounts, sweetheart deals and very extended credit terms.’”<sup>66</sup> This means small publishers feel the pressure of supporting vast chain bookstore shelves while not being given the attention they get in smaller bookstores. Then Crown president Robert Haft foresaw this dilemma for publishers in 1992, but he used emotional description rather than tracking the economic impact of the risk: “‘There are huge inventories, and if they don’t sell, the publishers who are our partners will be disappointed.’”<sup>67</sup> Current publishing concerns include the fear that “‘retailers’ publishing programs [...] will publish titles that compete with publishers’ most popular titles,” according to Jim Milliot of *PW*.<sup>68</sup>

The attempted vertical consolidation of the book business recently came close to joining booksellers with distributors. In 1992 *PW* included advice for small publishers from National Book Network’s Eric Kampmann: “‘A small publisher without national distribution should make sure that Barnes & Noble and Waldenbooks and others have the right information on titles. You have to be in the system. Ingram is a resource for Barnes & Noble, for instance. A publisher has to persuade Ingram to carry the best of their backlist.’”<sup>69</sup> That is, Barnes & Noble may not carry books not on the Ingram list. The

relationship between major book distributor Ingram and bookseller Barnes & Noble is so close that they attempted a merger subsequently investigated by the FTC and protested by independent booksellers, publishers, and authors. A National Writers Union press release explained the danger of superstore bottom lines wielding power over publishing:

The National Writers Union (UAW Local 1981) hailed the decision [...] by Barnes & Noble and Ingram Book Group to call off their proposed merger. The decision apparently came after the Federal Trade Commission—prompted by stiff opposition from authors—appeared ready to go to court to block the merger. [...] The NWU argued that the deal should be blocked because: It would further damage the competitive ability of independent bookstores, which are crucial to authors’ careers and livelihood. [And as] a result of the damage to authors and bookstores, consumers would be hurt because of less diversity in the marketplace.<sup>70</sup>

This statement both emphasizes the danger of consolidating the book market and describes the advocacy role of independent bookstores for diverse literatures.

In the 1998 “Spring Announcements” issue of the *News*, Carol Seajay reported in her regular “As we go to press...” column that begins the journal, “The really exciting news this issue is the lawsuit ABA filed against mega-chains Borders and Barnes & Noble.” She explained the suit for her readers, “The suit alleges that these chains solicit and receive all kinds of preferential – and illegal – discounts and deals that are not available to independent bookstores, that the chains’ market saturation strategies are fueled in significant part by these secret and illegal deals, and that driving independent

stores out of business is an intentional and long-held strategy.”<sup>71</sup> Her last statement is an extrapolation of the suit’s language, clearly articulating the underlying ramifications of the actions at the heart of the suit. A later paragraph about publicity of the suit described how bookstore “support” for media sites works as implied endorsement or advertisement for chain bookstores:

And for sure this is sour grapes, but did anyone else notice that the *NY Times* gave the RH/BDD merger coverage on the front page, half of the business section front page – complete with charts and graphs and color photos – *and* a page and a half of inside space, while the ABA lawsuit merited a scant four column inches on an inside page? Gee, might that have anything to do with the fact that the *Times* has recently sold its Web site links to Barnes & Noble and with who buys large amounts of advertising space? Or is this just one of those nasty little class issues: Publishing books is Important; selling them is beneath contempt...?<sup>72</sup>

This passage appeared in Carol’s consistent conversational tone that, along with a vibrant and growing community of letter-writers in dialogue with the journal, invited participation in the networked public. Her questions both suggest the capabilities corporate connections have for silencing news about where books are available. Ultimately, Carol challenged readers to resist business models of bookselling, made invisible by the absence of public discussion while “Publishing books is Important.”

The ABA lawsuit against Barnes & Noble and Borders proposed to prove that not all booksellers are the same, and the plaintiffs designated a difference based on the purpose and diversity of the booksellers. Ann Christophersen, co-founder of the Chicago

feminist bookstore Women & Children First, served as one of twenty six co-plaintiffs with the ABA, and she explained to the *News* how the suit is particularly important to feminist bookstores and to women's literature:

Feminist publishers and bookstores were started to make a wide range of women's voices available to readers. The consolidation of retail outlets into a few major chains seriously threatens that important work. Independents are being driven out of business, buying (and consequently publishing) decisions are being made by fewer (probably not feminist) people, and publishers are being undermined by high levels of returned, unsold books. This lawsuit is about reclaiming the conditions that make a rich and diverse literature possible.<sup>73</sup>

Christophersen pointed out the inappropriateness of using business models for bookselling, explaining consolidation by definition closes down diverse literatures. She urged opposition to any strategic narrowing of the market, explaining that "a rich and diverse literature" and "a wide range of women's voices" are at stake. For Christophersen, then, maintaining a diverse range of booksellers ensures the vitality of a variety of literatures. The ABA's 50-page legal complaint laid out the danger of the impending monopoly:

Because of the large and growing volumes of books purchased by the national chains, they have considerable and steadily growing influence concerning the books that are published, those that are promoted, and those that remain on the shelves for more than a brief period. The concentration of this power in two national chains – each of which imposes a single corporate mission and

philosophy on more than one thousand stores across the nation – threatens to undermine the diversity of book retailing in this country and the product choices ultimately available to customers.<sup>74</sup>

The ABA articulated the influence of the national chains and warned against the “single corporate mission and philosophy” espoused across the nation through the chain structure, as opposed to independent bookstores who each have their own mission, focus, and specialty.

Three years later, on April 19, 2001, an ABA press release announced that the lawsuit ended in a settlement. The only visible gain was the return of \$4.7 million to the ABA (the ABA spent \$18 million on the suit).<sup>75</sup> The press release and a subsequent interview with ABA President Neal Coonerty focused on the use of the legal action as a tool to require chain bookstores to take part in a public sphere rather than to focus on profit by conducting illicit and covert deals. The advocate ABA, influenced by the model of the FBN, publicized reading and books generating a vital and diverse public. The press release explained: “In bringing the suit against the defendants, it was hoped that light would be cast upon a variety of practices within the industry that favored the chains and put independent bookstores at a competitive disadvantage. The scrutiny brought by the suit has revealed such practices existed in the past and, to a certain extent, exist today, but, in great degree, the industry has been reformed.” Even though the ABA alleged that undesirable industry practices “exist today,” the ABA explained that the suit accomplished its goal of generating “scrutiny,” and “casting light.” This assessment is only true if readers involved in the book trade remember and make themselves aware of

the history of chain publisher and bookstore practices as well as of the substantial activist public sustained by the FBN from 1976-2000. Neal Coonerty, in his interview, claimed that the ABA, as a result of the settlement money and the money gained in the suits against the publishers, can “‘keep the light on’ on behalf of our members.” Here that means the tool of litigation remains at hand: “Unlike most settlements of this kind, we have not given up our right to litigate illegal trade practices if we believe it is necessary.”

### **Amazon.com**

Another lawsuit commenced just a year after the start of the ABA suit against the chain stores, this time with a feminist bookstore as the central plaintiff. The ABA financed the Amazon Bookstore Cooperative to sue Amazon.com for trademark infringement. This lawsuit lasted only a year before the tactics of Amazon.com coerced Amazon into a settlement. The Amazon Bookstore Cooperative opened in 1970 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as one of the two first feminist bookstores. Twenty-four years later, Amazon.com opened online. The first part of this section examines highlights of Amazon.com’s history and explores the online bookseller’s deployment of “community” to repackage its profit-motive for better sales. The second part of this section counters Amazon.com’s conception of “community” with the public documents surrounding the Amazon lawsuit.

Like chain bookstores, Amazon.com threatens publisher diversity, perhaps with greater effectiveness because of the now widespread use of the Internet in general and Amazon.com in particular as reference sites for readers and book-buyers. The internet bookseller opened in 1995, and by 1996 merited a *PW* article entitled, “Amazon.com’s

Amazing Allure: Word-of-mouth publicity and astute marketing make Amazon.com the most-talked-about online bookseller.” *PW*’s Elizabeth Bernstein reported, “In the spring of 1994, [Amazon.com founder Jeff] Bezos, then a Wall Street executive, learned of the ‘startling statistic’ that Web usage was growing by 2300% per year. He immediately sat down and drew up a list of the 20 best products to sell online. Books topped the list, in large part due to the vast number of titles available.”<sup>76</sup> As this history suggests, Amazon.com set out to “compete with traditional bookstores,” according to Jeff Bezos in 1996. One method of doing so was to create “a virtual community.”<sup>77</sup>

“We are creating a virtual community,” Bezos said in the *PW* article, “and that is really significant, as it allows us to compete with traditional bookstores.” Here Bezos foregrounded competition, indicating the financial motivation to take (and remake) market share from independents. This connection of competition with “community” uses the rhetoric of community to make a profit. For example, Bezos’ use of “community” both hones in on the local bookstores’ communities served and transforms those localities into capital. Use of “community” as an economic unit drives Miranda Joseph to caution against the uncritical development of community, since capitalism “[depends] on and [generates] community.”<sup>78</sup> As a result of this dependence, “The corporate embrace of multiculturalism and diversity is a strategy for the production of subjects for capitalism.”<sup>79</sup> For Amazon.com, then, “virtual community” draws on no political commitment or commonality, just the simulation of such. Membership is generated by purchasing a product on their website, which assigns a purchaser her own “gold box” (as in “Kristen’s Gold Box”) and the website thereafter welcomes each member by name (as

in, “Hello, Kristen Hogan”), followed by the simulated bookstore clerk’s, “We have recommendations for you.” The subsequent disclaimer reveals the system’s inability, ultimately, to tell one customer from another: “If you’re not Kristen Hogan, click here.”<sup>80</sup>

While Amazon.com, then, seems to have the books you want, the recommendations charted personally for you, behind the scenes profit-driven censorship exposes Amazon.com’s diverse marketplace as a dangerously capitalist enterprise. Amazon.com’s dominance of publishing makes its policies near mandates. Amazon.com has two distinct methods of forcing publishers’ hand on terms that may compromise or even shut down small publishers. The first, the *News* reported on in 1998: “Is anyone else watching Amazon.com’s Advantage program?” Carol Seajay asked, her rhetorical question emphasizing the conversational style of the *News* maintained by lively contributions of letters and articles from its public. The Advantage program requested small presses “to provide books at 55% discount, postage paid, and on consignment.” Seajay noted that “every independent bookstore” would love these terms “but can’t get” them because of the cost to small publishers. Amazon.com, however, threatens inaccessibility to ensure dream terms. If the publishers agree to the terms, they get a “slightly better listing in the database—‘usually ships in 1-2 days’ instead of the dreaded categorization ‘hard to get, usually ships in 4-6 weeks’ (even if the title is available at Amazon’s major supplier).”<sup>81</sup> That is, the shipping designation depends on Amazon.com’s profits rather on the real-time accessibility of the book on order. Ultimately, the force of Amazon.com and its controlling tactics affect what gets published. For example, when considering whether to publish a book on a certain topic,

publishers often look at Amazon.com sales on books of similar topics to determine whether the book under consideration will sell. When sales on Amazon.com are manipulated according to publisher terms, this means Amazon.com controls what gets published.

In 2004, according to *PW*, Amazon.com proposed a similar deal with more extreme consequences. Jim Milliot's headline read "Amazon Co-op Riles Independent Houses: Publishers view proposals as ultimatums." Amazon.com withdrew from Ingram's vendor-of-record program, meaning that the online merchant now deals directly with publishers on many books rather than going through the wholesaler Ingram. For publishers to stay on with Amazon.com, the firm requires them to offer a 52% discount, which is higher than the industry standard 40% discount. In addition, Amazon.com asked many publishers to "pony up a 5% co-op fee for advertising."<sup>82</sup> Jim Milliot reported that "publishers that decline to take part could lose their partnership status, which would subject them to such changes as Amazon not selling their books at a discount and not having their titles 'surface' in various merchandising and advertising programs. Amazon also *may turn off the search options to publishers' books*, making it possible to find a title only when the correct name of the book or the ISBN is entered."<sup>83</sup> Amazon.com controls the visibility of books not only to Amazon.com shoppers but to numbers of store workers and readers who use the site for reference. "Dennis Johnson, owner of Melville House, said Amazon's proposal isn't co-op but 'blackmail. What they are saying is pay up or disappear.' [... His] concern is that if Amazon limits the way his titles appear on the site, they will lose visibility in the entire marketplace. Johnson, and nearly every other

publisher contacted by *PW*, said Amazon's database has become an important source of bibliographic information about books for the public and the industry."<sup>84</sup> Amazon.com's apparent control over the market, indeed, over visibility of books, indicates the problem with online bookselling. In the absence of a diverse bookselling environment, some books disappear.

In addition to threatening women's literature, the online giant directly impacted Amazon feminist bookstore. The title of Claire Kirch's 2003 *PW* article on the 1999 ABA suit against Amazon.com indicated the two-tiered risk of confronting Amazon.com's carefully constructed image: "The Struggle Continues: Amazon Bookstore Cooperative's financial and psychological turnaround through grassroots support." The suit was motivated, Kirch reported, by Amazon Bookstore Cooperative's financial loss to confusion among book buyers who assumed collaboration between the brick-and-mortar and online stores:

The emergence and sudden surge in popularity of Amazon.com in 1995 brought a new round of problems for Amazon Bookstore. Customers flooded the bookstore's phone lines, thinking they were speaking to Amazon.com representatives. Patrons [sic] ordered books from Amazon.com, thinking they were supporting the feminist bookseller. Vendors called to offer deep discounts, then lowered the discounts when they discovered they were not dealing with Amazon.com. Sales plummeted.<sup>85</sup>

Amazon Bookstore Cooperative decided to sue for their name.

The company that claimed to support a “virtual community” made clear that their support of community does not extend beyond the community’s use-value. Carol Seajay reported in the *News*,

During the October round of depositions, Amazon.com’s lawyer Paul Weller asked Amazon Bookstore Cooperative members Jo den Boer and Lori Schroeder such questions as, ‘Have you had any interest in promoting lesbian ideals in the community?’ And ‘Are you gay?’ Both booksellers refused to answer these questions, but Weller followed up with questions about whether any of the bookstores’ owners or employees were gay [...]. He defended this line of questioning by saying, ‘I think...it’s important for the jury to know, for example, whether the people who work in this bookstore have a particular sexual orientation {and how the bookstore represents itself}.’<sup>86</sup>

Carol Seajay interpreted this line of questioning as maintaining that “lesbians could only sell books to other lesbians, and therefore Amazon.com isn’t in the same business because it sells to a ‘general interest market.’”<sup>87</sup> In attempting to delineate the bookstores through what Amazon.com would willingly misunderstand by defining as sexual practice, the online bookseller cemented its cooptation of lesbian and gay culture. That is, if there are lesbian feminist books in our gold boxes, the recommendations keep coming, but this virtual community enacts Miranda Joseph’s warning that “corporate deployment of the given form or style makes it at least in part alien to and against those who generated it.”<sup>88</sup> Alien enough that a virtual bookseller who happily sells books to lesbians legally attacks lesbian booksellers in depositions.

Amazon.com here made visible its (perhaps deliberate) misunderstanding of the mission of bookstores who, unlike the online giant, do not create “virtual community” based on sales, but intend to, as Ann Christophersen articulated, maintain a diverse book market to represent a wide range of women’s voices. Amazon.com, through their line of sexuality-based questioning, proposes that we square the identity of the seller with that of the buyer, the product for sale/bought, and the community (according to Amazon.com, also for sale). This is the quantity for sale on the disembodied “virtual community” website. The reality, the real bodies in the independent bookstore creating and challenging communities are far more interesting and complicated. Feminist bookstores, in short, circumvent the would-be smooth alignments of identity with point-of-purchase, to, as Miranda Joseph puts it, “make our collectivities more disruptive than less.”<sup>89</sup>

In the settlement, Amazon Bookstore Cooperative agreed always to identify itself by its full, legal name (even though it precedes the online store by 24 years) and traded its common law rights to the Amazon name to Amazon.com. Amazon.com now licenses the feminist bookstore to use “Amazon Bookstore Cooperative” as its name. All of this was accompanied by an undisclosed (and largely inconsequential) amount of money paid to the feminist bookstore by the online seller. In a 2003 *PW* article, Amazon Bookstore Cooperative’s Kathy Sharp explained, “People thought we made a ton of money with the settlement [...]. But we didn’t. We had to settle. The lawyer’s fees were killing us.”<sup>90</sup>

This specific attack of Amazon.com on Amazon feminist bookstore provides an example of the broader damage done by a corporate market to feminist bookstores and

women's literature on a large scale and indicates the importance of having diverse bookstores available as public spheres. I intend this chapter to encourage readers to become readers of the book market and to take the FBN as an example of public sphere creation in response to corporatization. Despite this recent spate of lawsuits, there remains no guarantee that trade policies stay above board. Since the FBN closed in 2000 and the ABA's funds refocused from lawsuits to the Book Sense program, there is no viable industry interrogation mechanism to watch over trade practices. Informed readers must decide whether feminist (and other specialty) bookstores are worth supporting even when the prices there are made higher by industry practices.

History of the book studies have highlighted the ways book distribution and literary advocacy have altered the availability and reception of literatures in print. This project takes its place among those studies as an activist literary history which informs readers about how the book market works and how feminist bookstores, in particular, have served as agents for women's literature. Robert Darnton in his groundbreaking essay "What Is the History of Books?" explicitly requested more scholarship on the "bookseller as a cultural agent,"<sup>91</sup> and this study identifies how bookstores continue to function as cultural agents, and readers choose what kind of culture they will support. Carol Seajay explains the role of a feminist bookseller: "I have a very strong belief that [...] women need information. You give women information, their lives will change, and so will yours. You may never know exactly how it circles back around, but the best thing I can do to make my life better is give you information."<sup>92</sup> Here Carol Seajay expresses the complicated purpose of the feminist bookwoman: to provide women with all the

information, not to limit the information in the interest of providing only “good” books. The freight of “good” as one-that-sells also forecloses the importance of books intended to help women in crisis. Feminist bookstores prioritize some of these books, regardless of sales. For example, Seajay “saw women come in and get books about battered women, and then their husbands would come in with it; he wanted ‘his’ money back, because his wife had bought this ‘filth’ here. He had torn the book up, or thrown it across the room, but I’d give him his money back. She’d already read it, and that’s what mattered to me.”<sup>93</sup> The exchange with the husband tracks different ideas of “good” and the importance of challenging rather than reinforcing social structures. Karyn London of Womanbooks remembers, “Part of how the store was defined was that we would stock things, in some cases, that we might hope no one ever bought, but we wanted you to have a chance to look through it and decide that for yourself. [...] Especially if it was published by women, and you wouldn’t find it in another store, we had a responsibility to make it available. And we might cross our fingers and hope you wouldn’t buy it, but you could sit there and look at it. [...] Big room, table, couch, make up your own mind.”<sup>94</sup> The feminist bookstore at once trusts readers to know what they think is a good book and challenges readers to imagine other definitions of “good.”

Feminist bookstores’ identity as women’s resource sites and as producers of a carefully crafted public sphere makes them unique spaces in the bookselling industry. In recognizing the role a network of feminist bookstores has played in drawing significant public and legal attention to trade practices and the state of the market, this chapter identifies the *News* as an important vehicle for literary activism. By combining the

tracking of the book trade with “caring passionately” about “books that tell the truth about women’s lives,” the *News* also models a combined engagement with texts both as truths or tools and as products made possible or threatened by publishing and bookselling mechanisms. This dual discussion suggests a new study and use of books as indicators of theory or narrative and as barometers of the book market; this dual discussion requires readers to revise how we interact with books. Our interaction begins with where we find them and buy them, not just with how or where we read them.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Seajay, “Notes from the Computer Table,” *Feminist Bookstore News*, 16.1 (May/June 1993): 1-2, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout I use the terms “independent,” “specialty,” and “feminist” to describe different bookstores. Independent bookstores are local, independently owned bookstores, as different from national or multinational chains. Specialty bookstores are types of independent bookstores that focus on a particular readership or literature (as do African American bookstores or religious bookstores). Feminist bookstores are a type of specialty bookstore which focus on constructing and serving a particular political readership; while they are local independents, they are part of a national movement as identified by the Feminist Bookstore Network (1976-2000); several feminist bookstores (including In Other Words in Portland, Oregon, and Toronto Women’s Bookstore, in Toronto, Ontario) operate as non-profits rather than as for-profit corporations.

<sup>3</sup> In 1996 there were 124 Borders superstores and 375 Barnes & Noble superstores; these companies also held mall stores Waldenbooks (976) and B. Dalton (631), respectively. In 2004 there were 459 Borders superstores and 663 Barnes & Noble superstores in the U.S. (by this time they had expanded internationally); these companies also held mall stores Waldenbooks (710) and B. Dalton (176), respectively. Borders Group, Inc., Form 10Q, 11 June 1996, Edgar Online, 12 Mar. 2005 <<http://yahoo.brand.edgar-online.com/fetchFilingFrameset.aspx?FilingID=640556&Type=HTML>>. Borders Group, Inc., Form 10Q, 24 Nov. 2004, Yahoo Finance, 12 Mar. 2005 <<http://biz.yahoo.com/e/041124/bgp10-q.html>>. Barnes & Noble, Inc., Form 10Q, 10 June 1996, Edgar Online, 12 Mar. 2005 <<http://yahoo.brand.edgar-online.com/fetchFilingFrameset.aspx?FilingID=34239&Type=HTML>>. Barnes & Noble, Inc., Form 10Q, 9 Dec. 2004, Edgar Online, 12 Mar. 2005 <<http://yahoo.brand.edgar-online.com/fetchFilingFrameset.aspx?FilingID=3331714&Type=HTML>>. ABA membership numbers from Small Press Distribution’s Victoria Shoemaker, quoted in Matthew Artz. Matthew Artz, “Connecting Small Presses with Readers for 35 Years,” *Berkeley Daily Planet* 11 Mar. 2005, *Berkeley Daily Planet*, 12 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.berkeleydaily.org/text/article.cfm?issue=12-07-04&storyID=20233>>.

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<sup>4</sup> “Feminist Bookstores Reach Record Numbers,” *Publishers Weekly* 5 Dec. 1994: 21. Current numbers through personal research.

<sup>5</sup> Note that while a range of out of print books are now available online, it remains important to consider the future of publishing and bookselling; availability of printed books does not ensure the printing of future books.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Angel and John F. Baker, “ABA Settles with Hugh Lauter Levin in Price Suit,” *Publishers Weekly* 13 Feb. 1995, 10.

<sup>7</sup> “The Bookstore in America: Borders,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 17.2 (Summer 1997): 216-50, 232.

<sup>8</sup> By 2004, “gay bashing” had come to describe more litigious acts of hate as well and had clearly achieved national recognition. After the 2003 State of the Union address, Senator John Kerry called Bush’s attempt at a constitutional amendment against gay marriage “gay bashing in the senate.”

<sup>9</sup> Carol Seajay, “Notes from the Computer Table,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 15.6 (Mar/Apr 1993): 1.

<sup>10</sup> FBN description, *Feminist Bookstore News*, 16.1 (May/June 1993): 3.

<sup>11</sup> The trade journal is now owned by Reed Elsevier, which owns and operates a range of trade publications as well as exhibitions, including the ABA Convention, now called Book Expo of America; see note twenty-nine.

<sup>12</sup> “About Publishers Weekly,” *Publishers Weekly* 17 Nov. 2003, *Publishers Weekly*, 6 Mar. 2005

<<http://www.publishersweekly.com/index.asp?layout=contentinfodetail&articleID=CA336727&channel=aboutUs&display=wildcard>>.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting study might be made of exploring changes in the treatment of women and women’s texts in *Publishers Weekly* after the advent and advocacy of feminist bookstores.

<sup>14</sup> While Carol Seajay within the pages of the *News* refers to the *Feminist Bookstore News* and the Feminist Bookstore Network as the FBN, for clarity in this chapter and throughout the dissertation I use FBN to designate the Feminist Bookstore Network and *News* as shorthand for the *Feminist Bookstore News*.

<sup>15</sup> Darlene Pagano, letter, *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.2 (n.d. 1978): 1. The National Woman’s Party first managed to get the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) introduced into Congress in 1923. The ERA read, “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction” (Faderman 93). In 1972, the Senate passed the ERA, and it went to the states for ratification. Thirty-five states, including California, ratified the Amendment by 1982, the stipulated deadline, but the number was insufficient, and the Amendment failed. The ERA has been reintroduced into Congress every session since 1985 and was most recently introduced on Tuesday, March 15, 2005. Lillian Faderman, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America—A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). “Chronology of the Equal Rights Amendment, 1923-1996,” National Organization for Women, 14 Nov. 2004 <<http://www.now.org/issues/economic/cea/history.html>>. Allison Stevens, “Washington

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Lookout: Diehards Breathe Life into Equal Rights Amendment,” *Women’s eNews*, 18 Mar. 2005, 18 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.womensenews.org>>.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Seajay, “ABA’s Feminist Bookstore Roundtable,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 12.2 (July/Aug. 1989): 4, S-28.

<sup>17</sup> Bernie Rath, letter to Carol Seajay, 28 Sept. 1989, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>18</sup> By 1993 the Feminist Bookstore Roundtable was headed by Minneapolis, Minnesota, feminist bookstore Amazon Bookstore Collective’s Donna Niles. John Mutter, ed., “ABA 1993 MIAMI,” *Publishers Weekly*, 3 May 1993: 51-267, 74.

<sup>19</sup> FBN introduction, “ABA President Responds to Feedback from Feminist Stores,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 13.4 (Nov./Dec. 1990): 19.

<sup>20</sup> Joyce Meskis, “ABA President Responds to Feedback from Feminist Stores,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 13.4 (Nov./Dec. 1990): 19-23. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Meskis 23.

<sup>22</sup> Mutter, “ABA 1993 MIAMI” 51.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Seajay, “ABA 93,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.2 (Aug. 1993): 37-45, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Seajay, “ABA 93,” 39.

<sup>25</sup> John Mutter with Jim Milliot, “ABA Members Fighting for ‘Level Playing Field’: They vote overwhelmingly to investigate unfair sales practices,” *Publishers Weekly* 7 June 1993: 7, 11-12, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Mutter and Milliot, “ABA Members” 7.

<sup>27</sup> “ABA Hires PR Firm to Promote Independent Bookstores,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.2 (July/Aug. 1994): 22.

<sup>28</sup> John Mutter, “ABA Begins to Move on Miami Resolutions,” *Publishers Weekly* 2 Aug. 1993: 18.

<sup>29</sup> In 1996, the *Feminist Bookstore News* reported on the ABA’s sale of the trade show: “In a move that took its membership by surprise, the American Booksellers Association sold its remaining 51% of the ABA Trade Show & Convention to Association Expositions & Services (AE&S), the division of Reed Exhibition Companies that purchased 49% of the show in 1993. The show will be renamed BookExpo America” (7). The issue goes on to point out the growing monopoly held by Reed Exhibition Companies: “Reed Exhibition also produces the London Book Fair, Salon du Livre, and the Tokyo Book Fair. The global parent company, Reed Elsevier also owns Cahners (*Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, and *School Library Journal*), R.R. Bowker (Books in Print and *Literary Market Place*), as well as book publishing concerns” (8). The ABA used revenue from this sale to create BookSense, what the ABA calls an “integrated marketing campaign,” a series of services provided to independent booksellers in order to compensate for the chain’s competitive advantages. BookSense provides a monthly newsletter and bestseller list with cover stickers, website templates with online ordering capabilities drawing on Baker & Taylor’s distribution services, and gift certificates valid at any BookSense store nationwide. “ABA Sells Trade Show—Book Expo America—,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 19.4 (Nov./Dec. 1996): 7-8. “About ABA,” *BookWeb.org*,

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2005, American Booksellers Association, 11 Aug. 2004

<<http://www.bookweb.org/aba/106.html>>.

<sup>30</sup> For example, a search from the Book Sense website (<http://www.booksense.com>) lists 26 bookstores “with Book Sense” in Texas, with two in Austin, BookWoman and BookPeople.

<sup>31</sup> John Mutter, “A Bigger, More Open ABA Convention Seen This Year,” *Publishers Weekly* 9 May 1994: 17, 18, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Bridget Kinsella, “Bookseller, Sell Thyself,” *Publishers Weekly* 30 May 1994: 19.

<sup>33</sup> Alison Bechdel, “Loyalty,” Dykes to Watch Out For, *Publishers Weekly* 30 May 1994: 19.

<sup>34</sup> Carol Seajay, “May 27 & 28 The Feminist Bookstores Conference – Miami Beach,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.2 (Aug. 1993): 29-31, 30.

<sup>35</sup> “The Gino’s Awards,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 16.2 (Aug. 1993): 32.

<sup>36</sup> John F. Baker with reporting by John Mutter, Daisy Maryles, Paul Hiltz, & Sybil Steinberg, “ABA ’94: Big, Busy—and a Bit Tense,” *Publishers Weekly* 6 June 1994: 14-15, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Arnie Levin, cartoon, *Publishers Weekly* 6 June 1994: 15.

<sup>38</sup> Jim Milliot, “The Suit: What It Means—and How the Book People on Both Sides Reacted,” *Publishers Weekly* 6 June 1994: 15.

<sup>39</sup> John Mutter, “Show Time in Los Angeles,” *Publishers Weekly* 20 June 1994: 36-38, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Seajay, “What a Scene!,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.2 (July/Aug. 1994): 17-21, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Carol Seajay, compiler, “The Feminist Bookstore Network Conference,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.2 (July/Aug. 1994): 27-30, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Seajay, compiler, “ABA Stands up for Independents, Fights Unfair/Illegal Discounts in Court,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.2 (July/Aug. 1994): 23-25, 100, 23-24.

<sup>43</sup> Seajay, “ABA Stands” 24.

<sup>44</sup> John F. Baker, “Penguin to Court on ABA Suit: Wait for FTC Ruling,” *Publishers Weekly* 11 July 1994: 10.

<sup>45</sup> Donald S. Clark, “The Robinson-Patman Act: Annual Update,” before the Robinson-Patman Act Committee Section of Antitrust Law Forty-Sixth Annual Spring Meeting Washington, DC, 2 Apr. 1998, Federal Trade Commission, 8 Jan. 2005

<<http://www.ftc.gov/speeches/other/spring98.htm>>.

<sup>46</sup> Clark.

<sup>47</sup> Clark.

<sup>48</sup> Jim Milliot, “Judge Denies Publishers’ Motions to Dismiss ABA Suit,” *Publishers Weekly* 13 Mar. 1995: 8. Carol Seajay, “ABA Suit Ready to Go,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 18.1 (May/June 1995): 16.

<sup>49</sup> Angel and Baker, “ABA Settles” 10.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Carol Seajay, “Further news on the lawsuit,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 17.6 (Mar./Apr. 1995): 44.

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- <sup>51</sup> John F. Baker, "ABA Sues Random on Pricing," *Publishers Weekly* 8 Jan. 1996: 10.
- <sup>52</sup> Jim Milliot, "Random House and ABA Settle Antitrust Lawsuit," *Publishers Weekly* 25 Nov. 1996: 10.
- <sup>53</sup> Jim Milliot, "St. Martin's Settles with ABA," *Publishers Weekly* 19 Aug. 1996: 11.
- <sup>54</sup> Carol Seajay, "ABA Settles with Rutledge Hill & St. Martin's Press," *Feminist Bookstore News* 19.3 (Sept./Oct. 1996): 11-12, 11.
- <sup>55</sup> Carol Seajay, "As we go to press...", *Feminist Bookstore News* 20.4 (Nov./Dec. 1997): 1. Jim Milliot, "Penguin in Multi-Million Dollar Settlement with ABA," *Publishers Weekly* 6 Oct. 1997: 10.
- <sup>56</sup> Jim Milliot, "Pearson Ends Penguin Probe, Though ABA Presses On," *Publishers Weekly* 12 May 1997: 16.
- <sup>57</sup> Jim Milliot and John F. Baker, "ABA Suit Against Publishers Looks Like a Long Affair," *Publishers Weekly* 13 June 1994: 9, 14, 9.
- <sup>58</sup> Carol Seajay, "As we go to press...", *Feminist Bookstore News* 20.4 (Nov./Dec. 1997): 1-2, 1.
- <sup>59</sup> Margaret Jones, "Chain Superstores: Will the Wave Wash?," *Publishers Weekly* 18 May 1992: 44-47, 46.
- <sup>60</sup> Jones 46.
- <sup>61</sup> Nora Rawlinson, "Who, Me? Afraid of Chain Superstores?," *Publishers Weekly* 23 Nov. 1992: 8.
- <sup>62</sup> Rawlinson.
- <sup>63</sup> Joseph Barbato, "Chain Superstores: Good Business for Small Presses?," *Publishers Weekly* 9 Nov. 1992: 56-59, 57.
- <sup>64</sup> John Mutter, "Altruda: Books Will Drive Borders Growth," *Publishers Weekly* 28 June 2004: 13. Emphasis mine.
- <sup>65</sup> Jim Milliot, "Chains Post Big Gains in First Quarter: Tough second quarter expected, but outlook for full year remains bullish," *Publishers Weekly* 24 May 2004: 13, 16.
- <sup>66</sup> Jim Milliot, "Books As Wallpaper? An Explanation for Returns," *Publishers Weekly* 11 Nov. 1996: 28.
- <sup>67</sup> Jones 47.
- <sup>68</sup> Jim Milliot, "Modeling for the Future: New business approaches can mitigate risk, spur growth," *Publishers Weekly* 10 May 2004: 24-26, 25.
- <sup>69</sup> Barbato 58.
- <sup>70</sup> National Writers Union, "Authors Help Kill Barnes & Noble/Ingram Deal," 2 June 1999, National Writers Union 13 July 2004 <[www.nwu.org/pic/bn2.htm](http://www.nwu.org/pic/bn2.htm)>.
- <sup>71</sup> Carol Seajay, "As we go to press...", *Feminist Bookstore News* 21.1 (Spring 1998): 1-2, 1.
- <sup>72</sup> Seajay, "As we go to press," (Spring 1998) 1. For more on Barnes & Noble website collaborations, see Carol Seajay, "Selling Their Souls: The High Cost of Posting B&N Web Site Banners," *Feminist Bookstore News* 21.5 (January/February 1999): 55-58.

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- <sup>73</sup> Carol Seajay, "ABA Sues Borders, Barnes & Noble! Unprecedented Legal Action Alleges Illegal Practices and Seeks Compensation," *Feminist Bookstore News* 21.1 (Spring 1998): 9-13, 9.
- <sup>74</sup> Carol Seajay, "ABA Sues Borders" 13.
- <sup>75</sup> "ABA Announces Settlement—Industry Abuses Revealed; Association to Continue Struggle" BookWeb.org, 19 Apr. 2001, American Booksellers Association 13 July 2004 <[www.bookweb.org/legal/4530.html](http://www.bookweb.org/legal/4530.html)>. "A Lawsuit Q&A With ABA President Neal Coonerty," BookWeb.org, 4 May 2001, American Booksellers Association, 13 July 2004 <[www.bookweb.org/news/btw/4591.html](http://www.bookweb.org/news/btw/4591.html)>.
- <sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Bernstein, "Amazon.com's Amazing Allure: Word-of-mouth publicity and astute marketing make Amazon.com the most-talked-about online bookseller," *Publishers Weekly* 4 Nov. 1996: 24-6, 24.
- <sup>77</sup> Bernstein 26.
- <sup>78</sup> Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002) xxxi.
- <sup>79</sup> Joseph 22.
- <sup>80</sup> Carol Seajay explains how web-based bookstores fail women: "I think people still need the connection. You can hardly go to a website and get a good book recommendation. People just don't make that connection; there's 'If you read this, you'll also like that,' but that doesn't help the woman who's going in and really needs specific information, needs, about abortion access or AIDS or any health issues, or all the rest of the things that women's bookstores do. So the need, the need is there, the finances are much harder." Carol Seajay, personal interview, 17 July 2003.
- <sup>81</sup> Seajay, "As we go to press..." (Spring 1998) 1-2.
- <sup>82</sup> Phyllis Tickle and Lynn Garrett, "Amazon Drops Ingram for Religion," *Publishers Weekly* 14 June 2004: 15.
- <sup>83</sup> Jim Milliot, "Amazon Co-op Riles Independent Houses: Publishers view proposals as ultimatums," *Publishers Weekly* 31 May 2004: 5, 8, 5. Emphasis mine.
- <sup>84</sup> Milliot, "Amazon Co-op Riles" 8.
- <sup>85</sup> Claire Kirch, "The Struggle Continues: Amazon Bookstore Cooperative's financial and psychological turnaround through grassroots support," *Publishers Weekly* 13 Oct. 2003: 20-21, 21.
- <sup>86</sup> Carol Seajay, "Amazon.com Settles with Amazon After Dyke-Baiting Fails," *Feminist Bookstore News* 22.6 (Spring 2000): 16-17, 25, 17.
- <sup>87</sup> Seajay, "Amazon.com Settles" 16.
- <sup>88</sup> Joseph 44.
- <sup>89</sup> Joseph 172.
- <sup>90</sup> Kirch, "Struggle Continues" 21.
- <sup>91</sup> Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 27-52, 43.
- <sup>92</sup> Seajay, interview.
- <sup>93</sup> Seajay, interview.

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<sup>94</sup> Karyn London, personal interview, 11 Dec. 2003.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Learning the Trade: Feminist Bookstores Building a Women's Study**

On a rainy summer morning in 2003, I found my way up 95<sup>th</sup> Street from Central Park to Eleanor Olds Batchelder's ninth-floor apartment, three blocks from where Womanbooks, the feminist bookstore she co-founded, had been a center of women's communities from 1975-1987. In the midst of last-minute packing, Eleanor talked with me on tape at her kitchen table, and later on the bus to La Guardia, about Womanbooks. I learned that I was tracking the path feminist teachers had followed to the upper west side and Womanbooks. Eleanor explains that Womanbooks, for academic women,

was better than a book table at the conferences—that was the other place where you could go and leaf through books and take a look and see what you were getting. But, because we had almost everything on our shelves, 'My god,' they would say, 'look, you have everything here. I can look and see.' And, also, people would come, like they do now to the [Lesbian Herstory] Archives, to do research at Womanbooks, because we didn't mind if they used the books there. We had a big table.<sup>1</sup>

Word spread quickly about the stock and the community of women, and soon the week of the MLA Convention, at the end of December, brought the biggest revenue of the year for Womanbooks. "All the women's studies women would come in," Eleanor describes the throng, "and they would all make this pilgrimage up to 92<sup>nd</sup> Street to basically spend their book budget. They'd spend hundreds of dollars each at the store. They'd just make these huge piles of books, and ship them home."

Providing a large public collection of feminist texts was only part of feminist bookstores' contribution to the burgeoning field of women's studies; teachers came to the bookstores in search of other feminist teachers and to attend events that formed part of bookstores' work as community-based women's studies. Karyn London, co-founder of Womanbooks, points out that feminist bookstores' service to academic women's studies grew out of a commitment to providing vital information to women: "We were more comfortable with some asking for books about rape or abortion, and they weren't researching a paper. That was their experience. [...] They wanted a connection, where to go and who to talk to, and who's in a similar situation. One couldn't find that kind of information and support in just any bookstore or a library."<sup>2</sup> Built to distribute textual and other resources to women, feminist bookstores became a logical space for women's studies professors seeking texts and other support, also looking for information not available as a collective force elsewhere. By providing services to both the women's community and women's studies teachers, feminist bookstores became spaces where the academic and community projects would remain, as they began, linked.

The last decade has seen the publication of numerous histories of the women's studies movement, but none addresses feminist bookstores' contribution to women's studies.<sup>3</sup> I add to those histories with two goals in mind: to record the undocumented history of feminist bookstore support for women's studies, and to identify the largely unrecognized ongoing work of feminist bookstores in partnership with academic women's studies projects. I locate the foundation for the historical and current functions of feminist bookstores in their identities as crossover spaces, spaces that serve both

academic and community feminisms, and thus hold exciting possibilities for building and challenging both. Of the range of community feminist organizations, feminist bookstores uniquely contribute to and serve as sites for women's studies because they constitute literary public spaces parallel to the literary focus of academic women's studies.

In order to effectively take part in this ongoing conversation about the history and state of women's studies, I offer here a brief overview of the discussion, and I focus on the moments that can be informed and contextualized by a feminist bookstore narrative. I then include two case studies that map out the beginning and the current-day relationships between feminist bookstores and women's studies. These case studies take the form of narrative analysis, both charting the history of the two feminist bookstores and offering a reading of the bookstores' interviews and documents that relate to women's studies. These detailed narrative studies of Womanbooks (open in New York, 1975-1987) and of In Other Words (open in Portland, Oregon, 1993-present) stand in for an extended group of feminist bookstores working on related projects concomitant to each bookstores' life. As articulated in chapter one, the Feminist Bookstore Network provided a forum for the sharing of strategies among an international network of feminist bookstores undertaking similar work, including women's studies work.

Feminist scholars analyzing the field of women's studies must recognize this history of women's studies outside the academy, and doing so will demonstrate the vital functions of both women's studies and feminist bookstores. I offer this chapter in response to two questions: how does it change current definitions of the field of women's studies to acknowledge community women's studies projects carried out by feminist

bookstores throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s? Can feminist bookstores' ongoing women's studies work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century provide a new approach to defining women's studies as a coherent field with an interdisciplinary methodology?

### **Women's Studies in Print**

San Diego State College (now San Diego State University) established the first U.S. women's studies program in the spring of 1970. That same year the first feminist bookstore, ICI: A Woman's Place, opened in Oakland, California, and the new Pittsburgh feminist press KNOW, Inc., put out the first of what would become the *Female Studies* series, an unbound collection of seventeen syllabi from women's studies courses taught in 1969-70. In *Female Studies II*, six months later, Florence Howe of the Feminist Press wrote that she knew of 113 women's studies courses being taught across the nation.<sup>4</sup> KNOW and the Feminist Press positioned themselves as producers of integral resources for women's studies teachers;<sup>5</sup> already the women's studies movement utilized the circulation of published texts to communicate across the nation, to exchange information, and to document the new field. This publication history of the women's studies movement indicates a relationship between the incipient feminist institutions of book production and distribution and the burgeoning women's studies in institutions. Women's studies' reliance on printed matter emphasizes the need to attend to the structures, including feminist bookstores, required to support a women's literature.

*Female Studies* developed into a series that included syllabi, bibliographies, and articles for those teaching or wishing to teach women's studies courses; the series that started out with KNOW transferred to the Feminist Press (founded in 1970) after the fifth

issue, in 1972. Ellen Messer-Davidow notes the significance of this shift in publishing agency: “just as a half-dozen feminist scholarly periodicals were launched, the *Female Studies* series was transferred from the community-based KNOW Press to the academy-oriented Feminist Press, and the hybrid feminist books that combined movement critique with academic criticism waned.”<sup>6</sup> For Messer-Davidow, this shift in publishing marked the split between movement and academic feminisms. If published categories influenced the work of women’s studies, attention to the spaces of access to texts rather than just to the texts themselves offers another view of the relationship between grassroots and institutional women’s studies. Trade publishers could split the community from the academy, but on feminist bookstore shelves the books could be seen and read in conversation with each other. A 1976 Womanbooks newsletter locates this crossover on Womanbooks’ shelves, where readers would find classics professor Sarah B. Pomeroy’s *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Schocken Books) and history professor Sherna Gluck’s *From Parlor to Prison: Five American Suffragists Talk about Their Lives* (Vintage) alongside editor Pat Rotter’s *Bitches and Sad Ladies: An Anthology of Fiction by and about Women* (Harper’s Magazine Press) and Catherine Samuels’ *The Forgotten Five Million: Women in Public Employment* (Women’s Action Alliance).<sup>7</sup> Combined “academic” and “movement” women’s studies, visible not in a single text but in the single space of the feminist bookstore, offer the practice of reading feminist bookstores shelves as increasingly important to a conversation between academic and movement women’s studies.

An early map of women's studies includes a space similar to a feminist bookstore, indicating that women's studies architects saw feminist bookstores and their shelves as central to connecting academic and community feminisms. In 1972, Roberta Salper was teaching at San Diego State and recorded for *Female Studies* the beginning of the first women's studies program: "[A]bout 20 women from the university and community formed a 'Women's Studies Committee' and struggled for months for the program to become part of the College of Arts and Letters."<sup>8</sup> At the bottom of the second page is a diagram of the "proposed components" for the San Diego State women's center. The original plan linked the center with components including "Publication," "Store Front," "Cultural Center," and "Women's Studies" (marked as "the only existing pt.>"). The center's structure was redefined by institutional forces, but Salper's diagram preserves the intended means of maintaining a connection with community feminisms: publication, store front, and cultural center. The store front and cultural center combined would have provided the space for feminist readings, performances, and discussions, all of which took place at feminist bookstores, accompanied by the publication arm which the public space of the bookstore supports. Salper, then, envisioned (in theory if not in name) the feminist bookstore project as a physical part of women's studies. Events listings for Womanbooks showcase the relevance of feminist bookstore programming to women's studies classrooms. 1976 Womanbooks events included "Readings and Rappings on Getting Older"; a "Poetry Reading for Assata Shakur with Jayne Cortez and June Jordan" for "Women only"; and a "Presentation by Action for Women in Chile."<sup>9</sup> 1983 events included a reading from "I AM ANNIE MAE: THE PERSONAL STORY OF A BLACK

TEXAN, collected & edited by Ruthe Winegarten”; and an event with Susannah Heschel on “FEMINIST JUDIASM.”<sup>10</sup> 1986 events included Hannah Lerman reading “from her new book *A Mote in Freud’s Eye*” and Etel Adnan reading “from her new book *Sitt Marie Rose*.”<sup>11</sup> Through such event programming, Womanbooks functions as an interdisciplinary discussion space for women around issues of aging, race and feminisms, transnational feminisms, religion, and psychology. Feminist bookstores, as suggested by Salper’s diagram, continued to make publicly available a community based women’s studies curriculum.

Academic and community women’s studies have combined to make women’s literature both central to the field of women’s studies and a central agent of feminist social change. In addition to texts directly distributing and analyzing feminist and women’s studies movements, contemporary and historical texts printed and reprinted both by feminist presses (starting in 1969) and by trade presses provided necessary texts for women’s studies.<sup>12</sup> Barbara Smith’s account of her graduate education articulates the significance of this creative literature for an inclusive body of feminist literature. Smith was beginning to formulate a Black Women’s Studies when early women’s studies syllabi were often filled with white women’s writings. She remembers,

In the fall of 1971, I transferred to the University of Connecticut to begin work on my Ph.D., and I took a seminar in women’s literature (one of the first offered in the country). Of course, all the women were white. [...] During the summer I read in *Ms.* magazine, which had just started publishing, that Alice Walker would be teaching a course on Black women writers at the University of Massachusetts in

Boston, where I had recently moved. Fortunately, she let me audit her course. It was perfect timing. We read Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, and, most important, Ann Petry's novel *The Street*.<sup>13</sup>

Smith's own publications, in turn, act as the kind of agent for change that these books had served for her. Barbara Smith, Gloria T. Hull, and Patricia Bell Scott edited *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, published by the Feminist Press in 1982. Hull and Smith wrote in the introduction, "The book illuminates and provides examples of recent research and teaching about Black women. We hope, too, that in true harbinger fashion, it will be a catalyst for even greater gains in the future."<sup>14</sup> The book itself, like *Female Studies*, would generate action. When read alongside each other, Salper's vision of a hybrid academic/community space and Smith's concept of texts as catalysts articulate the potential of the feminist bookstore, providing the crossover space women's studies had aspired to and collecting together the texts that would continue to fuel women's studies.

Women's studies histories show feminist scholars' first teaching positions commencing close to the opening of feminist bookstores in their cities, mapping the growing accessibility of feminist literature through feminist bookstores and its use by women's studies. Gloria Bowles' Women's Literature class in Berkeley began in 1973, three years after ICI: A Woman's Place opened in Oakland.<sup>15</sup> In 1974, Nellie Y. McKay signed on at Simmons in Boston and the feminist bookstore New Words opened in Cambridge.<sup>16</sup> Ten out of the remaining twenty cities critical to the founding of women's

studies and documented in Florence Howe's *The Politics of Women's Studies* were also homes of early feminist bookstores: Tuscon, Arizona (Antigone); San Diego, California (The Women's Store); Atlanta, Georgia (Charis); Chicago, Illinois (Jane Addams); Brooklyn, New York (Women's Works); Buffalo, New York (Emma); New York, New York (Labyris); Portland, Oregon (A Woman's Place); Madison, Wisconsin (A Room of One's Own); and Vancouver, British Columbia (The Women's Bookstore).<sup>17</sup> The shared geographic space here indicates that in these and other cities feminist bookstores were operating alongside women's studies programs. Such simultaneous work is significant in its response to two central contemporary critiques of women's studies: that women's studies is not truly interdisciplinary, but largely humanities-based, and that women's studies is so diverse in its ideal focus as to be unmanageable as a single field.<sup>18</sup>

Feminist bookstores worked at once as community and as academic women's studies spaces that could spatially articulate the interdisciplinarity of women's studies more completely than could a dispersed list of course offerings. At the beginning of women's studies, many teachers and students embraced the discipline's "incoherence and incompleteness," signs for Miranda Joseph that women's studies recognized uncollapsible differences and used this to challenge totalizing structures.<sup>19</sup> This happened of necessity, according to Annette Kolodny, "When we started, there was very little that could be called a body of literature in any of our fields, and we drew on whatever we could find. [...] In essence, we taught one another to read critically across the disciplines."<sup>20</sup> Feminist bookstores also provided cross-disciplinary locations; Eleanor Olds Batchelder explains, "Not only women's literature, but women's studies altogether

was included: history and sociology and anthropology, everything. I mean, we certainly made the books available.” Ellen Messer-Davidow explains that women’s studies practiced an imperfect interdisciplinarity: “Since feminist faculty were not uniformly distributed across mainstream departments, women’s studies courses erupted unevenly on most campuses, with the preponderance based in English, history, and sociology; some in the foreign languages, anthropology, psychology, political science, philosophy, art history, education, and social work; and virtually none in economics, the natural sciences, business, and law.”<sup>21</sup> It may follow that for the same reasons, academic books on feminist science were more scarce than books on other areas of women’s studies.

Feminist bookstores, however, could create a more strictly interdisciplinary space. I interviewed biologist and Cambridge, Massachusetts, feminist bookstore co-founder Rita Arditti at the 2004 National Women’s Studies Association conference where she was a keynote speaker. She explains how co-founding New Words in 1974 taught her about interdisciplinarity:

It helped me understand in practice what interdisciplinarity was. My background is in biology, but I was doing biology and social issues, which is an interdisciplinary thing, and I was trying to learn about women’s studies. I learned about women’s studies by doing the bookstore: I started to read literature, history, science, philosophy, you name it, so it was clear for me from the beginning that women’s studies covered all these disciplines and how they were interrelated. So, I learned about women’s studies by doing the bookstore.<sup>22</sup>

In support of Messer-Davidow's claim, Rita Arditti points out that her experience was not a common one: "There weren't many scientists who were interested in feminism at that moment. Though in my area, Ruth Hubbard, very well-known biologist at Harvard, who was also a feminist, yes, she would support the bookstore and come to the bookstore. But I don't remember many others at the beginning. It was a very new thing." Arditti's experience of learning "about women's studies by doing the bookstore" illustrates at once the significance of having feminist "literature, history, science, philosophy" in one place and the possibility that a collection of these books could articulate "how they were interrelated." That is, the space of the bookstore formulates an approach to women's studies through a configuration of texts.

Feminist bookstore newsletters and catalogs document the ways in which the bookstores' classification systems disrupted academic disciplines. Instead of traditional categories like literature, sociology, or education, the 1973 mail-order catalog from ICI: A Woman's Place includes headings like "Movement," "Lives," "Novels," "Male Liberation," "Food Trips," and "Patriarchy, Fascism, & Class."<sup>23</sup> Categories in two 1981 Womanbooks catalogs even escape the designation "novels" with sections including "mind," "spirit," "body," "international," "stories," "humor," "loving," and "bodies," each preceded by a woman's symbol.<sup>24</sup> Only by the mid-1980s, at least seven years after the founding of the NWSA, does "women's studies" appear as a feminist bookstore section heading: it first appears on the Womanbooks "Buying Guide" list in the *Village Voice Literary Supplement* in 1984.<sup>25</sup> Before this, as suggested by Rita Arditti's quote, everything in the bookstore was recognized as "women's studies." The introduction of

“women’s studies” sections draws attention to the previous lack of such a compartmentalized section. Positing the full feminist bookstore as women’s studies allows us to read the bookstore as a template for women’s studies, where relationships between sections and disciplines change and move.

By restructuring the relationship between sections of texts (and by rendering even sections unstable through constant in-store shifting),<sup>26</sup> feminist bookstores reframe current questions of how to create a thorough and feasible women’s studies curriculum that is coherent even while challenging the institutional disciplining Ellen Messer-Davidow mourns.<sup>27</sup> Feminist bookstores in their category shifting enact and celebrate the very “impossibility of women’s studies” that Wendy Brown identifies as the inability to determine categorically “what a women’s studies curriculum should contain.”<sup>28</sup> This “impossibility” becomes for Sneja Gunew, in her essay on restructuring women’s studies, the empowering recognition that “we are in the midst of a huge restructuring of knowledge that questions the monopoly universities have traditionally enjoyed as privileged purveyors of knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> That is, the impossibility is the possibility, pointing to a field fluid and shifting.

Recent scholarship on women’s studies has returned to an early question of discipline raised by Susan S. Sherwin in *Female Studies V*, “Are we seeking to create a separate framework of analysis with which to approach problems?”<sup>30</sup> And Wendy Brown brings us back to a question of place, by asking “whether teaching feminist courses [...] must be done in the context of a degree-granting program or whether the discussions we had long ago about ‘mainstreaming’ (moving these courses into the general curriculum of

other disciplinary and especially interdisciplinary programmatic sites) might be revived.”<sup>31</sup> The question of place is of utmost importance here, as suggested by Roberta Salper’s diagram from 1972 which suggested an alternative future, one that would have linked publishing mechanisms with university women’s studies and with community activism, all of this possibly through a “store front.” The possibility of that “store front” is what interests me here. The question of what should happen with women’s studies is much like the question of what should happen with feminist bookstores. Should women’s feminist books simply appear along with other books in a general bookstore, should women’s studies courses simply appear in course catalogs in various disciplines, or is there something to be said for the context of a space?

### **Womanbooks: Defining the Discipline**

By the time Womanbooks opened in New York in 1975, the women’s studies and women in print movements, both started in the late 1960s, were well underway. Regional women’s studies programs were founded subsequent to Womanbooks’ opening, thus placing the bookstore amidst the extended beginnings of the women’s studies movement. During the late 1970s, Womanbooks served as a regional resource for women’s studies teachers and students from universities including Dartmouth and Yale. Faculty proposed a women’s studies program at Dartmouth in 1977, and the program began in 1978;<sup>32</sup> Yale’s Women’s Studies Program, now the Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program, opened in 1979;<sup>33</sup> CUNY’s Center for the Study of Women and Society started in 1977.<sup>34</sup> This spread of dates suggests that various forces throughout the 1970s continued to shape the origins of women’s studies. Acknowledging the combined history

of women's studies and feminist bookstores can produce feminist bookstores as examples of the continued public uses for women's studies in order to combat continued threats to academic women's studies. This case study of Womanbooks describes how a growing women's studies network was advanced by the public spaces of feminist bookstores when new (and not-so-new) women's studies practitioners turned to feminist bookstores for information and networks. A short history of Womanbooks situates the bookstore as a public space with wide-ranging impact.

In the early 1970s the feminist movement sparked relationships that would build a New York institution: Karyn London, just out of college, and Eleanor Olds Batchelder met in a consciousness raising group and became lovers, and Fabi Romero, involved with the New York Radical Feminists, met Eleanor when they collaborated on the New York Radical Feminists' Motherhood Conference and Speakout. Karyn and Eleanor had visited Labyris, New York's first feminist bookstore, housed in Greenwich Village; Labyris hosted readings and political action, maintained a collection of feminist literature, and often instituted a lesbian separatist policy (Eleanor recalls that Labyris wouldn't carry Ti-Grace Atkinson's texts because she was not a lesbian).<sup>35</sup> Eleanor, Fabi, and Karyn, however, sought a differently oriented space for distribution of women's words and resources, in part because of their own identities (Eleanor and Karyn were lovers, and Fabi was married to a man, both Eleanor and Fabi had children, Fabi is Latina, Eleanor and Karyn are white). Karyn explains, "Of the three of us that started the store, we came

from different political backgrounds, and that was a strength, because we weren't all of one persuasion: sexual orientation, race, politics, feminism.”

Eleanor and Karyn first read about feminist bookstores across the nation when they got their hands on *The New Woman's Survival Catalog*, published by a contract publisher in 1973, and available by mail order from ICI: A Woman's Place.<sup>36</sup> In the oversized book with the blazing red cover, the Womanbooks women recognized in the pictures of feminist bookstores across the nation images of the space they wanted to create. When I visited her in 2003, Eleanor found her copy of the book, still on her shelf, and flipped through the large browned pages: “Here is the section on feminist bookstores. And they had all these ones, you see, with the nice couches, and the chairs, and it was all so inspiring.” For Karyn, the comfortable space seemed an ideal neighborhood staple: “We felt strongly that a woman's bookstore should be like the hardware store, the dry-cleaners, the supermarket: there should be such in each neighborhood.” In 1975, the three women opened Womanbooks in the storefront of a leaky single-room-occupancy hotel (SRO), north of Labyris, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, at 255 West 92<sup>nd</sup> Street. A flyer announcing the opening week, March 1-8, concluded with a quote from poet Carolyn Kizer: “We are the custodians of the world's best-kept secret: Merely the private lives of one-half of humanity.”<sup>37</sup>

The first Womanbooks space was immediately popular despite its location. Eleanor describes, “You had to come up the stoop and into this really creepy-looking hotel, [...] and women told us later that they would pass by the store, enviously looking in, but they didn't have the guts to actually enter the store.” According to Eleanor, the

inner sanctum of the bookstore offered a marked contrast to the hostile entry: “We had a big banner hanging up [outside], and, as you came into the store, we had a huge woman symbol painted on the wall, a red woman symbol. We had feminist music playing, we had coffee going in the back room. Somehow, we got put into a lot of guidebooks, and, so, people knew to stop [in].” Word of mouth and the guidebooks immediately made Womanbooks an international destination. The first weekend Womanbooks opened, Karyn remembers, “somebody came in from Australia. It was like our second day open, and she bought hundreds of dollars of books to take home. We had one copy of everything at the time, and we would reorder two when it sold. That was how we grew.”

Tired of the leaks, and outgrowing the SRO at a pace that indicated the ongoing need for feminist bookstores and feminist texts, the following year, 1976, Womanbooks moved up 92<sup>nd</sup> Street to 201 West 92<sup>nd</sup> Street,<sup>38</sup> just a few doors down from where Joan Nestle housed the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in her apartment at 215 West 92<sup>nd</sup> Street from 1974 until 1992, when the LHA moved to its current home in a brownstone in Brooklyn. Eleanor explains of this proximity to the LHA, “With both of those heavy-duty institutions on 92<sup>nd</sup> Street, nobody could afford not to go up there.” Womanbooks, then, was geographically connected to community institutions of women’s history and culture as well as to academic sites, including Columbia University, just a mile and a half up Broadway.

The new bookstore space, Karyn describes, was a big improvement: “It was one large room, that was a thousand square feet and rectangular. We tried to divide it up a little bit, to make cozier corners. There was the poetry corner and the children’s book

area, and a reading area. All before Barnes & Noble.”<sup>39</sup> All of this was clearly visible from the street in a way that made the second location distinctly different from and more accessible than the first. The three women wrote in the first newsletter from the new space, “The large expansive corner windows flood the store with sunlight and make us more visible within the community. Women living nearby or passing on their way to work and school who would not have sought out a women’s bookstore, lured inside out of curiosity, are surprised to find out how comfortable they feel being in a woman-defined space.”<sup>40</sup> This sense of “surprise” at the use of a “woman-defined space” communicates the method through which people can be introduced to women’s issues through a place; women’s studies classrooms and the texts carried by feminist bookstores carry out a parallel project.<sup>41</sup>

There were, at one point, five feminist bookstores in New York. The stores worked together to ensure that they were not in competition, but that they were working to thoroughly distribute women’s work to New York (and visiting) women. Womanbooks, the largest of the New York stores, and one of the largest feminist bookstores in the U.S., fostered a support network among the other feminist bookstores. When the bookstores went out of business, the owners of several of those bookstores went to work at Womanbooks, so that Womanbooks functioned as a repository for feminist print history and culture. Karyn explains, “Towards the end, virtually the whole staff was people who had owned another women’s bookstore. And the richness of that was, was a true delight. Lucy Lloyd [from] La Papaya, Sharon Anderson from Women’s Words, both in Brooklyn. Shirley Walton Fischler from Djuna Books in Manhattan’s

West Village, Kirio Spooner from Northampton, Massachusetts. It was a lot of collected history and experience working together.” The movement of women from one feminist bookstore to another indicates the specialized work of the feminist bookwoman and points to the resulting resources in memory and history accessible through feminist bookwomen.

In 1980 Fabi and Eleanor sold their shares in the bookstore to Karyn, and Fabi moved to New Mexico. In 1985 Karyn sold the bookstore to Martita Midence, a friend of Eleanor’s who, Eleanor describes, was “bilingual, worked at the UN, and was very concerned for international women.” Within a couple of years Martita had to close the bookstore, and she died shortly after that. Eleanor and Karyn both still live within a few blocks of where Womanbooks had been, Eleanor with her current lover, Fumiko Ohno, whom she met at Womanbooks through Martita. These continuing relationships mark feminist bookstores’ vital role as a space for personal connection between women.<sup>42</sup> For Karyn, the bookstore’s story serves a vital purpose for women’s literary history and future: “Before it existed, you couldn’t really imagine that particular incarnation of women’s bookstores; then what’s always there is a reference point of what was possible.” This marker of possibility makes feminist bookstores vital to women’s lives in general and to women’s studies in particular. Karyn explains the need continues, “That it existed as a public space for the time it did, I think the sense in which I, and other women, miss it most—I still live three, four blocks away from where it had been—that for the same reason that we founded it in seventy-five, we wanted there to be a place like that in our neighborhood to go to. I still wish there were.”

The narrative of this ideally-situated New York store charts what Karyn terms “a natural interweaving and overlap” of Womanbooks with women’s studies through a commitment to women’s literature, public literacy, social justice, and making women’s lives possible. Womanbooks as a case study stands in for a national network of early feminist bookstores that, among their range of services to women, promoted women’s studies. First, feminist bookstores as community women’s studies centers programmed workshops and readings (occasionally by women’s studies teachers) of texts used in women’s studies courses, thus uniquely serving as publicly accessible sites of women’s studies education and information dispersal. Second, feminist bookstores directly supported the developing field of women’s studies by providing literature, consultation, and networking services to women’s studies professors and students in college and high school women’s studies programs and courses.

### *1. Public Education*

A look at books stocked by Womanbooks emphasizes the shared project of feminist bookstores and women’s studies curricula. Sitting at Eleanor Olds Batchelder’s kitchen table, I leafed through a manila folder of Womanbooks catalogs and newsletters. As I read still-familiar titles among the store’s catalogs and best-seller lists, I realized that this archive identifies a strong connection between the books made available (and put in conversation with each other) by feminist bookstores and the books used to build the foundations for today’s women’s studies courses: the 1977 lists include *Moments of Being* by Virginia Woolf, *Meridian* by Alice Walker, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as*

*Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston, and other books that I had “discovered” in my women’s studies classes in the 1990s.<sup>43</sup> The bookstores also expanded beyond what students could find in a single course offering by collecting an interdisciplinary literature in one place. In addition to books from the disciplines Ellen Messer-Davidow identifies as producing either a “preponderance” of or “some” women’s studies courses, feminist bookstores carried books from disciplines which Messer-Davidow identifies as having produced “virtually none” of the early women’s studies courses. Below I list the range of traditional disciplines from the “virtually none” list, “economics, the natural sciences, business, and law,” represented through two Womanbooks catalogs from 1980. I quote the catalog entries as examples for each, and I include in parentheses the headings under which each book appears in its catalog.

Biology	BIOLOGY OF WOMEN, Ethel Sloane, Wiley 15.95 cl. (Health and Aging)
Business	BACK TO BUSINESS, Lucia Mouatt, NAL 1.95. A woman’s guide to reentering the job market. (Law and Public Life) MOTHERS AT WORK, Carolyn Teich Adams, Kathryn Teich Winston, Longman 9.95. Public policies in the United States, Sweden & China. (Law and Public Life)
Economics	THE ECONOMICS OF SEX DIFFERENTIALS, Cynthia Lloyd & Beth Niemi, Columbia 16.5 cl. Statistical study showing little change for women in the labor market. (Work and Law) WOMEN’S WORK, MEN’S WORK, Virginia Novarra, Boyars 6.95. The ambivalence of equality. (Law and Public Life) <sup>44</sup>
Law	WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, Clarice Feinman, HRW 18.95 cl. Women offenders and professionals. (Law and Public Life)
Mathematics	WOMEN AND THE MATHEMATICAL MYSTIQUE, ed. Lynn Fox, Linda Body, Dianne Tobin, JHopk 5.95. Examines sex differences in math ability. (Feminism and Women’s Studies)

Medicine      THE DIGNITY OF LABOR, Ann Cartwright, Methuen 22.5 cl.  
Women's, midwives', and obstetricians' experiences with current  
practices. (Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Childbirth)  
WOMEN AND MEDICINE, Beatrice Levin, Scarecrow 14.5 cl.  
Women as doctors. Full of data. (Motherhood, Pregnancy, and  
Childbirth)<sup>45</sup>

While the appearance of these books on the catalogs does not guarantee a larger presence on the shelves, it does indicate the range of books that come through the feminist bookstore. The Womanbooks catalogs diagram shelf sections (Motherhood, Law and Public Life, Work and Law, Feminism and Women's Studies) usable for women. As a result of this priority, the sections challenge academic disciplines, not quite matching up with their academic designations; for example, economics, law, and business speak to each other through "Law and Public Life." The bookstore sections, then, emphasize the useful overlap of disciplines needed to address women's lives. Feminist bookstores made this literature both available through book sales, as discussed in my first chapter, and relevant to women's studies by articulating interdisciplinarity on their shelves.

The bookstores also made much of this literature available through public readings and events. These performances identified women's literature not simply as reading material but as discussion material; this qualifies the bookstores as the feminist literary public spheres I define in chapter one, and I argue here that those feminist literary public spheres functioned as community women's studies classrooms. During book release events, feminist bookstores hosted what may often have been the first public discussions of texts that would change feminist theory and women's studies. Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Hacker, Olga Broumas, May Sarton, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, and more, all read and had book-release parties at

Womanbooks. Marilyn Hacker also organized and shaped the Womanbooks poetry section. Karyn London explains, “People would come in who knew more about a particular section. Marilyn Hacker moved back to the United States, and she said, ‘I could go through it and organize it.’ We had initially known very little, we tended to just accept and take everything, especially poetry books on consignment, and that tended to be a mess. It was wonderful for her to come in here and filter through and say what was worth hanging onto forever even if nobody ever bought it.” These groundbreaking readings took place in the company of feminist book sections shaped by authors, teachers, and bookwomen.

Each of these authors also worked as a teacher by the early 1970s, charting the close connections between the literature on the shelves and the work happening in classrooms as well as between the work happening in classrooms and what might happen at a bookstore event. For example, Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington used Womanbooks to chart women’s literary and activist history when, in November of 1979, Womanbooks invited us to “Come Celebrate Zora! With Alice Walker & Mary Helen Washington” at “An Open House for the Publication of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing...[and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader]*” from the Feminist Press.<sup>46</sup> Feminist bookstores also formed a transnational circuit through which feminist authors would travel, generating a network for connecting local community women’s studies with global figures. For example, the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, visiting from France, spoke at Womanbooks.<sup>47</sup> The circulation of authors in women’s studies classrooms and in the public spaces of

feminist bookstores emphasizes how the collaborative work of the two spaces allows a crossover of discussion between community and academy and cultivates a broad readership for authors writing not only for academic approval but primarily for social change.

These literary events take place amidst a range of feminist bookstore events generating discussion about a wide array of women's issues. The combination of literary, visual, musical, social, and other events produces a context of exchange at feminist bookstores that makes visitors into discussants and uses a range of disciplines to develop readers' feminist literacy. For example, a 1979 Womanbooks calendar of events reads:

Tue Dec 4 Poetry reading, 8 p.m., Valerie Miner & Kristina McGrath  
Thu Dec 13 Slide show on Women in Guinea-Bissau, 8 p.m., presented by Stephanie Urdang  
Tue Dec 18 Poetry reading, 8 p.m., Honor Moore & Judith Moffett  
Thu Jan 3 Concert by Daria Marmaluk of women's music: Songs of Women's Hearts and Struggles 8 p.m.; song swap follows, \$2.00 donation requested; women only  
Fri Jan 25 Slide show on lesbian photographers, 8 p.m. by Jeb (Joan E. Biren), author of EYE TO EYE, \$2.50 donation requested; women only  
Every Sunday Volleyball for women of all ages and skills at Hartley House, 413 West 46<sup>th</sup> Street, 2 p.m. \$1.00 contribution if you can<sup>48</sup>

All of these women still practice their work, and on this Womanbooks flyer they provide a framework for each other, linking women's issues and approaches to studying those issues to raise new possibilities. Valerie Miner, Kristina McGrath, Honor Moore, and Judith Moffett, noted poets and teachers, take part here in a spatial discussion with Stephanie Urdang, now the Gender and HIV/AIDS Adviser for UIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), Daria Marmaluk (now Daria Marmaluk-Hajioannou), internationally acclaimed children's musician, Jeb, groundbreaking lesbian photographer

and chronicler of lesbian feminisms, and the women of the Womanbooks-sponsored volleyball Sundays. This collection of women and modes of discussion just begins to indicate the range of public education and conversation that took place at Womanbooks and other feminist bookstores. These sites of public women's studies, then, took part in developing the critical and cultural literacy of generations of women, even if they never set foot inside a women's studies classroom, and continued the education for those who did.

## *2. Resources*

Womanbooks brought the newly charted feminist literary public sphere to bear on the burgeoning field of women's studies through two direct services for women's studies professors and students. First, the bookstore built networks for discussion and information-sharing; and, second, as library, research center, and bookstore, Womanbooks provided texts for scholarly research and for courses. Climbing up from the Lesbian Herstory Archives basement with another heavy Womanbooks box, I uncovered the dusty archive and found a spiral notebook, a customer log designated for resource sharing. In neat cursive on the first page, someone had written directions for contributors: "If you would like to connect with other women for support, ideas, energy, etc., leave your name, address or phone, and a description of your project or interest."<sup>49</sup> The entries that follow create a scrapbook of women's projects in the greater New York area and beyond; they document the range of women who came to Womanbooks, who sat at the research table, opened this spiral notebook, and left a message for women they had not yet met. What these women wrote provides evidence that women came to Womanbooks

looking in particular for women's studies resources for courses and texts in the making. I include analysis of three sets of entries here as examples of this collaborative journal as a history of a field.

On May 2, 1979, Leslie Kanes Weisman recorded her New York address and, beneath it, wrote, "Researching material that relates to the meaning, use and design of the American home, in the past, present, and future, based on roles for [women]." This entry documents Leslie Kanes Weisman, then as now a professor of architecture, using a feminist bookstore as resource for her scholarship. Her entry also took part in a conversation connecting theory and practice around women's living spaces as women throughout the log searched for housing and even sought to build an alternative "American home": "I am an electrician by profession," writes Cynthia Long on September 7, 1979, "& I am looking for other women in construction trades to explore the possibility of designing and renovating living-working space." Leslie Kanes Weisman, possibly informed by this written conversation about living space that reflected community and academic concerns, would go on to write *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment* in 1992 and *The Sex of Architecture* in 1996.

Another set of entries focuses on the student's experience. On Sunday, November 18, 1979, Kathrin Lassila, visiting the City from New Haven and her classes at Yale, wrote that her school-funded internship program had "balked" at her interest in working with Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) or with Women Against Pornography (WAP); her entry asks for help finding a placement "which will be feminist

enough to satisfy me and look ‘mainstream’ enough to pacify them.” Here Lasilla turns to the Womanbooks notebook readers for help using a hostile academic internship program to undertake a women’s studies internship.<sup>50</sup> A second student from out of state, a representative of Dartmouth Women’s Alliance, gives an address in Hanover, New Hampshire, and asks for general contact with feminists. She writes, “My ‘fellow’ pyro-feminists and I are struggling to develop a feminist awareness at a white-male dominated institution known as Dartmouth College. We’re organizing a women’s radio program and need help! Or just write to say hi.” Dartmouth had just officially implemented coeducation in 1972,<sup>51</sup> and this entry documents the role of feminist bookstores as inspiration for and possibly as a resource for campus women’s activism.

Three high school teachers record entries requesting working partners for developing women’s studies courses at their high schools. One teacher from Yonkers wants to talk with “women teaching in public high schools about teaching in general & about teaching high school women’s studies”; a teacher from Bridgewater, Connecticut, asks for help with her upcoming course, “Women as a Force in American History”; and another describes her own focus on “18<sup>th</sup> & early 19<sup>th</sup> Century British women writers, particularly Jane Austen, Fanny Burney & Maria Edgeworth,” and wants to “share information & materials with anyone who has similar interests.” Since women’s studies remains marginalized in U.S. high schools, feminist bookstores might still offer a useful space for collaborating to build those programs.

These entries track a detailed conversation of women in the trades, in the teaching professions, and in school, all looking for resources and depending on the feminist

bookstore as a local reservoir. Whether or not these entries generated a mass response, each entry author felt enabled by the space to record her ideas and felt convinced by the books on the shelves, the events in the newsletter, and the bookstore women that women's studies women would be visiting and thoroughly interacting with the space, would spend enough time to read the customer log and would find her log entry. The geographic range of the entry-writers' home addresses also indicates Womanbooks' regional influence on the development of women's studies scholarship and programs as knowledge about the bookstores' resources spread across state lines.

The books also provided a resource for women's studies researchers and courses. Womanbooks served as a library both in the sense of breadth of stock and in the sense of stacks open for browsing and research. The ability to page through books otherwise seen only in catalogs or displayed on tables separated by publisher at professional conferences proved one of the biggest attractions for academics, according to Eleanor. Because of Womanbooks' comprehensive stock, including academic titles, the frequent winters that found the Modern Language Association's annual conference in New York City also found droves of women's studies professors making the regular pilgrimage to Womanbooks. Karyn London developed a partnership with the *Village Voice* Literary Supplement to produce the Womanbooks Buying Guide; the 1984 edition gives an example of what these women's studies professors would have found at Womanbooks that year:

Feminist Theory

*We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, edited by Jane Meyerding

*Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, Mary Daly

*The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, Barbara Ehrenreich

*Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Hester Eisenstein

*On Being a Jewish Feminist*, Susannah Heschel

*Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: A Treasury of Goddess and Heroine Lore from around the World*, Merlin Stone

Women's Studies

*Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write About Their Work on Women*, edited by Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, Sara Ruddick

*Everywoman's Guide to Colleges and Universities*, edited by Florence Howe, Suzanne Howard & Mary Jo Boehm Strauss

*Notable American Women: 1607-1950, A Biographical Dictionary, vols. I-III*, edited by Edward T. James et al.

*Notable American Women: The Modern Period, A Biographical Dictionary*, edited by Barbara Sicherman & Carol Hurd Green<sup>52</sup>

The complicated presence of the “buying guide” documents feminist bookstores’ public role as references for women but also as counterpoints to other bookstore resources.

Letters in response to Womanbooks’ publications confirm that women’s studies programs were grateful for the range of books and resources available through Womanbooks. The second issue of the Womanbooks review publication, *Reading, Writing & Rhythm*, printed a letter “from a Women Studies Department, ‘We are very impressed with this publication and will be ordering some of the materials.’”<sup>53</sup> In parallel growth with the women’s studies movement, feminist bookstores like Womanbooks supplied women’s studies programs with texts, with spaces for discussion, and with a forum for networking. The enduring importance of these sites is their publicness, the invitation to those working with or interested in women’s studies to make a pilgrimage to the bookstore for discussion, resources, and literatures; these bookstores, once recognized as functioning as sites of women’s studies, can broaden our view of the history and successes of women’s studies and can provide us with a mappable public sphere where

women's studies was discussed outside of universities. Today there is no feminist bookstore in New York city;<sup>54</sup> as feminist bookstores continue to close, it becomes necessary to examine what purpose these bookstores continue to serve for us today. My next case study explores the range of women's studies needs feminist bookstores uniquely serve, identifying feminist bookstores as useful partners for academic women's studies.

### **In Other Words: A Place for Women's Studies**

The 1973 *New Woman's Survival Catalog* includes an entry for A Woman's Place, the first feminist bookstore in Portland, Oregon. Next to a grainy picture of a woman holding brochures and looking at flyers posted on the walls of A Woman's Place, the bookstore's entry lists ongoing classes, a reading room, a library, and offers "use of our large meeting room for films and speakers on women."<sup>55</sup> The list of services as well as the chosen image of a woman looking not at shelves but at information postings emphasizes the bookstore's provision of "a woman's place" for community education initiatives. This announcement, appearing two years before Portland State University (PSU) administrators approved creation of a PSU women's studies program,<sup>56</sup> documents an instance of concurrent community and academic women's studies development. When A Woman's Place closed in 1990, the Portland community missed its feminist bookstore, and the legacy of the older bookstore, including its role as a counterpart to academic women's studies, was soon passed on to the new Portland feminist bookstore, In Other Words, founded in 1993 and still open. A short history of In Other Words situates this bookstore as one example of a continuing feminist bookstore project and as performing a

unique instantiation of that project through a structural link to academic women's studies. I follow the short history with an analysis of how the bookstore continues the shared work of women's studies as articulated in the previous section and of how the continuation of this work can serve future academic and crossover women's studies projects.

After her graduation from PSU in 1993, Catherine Tetrick joined with her former-professor Johanna Brenner, then a women's studies professor and later chair of the women's studies program, to start a feminist bookstore. Both women had been to A Woman's Place, and, Johanna explains, they wanted to create a space that "would be what a Woman's Place had been, which feminist bookstores had always been, [...] a place to support feminist activism and consciousness-raising and organizing."<sup>57</sup> Catherine Sameh, the third founding partner, had known both Catherine Tetrick and Johanna Brenner since the late eighties when they had worked together on reproductive rights advocacy. The common activist and academic backgrounds of the founders trace the roots of feminist bookstores in both academic and community feminisms.

In June of 1993, the three women founded the Women's Community Education Project (WCEP), a nonprofit organization created to build and maintain In Other Words. Other feminist bookstores had started as nonprofits and utilized large collectives, and the WCEP used those precedents to work towards an inclusive feminist bookstore that could challenge institutional oppressions, including the racial segregation in Portland and within some parts of the feminist movement. Having to choose a single space, In Other

Words could not escape the segregated Portland map, although the bookstore has held some events off-site and is considering a change in location to make the full range of women's literary culture more accessible. That first year, an affordable sublease opened up unexpectedly, and the bookstore opened on SE Hawthorne Blvd., a central street in Portland. The sublease also introduced a new problem. Johanna diagnoses it:

Our town is somewhat segregated. We're really far away from what was historically the Black area of town, and the areas that are becoming more Latino tend to be in other areas [...]. Hawthorne is relatively diverse compared to a lot of other places; [...] but it's overwhelmingly a white crowd there. So, I would say the main thing was how [...] to, from the beginning, develop relationships and then maintain relationships with women of color in the community who saw themselves as having support inside the store.

Here what happens "inside the store" attempts to restructure relationships limited by geographic segregation outside the bookstore. The WCEP gathered a fifty-five member advisory board to help develop the inside of the bookstore, and the advisory board's Women of Color Caucus revised the genre designations of the book sections. Johanna remembers, "On the issue about whether to have a women of color section, versus having women of color books throughout, it was decided that we needed to buy more copies of all of the women of color books so they could be in both places." The position of books within the bookstore stakes a political claim for a range of feminisms. Manager Sue Burns points out that the bookstore continues to focus on building and supporting diversity, and the diversity of staff and volunteers exceeds the demographics of Portland:

while the African American population in Portland was 6.8% in 2003,<sup>58</sup> 10% of In Other Words staff and volunteers are African American.<sup>59</sup> Sue hopes to move the bookstore to northeast Portland to serve a broader population, and though the board has voted to consider the move, they recognize the need to ensure that In Other Words is not participating in but is buffering the ongoing gentrification in the city. In Other Words thus offers to academic women's studies an example of feminist bookstores as situated feminist crossover spaces that constantly engage with issues of space, segregation, and gentrification.

Ongoing feminist bookstores also participate in carrying on the history of the feminist bookstore movement for women's studies and for future feminist bookstore projects. When In Other Words opened, it became a member of and gathered input from the Feminist Bookstore Network (FBN, 1976-2000). The FBN, an official national network, validated support and distribution of women's literature as part of a national feminist bookstore project. Catherine Sameh explains how she used the network in the early days of In Other Words, connecting with the ongoing work of several of the FBN member bookstores still open: "We called Amazon a lot [Minneapolis, 1970-present],<sup>60</sup> they had been around, [...] Mother Kali's, too, in Eugene [1975-present], and Charis, in Atlanta [1971-present]."<sup>61</sup> These conversations and In Other Words' place in them indicates that In Other Words does not function as an isolated bookstore or community; there is a continuous, national conversation about issues central to the validation and distribution of public women's studies.

In 1996, Catherine Tetrick stepped down as co-manager of the bookstore, and in 2002 Catherine Sameh moved to Brooklyn after hiring Sue Burns to manage In Other Words. By then, Sue had already worked at two feminist bookstores, BookWoman (Austin, 1975-present) and Word Is Out (Boulder, 1994-present). Sue and former In Other Words bookwoman Els Debbaut both discovered feminist bookstores through women's studies. Els found feminist bookstores while studying literary criticism in Manchester, England: "The two women teaching that were very feminist, and they were a couple, so they kind of showed me around; there was a little underground feminist bookstore, and I loved it. So, yeah, that was when that world opened for me."<sup>62</sup> For Sue, a women writers class instigated both her enrollment in "every women's studies class that was offered" and a subsequent road trip to "every women's bookstore [she] could find."<sup>63</sup> Sue's and Els' personal narratives and work at In Other Words, a joint feminist bookstore and academic women's studies project, mark the continuation of a shared history of women's studies and feminist bookstores.

Because Johanna Brenner, Catherine Tetrick, and Catherine Sameh founded In Other Words in close connection with the PSU women's studies program, this bookstore formalizes a shift in roles from feminist bookstores as outside provider for and community equivalent of academic women's studies to feminist bookstore as community partner with academic women's studies programs. However, this unique formalization is enabled by ongoing informal connections between women's studies and feminist bookstores at large. Feminist bookstores today continue to enable and expand the

possibilities for women's studies syllabi, first, by supporting texts and programming that build a community women's studies curriculum, and, second, by providing resources such as space and community networking directly to academic women's studies.

### *1. Public Education*

According to the mission statement generated by In Other Words and its parent non-profit, the bookstore uses "education to improve and enhance the lives of women by":

- ★ Presenting positive images of women
- ★ Highlighting the historical and contemporary accomplishments of women in all spheres of social and cultural life
- ★ Providing a forum for dialogue and debate
- ★ Providing opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of the diverse experiences of women
- ★ Showcasing new scholarship by and about women for communities that don't have easy access to this information<sup>64</sup>

The last entry includes one of the bookstore's mandates to function as a community women's studies program. Johanna explains how this works: "What we put in our mission statement, being a place for dialogue and discussion for the things that feminists are trying to figure out—complex questions—unless you're on campus, you don't really have a place where you can engage in those kinds of discussions, or hear speakers, or have a panel." Showcasing feminist literature and authors and using events to develop community feminist literacy in the bookstore's readership, In Other Words uses the feminist bookstore practice of community women's studies to both support women's literature and model a community readership for women's studies projects.

In Other Words uses events and its web presence to support the writing and publication of local authors. At an event in 2002, In Other Words celebrated local

authors' contributions to *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, editors Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating's continuation of the groundbreaking feminist and women's studies text *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.<sup>65</sup> Portland writers in the new anthology, including Chrystos and Diana Courvant, read at the event, which used the space of the feminist bookstore to connect this groundbreaking text with its prominent feminist history. Sue explains that the event was one of her favorites, "because it's such a historical piece of the feminist movement, especially feminist writing, and women of color. [...] It was incredibly interesting to see the contrast [with *This Bridge Called My Back*]: where have we come in twenty-five years?"<sup>66</sup> Johanna points out that feminist bookstores have historically served as spaces for feminist authors to reach recognition: feminist bookstores "created a space where people like Dorothy Allison could get read, because some of her stuff gets distributed, *Bastard Out of Carolina* got on the bestseller list, but a lot of her essays and stuff haven't. And it's where people find out about them."

In *Other Words* also connects less well known writers with publishers and provides a publishing venue through web reviews. Sue points out that women writers see the bookstore as a place for publishing resources: "We have a list of publishers, especially women publishers, because a lot of women seek us out [and say], 'I'm writing and I'm looking for a publisher.'"<sup>67</sup> While other bookstores draw on the clout of popular authors and publications, *In Other Words* uses its public status to promote unpublished women authors. Powell's, the Portland independent bookstore giant, recently "brought on the *Atlantic Monthly*, *LA Weekly*, *Mother Jones*, *Utne* and Salon.com as [web] content

providers and now offers a 'Review-a-Day' feature,"<sup>68</sup> indicating the growing cache of publishing online book reviews. In contrast, In Other Words uses web reviews as a way of providing writing experience and publishing credentials to local women authors. Sue explains, "We publish reviews on our website, and all of those reviewers are local, and largely unpublished, and several of our reviewers use this as a way to get their work out there and to maybe gain some clout when they're going to get their other work published."<sup>69</sup> Supporting these writers nourishes a women's literature and builds material resources for academic women's studies. For example, the bookstore's support of new writers by distributing feminist zines and supporting their authors has helped to generate a literature now part of academic women's studies. Sue explains, "Whereas zine writing was a response to a corporate takeover of publishing, it is now part of our academic study, and in Portland, that's in part due to the discussion that we've had at In Other Words."<sup>70</sup>

Through readings and workshops, framed by the written apparatus of newsletters and events listings, In Other Words teaches readers to encounter the books and authors the bookstore showcases. A list of events from May, 2000, offers an overview of the educational context at In Other Words.

May 7<sup>th</sup>: A Line of Cutting Women

In Other Words is proud to present a reading from CALYX Books' *A Line of Cutting Women*, CALYX Director Margarita Donnelly is joined by Senior Editor Beverly McFarland and CALYX Journal editor Yolanda Calvillo for a reading and discussion on this collection of CALYX's best works.

May 9<sup>th</sup>: Reading with Writers

A series of free community seminars on women's literature. Registration required. On May 9, Ursula Le Guin will lead a discussion on 'Reading the First Chapter of Novels.'

May 15<sup>th</sup>: Adios, Barbie: Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity<sup>71</sup>

A special evening of readings from the widely-praised new anthology *ADIOS, BARBIE*, edited by Ophira Edut. Diana Courvant, Nomy Lamm, and representatives from publisher Seal Press will read from these fresh, incisive essays.

May 23<sup>rd</sup>: Reading with Writers

A series of free community seminars on women's literature. Registration required. On May 23, Molly Gloss will lead a discussion on 'Re-imaging Our Lives.'

May 28<sup>th</sup>: 'The Last Word' Women's Open Mic

Women of all ages are invited to bring their own poetry, short fiction, journal musings, personal essays, and other written and spoken words to read for 5-7 minutes.<sup>72</sup>

Over the month, *In Other Words* highlights national authors like Ophira Edut as well as local authors like Diana Courvant and takes part in a local feminist book culture with a reading from the Corvallis, Oregon, feminist press CALYX. New writers have access to a public audience weekly with the ongoing "'The Last Word' Women's Open Mic," and the "Reading with Writers" series brings critical reading skills out of the academy and into public discussion. Johanna explains that this series, funded by the Oregon Council for the Humanities for "bringing scholarship to the community," invited writers to talk about "how do you determine a text. So it was kind of literary criticism, but in a very informal, approachable way." Other series included "Class Questions," "Young Women Organizers and Their Allies," and "Non-Sexist Parenting in a Sexist Society." Through monthly events, *In Other Words* models public education around reading and discussion as community women's studies.

## 2. Resources

While a history of women's studies and feminist bookstore collaborations (for example, in Atlanta, Toronto, and Cambridge) built the foundation for this Portland example of such a relationship, the *In Other Words*-PSU collaboration can serve as a

model for future instantiations because the progressive educational culture at PSU encourages women's studies professors to explore creative relationships with *In Other Words*.<sup>73</sup> In 1999, a report from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching offered an in-depth look at PSU's senior capstone program, noting, "[T]his program may be unique in the country. [...]his program is a capstone of a student's entire undergraduate experience. The primary objectives are: to provide opportunities for students to apply their learning [...] to real issues and problems in the community; to enhance students' ability to work in teams; and to encourage students to become actively involved in community affairs."<sup>74</sup> Feminist bookstores already provide a template for such work out of women's studies, and PSU collaborations with *In Other Words* caught the eye of the Carnegie reporters: "Another Capstone community leader runs a nonprofit feminist bookstore, and the students in that course not only participate in a Women's Studies seminar but also engage in various community projects to support the bookstore and reach out to young women in the community." This publicly recognized and supported collaboration thus offers a concrete example of useful connections between academic and bookstore women's studies.

The feminist bookstore serves as a central text for PSU's Women's Studies Program. In 1998, the first PSU women's studies capstone used *In Other Words* to develop a text for women's studies students by conducting an oral history of *In Other Words*.<sup>75</sup> Producing the oral history as a book, *Pages Turning*, students developed an understanding of feminist bookstores as unique crossover spaces through which students can understand feminism. Melissa Kesler Gilbert explains how the oral history locates the

bookstore as a living site of feminist activism for her students' reference: "The collection highlighted the importance of creating a 'family of women' at the bookstore, the commitment to diversity, and the making of feminist intellectual space."<sup>76</sup> Each of these features of the bookstore indicate places of connection to academic women's studies. Defining feminist bookstores as making "feminist intellectual space" identifies feminist bookstores as different from other grassroots feminist-based community organizations (like domestic violence shelters, women's legal funds, etc.): the community work of the bookstore connects a feminist literature shared by academic women's studies with a larger community-based feminism through literature and events. That is, the bookstore makes clear to students and others that feminist theory is not created and bound by the academy. Developing a collection of books also allows textual "commitment to diversity." The ongoing conversation about diverse feminisms results in the shifting sections of books between a section system that separates fiction by ethnicity and a section system that joins ethnicities; at issue is how best to make literature by women of color visible in and supported by the bookstore.<sup>77</sup> For Melissa Kesler Gilbert, the bookstore's multifaceted combination of a literary and feminist project made *Pages Turning* a useful text for her subsequent capstone courses at PSU: "Each term my students grasp onto the history of the bookstore as a place to ground themselves. [...] It also helps them to recognize how effective an individual woman can be in making a difference as well as the power of a feminist collective, of women working together."<sup>78</sup> The bookstore as a "family of women" suggests the work of the bookstore as accessible to members of the course. Some feminist professors see the bookstore as a space for

articulating the work of feminist literature outside of academia. Sue explains that professors frequently ask her and other In Other Words bookwomen to come to their classes and talk about running a feminist bookstore as possible future work for feminist students: “Women’s studies professors want to show their students what happens to women’s studies when you’re not in an academic environment [...], and, so they invite people involved with the bookstore, [... to] go talk to their students.”<sup>79</sup> Courses working directly with In Other Words thus utilize the bookstore as a viable feminist literary space and activist center.

The structure and history of the bookstore, documented and referred to by students in the oral history text, articulate the space of the bookstore as uniquely appropriate for reaching a community invested in exchanging information and education around women’s issues. Thus, for women’s studies courses involving community outreach, In Other Words provides the physical space of the bookstore for crossover connections between the academy and the community, serving the WCEP goal of “Providing opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of the diverse experiences of women.” In 2001, Wendy Judith Cutler taught a PSU course titled “Lesbians with Cancer,” specifically designed to utilize the space of the bookstore: “In this Capstone course, we will work collaboratively with In Other Words, the local nonprofit women’s community bookstore and resource center and the Hambleton Project, an organization providing education and support to lesbians with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. Students will work as part of an interdisciplinary team to plan and implement a visibility campaign in order to increase community awareness of the

Hambleton Project.”<sup>80</sup> Here the bookstore provides accessible feminist space for public meeting as well as for connection between academic women’s studies and the community around the Hambleton Project. The course resulted in a four-part series entitled “Lesbians Aware: Cancer Awareness, Prevention, and Care” that drew on the model of previous in-store events and on an existing structure for showcasing community resources:

May 9:

An introduction to the Hambleton Project, a local non-profit organization that provides support to lesbians with cancer and other life threatening conditions. Screening of the video ‘Rachel’s Daughter: Searching for the Causes of Breast Cancer.’ The topic of discussion will focus on emotional support for both lesbians with cancer and their partners.

May 16:

A discussion addressing health issues of women of underrepresented communities, especially women of color. Also, a screening of ‘A Litany for Survival,’ a moving documentary of the life and cancer experience of Audre Lorde, a black-lesbian-mother-writer-poet-warrior.

May 23:

A panel discussion led by alternative health care practitioners and educators focusing on prevention and self-care.

May 30:

Wrapping up the series is a benefit and educational fundraiser on Wednesday May 30 at 7:00pm for the Hambleton Project at the Smith Ballroom on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of PSU Campus. Sister Spit, the fabulous San Francisco-based All Grrrl Queer Spoken Word and Poetry Performance Troupe will headline. A sliding scale donation of \$7-\$15 is asked, suggested donation of \$10.<sup>81</sup>

For the first three events the bookstore provides a space accessible to both academic and community feminists. The events’ multi-issue similarity to the earlier Womanbooks events indicates a tradition of the bookstore as a space for discussion and outreach. The fourth event, located at PSU, brings students and community back onto campus, thus using the bookstore as a forum to develop an audience that then gains (at least limited) entrance to university sites and resources.

Simultaneous to the in-store events, In Other Words hosted the Hambleton Project as its Organization of the Month, an ongoing In Other Words service that showcases community feminist organizations. Catherine Sameh describes the Organization of the Month project: “We have those two big windows, we meet with a group and come up with a whole display that they [can] do, and then have information about their group inside, and, the idea was that people would walk by, and they would come in and get information about that.” This focus on grassroots partnerships continues the work of feminist bookstores as information clearinghouses through information binders, bulletin boards, and the bookwomen themselves. Such a history of broad collection and support of resources makes feminist bookstores readable for women’s studies students as public feminist resource centers.

Another collaboration utilizes the zine genre, a popular form for writing in Portland, as a space for developing feminist thought and resources; this focus on literary production is particularly suited to In Other Words, a space already supportive of local and new as well as national and established feminist literature. Sally Eck took over the teaching of the PSU GirlPower capstone from Melissa Kesler Gilbert and continues to use In Other Words as the primary community partner for the course. GirlPower students pair up with community organizations to develop and run focus groups with teen girls throughout Portland; each of the groups develops a zine using the teen girls’ words and interests. In order to prepare students to interact with teen girls, Sally Eck uses a bookstore scavenger hunt, developed by Melissa Kesler Gilbert, that identifies the resources In Other Words provides for this project: “Find three bumper stickers or

buttons that might appeal to teen girls;” “Find 4 book titles (each from a different section) that might appeal to a teen girl;” “Go to the ’Zine section and find 2 titles that might appeal to teen girls;” “Find the RESOURCE/INFORMATION BOARD in the bookstore. [...] Find 3 resources or information of interest to teen girls from the info board.”<sup>82</sup> These scavenger hunt prompts describe In Other Words as a literary space particularly suited to serving both teen girls and outreach to that population. A brochure for the class explains, “We hope to raise teen women’s awareness of the importance of sharing their ideas with others and accessing local resources and activities for women in our city.”<sup>83</sup> In Other Words teaches students literacy in community resources and literature publicly available, here specifically to teen women, and the bookstore is also a place where teen women can access “local resources and activities” and share zines. The zine section carries zines from around the nation and, now, zines from the GirlPower capstone, using feminist bookstores as crossover spaces to make teen women’s voices publicly visible to themselves, to their communities, and to women’s studies students and professors.

While other independent and mainstream bookstores may offer “women’s studies” sections and feminist author readings, feminist bookstores draw on their activist and educational motivation to provide for readers a whole context for women’s literature, including their history of commitment to and success in supporting women writers and women’s studies. Sarah Dougher explains why she connects her PSU courses with the In Other Words: “When I describe cultural forms of second-wave feminism, the bookstore is of course a very important form, so along with the feminist press and the feminist

record label and the feminist land, it's all of a piece with that. And one I stress to my students that is still functional, is still working and in the community."<sup>84</sup> Sarah Dougher's point that feminist bookstores are "still working and in the community" emphasizes the usefulness of the bookstore that both marks the history of and outgrows the "second-wave." This history of *Womanbooks* and *In Other Words* in relationship to academic women's studies gestures towards the work of an entire movement of feminist bookstores: in 1994 there were 124 U.S. feminist bookstores represented by the Feminist Bookstore Network.<sup>85</sup> Today there are only twenty U.S. feminist bookstores, but the movement continues: the feminist bookstore *Broad Vocabulary* opened in Milwaukee in June, 2005. By acknowledging and learning to read the oral histories and ephemera that record feminist bookstore history, we can access the crossover history of women's studies, and we can acknowledge that the work of feminist bookstores involves women's studies; feminist bookstores have continuously made the case that women's studies is a viable, truly interdisciplinary field with a growing literature base. The analysis I have provided here offers a vocabulary for this reevaluation and models how feminist scholars can "read" the spaces where we access our books.

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<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Olds Batchelder, personal interview, 3 July 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Karyn London, personal interview, 11 Dec. 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Women's studies history has consistently found voice in print, including early accounts in Florence Howe's *Women's Studies Newsletter*, first published in 1972, which, after the first National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) meeting, in 1977, became the print vehicle for NWSA; in 1973 in *Women's Studies: Courses and Programs for Higher Education*, Lora H. Robinson's report for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education; and in 1982 with the MLA Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession's publication of their *Women in Print* series. Recent sketches of the history and analysis of the present state of women's studies have been offered as personal narratives like those found in Florence Howe's edited collection *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony*

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from *30 Founding Mothers* (Feminist Press, 2000), as extended personal histories of particular programs like Joan D. Mandle's account of Women's Studies at Colgate University, *Can We Wear Our Pearls and Still Be Feminists?: Memoirs of a Campus Struggle* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), as institutional histories from individuals or groups like Barbara W. Gerber's "NWSA Organizational Development: a view from within, at 25 years" (*NWSA Journal*, 2002) and the University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Consortium's *Transforming Women's Education: The History of Women's Studies in the University of Wisconsin System* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), as scholarly analyses of the development of the field like Ellen Messer-Davidow's *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse* and Robyn Wiegman's edited collection *Women's Studies on Its Own* (both from Duke University Press in 2002), and as histories of the U.S. feminist movement influencing and constituting women's studies like Estelle B. Freedman's *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (Ballantine Books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Florence Howe, ed., *Female Studies II* (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> On the back cover of *Female Studies VII*, the Feminist Press announces that the Press "offers alternatives in education and in literature. Founded in 1970, this non-profit, tax-exempt educational and publishing organization works to eliminate sexual stereotypes in books and schools." And the Feminist Majority Foundation chronicles the beginning of KNOW, Inc. in 1969, "Dr. JoAnn Evansgardner and other members of Pittsburgh NOW started their own press, KNOW, Inc., under the slogan, 'Freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press.' KNOW published the first articles and reprints for a burgeoning women's studies movement." Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, ed., *Female Studies VII: Going Strong, New Courses/New Programs* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973). *Feminist Chronicles*, 2002, Feminist Majority Foundation, 11 Jan. 2005 <<http://www.feminist.org/research/chronicles/fc1969.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Messer-Davidow, *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 128.

<sup>7</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Nov. 1976, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Roberta Salper, "Women's Studies," *Female Studies V*, ed. Rae Lee Siporin (Pittsburgh: KNOW, Inc., 1972) 100-105. 101.

<sup>9</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Spring 1976, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Fall 1983, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Winter 1986, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>12</sup> The first two feminist presses in the United States, the Oakland Women's Press Collective and the Iowa City Women's Press, both started operations in 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Smith, "Building Black Women's Studies," *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe (New York: Feminist Press, 2000) 194-203, 196.

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<sup>14</sup> Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith, "Introduction: The Politics of Black Women's Studies," *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1982) xvii-xxxii, xxviii.

<sup>15</sup> Gloria Bowles, "From the Bottom up: The Students' Initiative," *Politics of Women's Studies*, 142-154. Carol Seajay, e-mail to the author, 25 Feb. 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Nellie Y. McKay, "Charting a Personal Journey: A Road to Women's Studies," *Politics of Women's Studies*, 204-215, 208. Kay Longcope, "Where Women's Words Count," *Boston Globe*, 12 Mar. 1984: 17-18, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Of these stores, New Words, Antigone, Charis, and A Room of One's Own still thrive. Though A Woman's Place in Portland closed, the city now has the feminist bookstore In Other Words. Vancouver no longer has The Women's Bookstore, and its feminist bookstore Women In Print, which opened in 1993, is closing its brick and mortar store and transforming into an online bookstore and resource center.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Ellen Messer-Davidow and Wendy Brown, respectively. Wendy Brown, "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 9.3 (1997): 79-101.

<sup>19</sup> Miranda Joseph, "Analogy and Complicity: Women's Studies, Lesbian/Gay Studies, and Capitalism," *Women's Studies on Its Own*, ed. Robyn Wiegman (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 267-292, 288.

<sup>20</sup> Annette Kolodny, "A Sense of Discovery, Mixed with a Sense of Justice," *Politics of Women's Studies*, 276-290, 281.

<sup>21</sup> Messer-Davidow 156.

<sup>22</sup> Rita Arditti, personal interview, 19 June 2004.

<sup>23</sup> ICI: A Woman's Place, "Best Sellers," Catalog, 1973, ICI: A Woman's Place Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Womanbooks, *Reading, Writing, & Rhythm: women's works in review* 1.1 (Sept./Oct. 1981), Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives. Womanbooks, *Reading, Writing, & Rhythm: women's works in review* 1.2 (1981), Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>25</sup> "Womanbooks Buying Guide," *Village Voice Literary Supplement* Sept. 1984, 11-14.

<sup>26</sup> Feminist bookwomen constantly revise and revisit their bookstores' sections; this chapter and chapter four discuss sections at Old Wives' Tales and New Words.

<sup>27</sup> Messer-Davidow 18.

<sup>28</sup> Brown 81.

<sup>29</sup> Sneja Gunew, "Feminist Cultural Literacy: Translating Differences, Cannibal Options," *Women's Studies on Its Own*, 47-65, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Susan S. Sherwin, "Women's Studies as a Scholarly Discipline: Some Questions for Discussion," *Female Studies* V, 114-116, 114.

<sup>31</sup> Brown 97.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Kelley, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Coeducation as Process," Keynote Address, Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Coeducation, 17 Oct., 1997, Dartmouth College, 27 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~coed25/calendar.html>>.

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<sup>33</sup> “Introduction,” *Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies*, 2005, Yale University, 27 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.yale.edu/wgss/>>.

<sup>34</sup> “Welcome,” Center for the Study of Women and Society, 2005, City University of New York, 8 Sept. 2005 <<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/womenstudies/resources.html>>. Dates for individual women’s studies courses would chart earlier beginnings in some cases.

<sup>35</sup> The separatist space supported a vibrant community, and sometimes stretched its policies to connect women for activism. Andrea Dworkin describes one protest organized through Labyris: “The original protests against the film *Snuff* here in New York, all the meetings were held at Labyris bookstore. Which was, basically, a radical separatist bookstore that expanded its parameters to let all sorts of women in to do this protest. They were extremely important. So, a lot of activism was centered either where feminist bookstores were the heart of where the activism happened, or people actually organized because of their contact with feminist bookstores.” Andrea Dworkin, personal interview, 12 Dec. 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Kristen Grimstad and Susan Rennie, eds., *The New Woman’s Survival Catalog: A Woman-Made Book* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1973). ICI: A Woman’s Place, “Best Sellers,” Catalog, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Womanbooks, Opening Flyer, Mar. 1974, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>38</sup> The actual address of the second Womanbooks location was 656 Amsterdam Avenue, but Womanbooks referred to the address as 201 West 92<sup>nd</sup> Street because it made the bookstore “easier to find.” Eleanor Olds Batchelder, email to the author, 15 Oct. 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Though not before the founding of Barnes & Noble, at this time feminist bookstores were providing on a large-scale the kinds of comforts Barnes & Noble would only later find profitable to include in its chain stores. See Daniel Raff on the history of Barnes & Noble.

<sup>40</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Summer 1976, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Estelle B. Freedman: “Each time I enter the classroom, and whenever I witness the intellectual and personal growth that takes place there, I recall a definition I heard in the late 1970s that women’s studies is ‘the educational arm of the feminist movement.’ My classroom is neither polemical nor overtly political, but by providing a space for rethinking how we treat women, teaching represents my personal contribution to feminism. I began to wonder if I could transpose this educational experience from the classroom to a book that would reach a wider audience” (viii). Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine-Random House, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> An entire study could examine women’s narratives of meeting their lovers (and good friends) at feminist bookstores.

<sup>43</sup> Joe Carliner, compiler, “The (Alternative) Best Sellers,” *Soho Weekly News*, 20 Apr. 1977.

<sup>44</sup> I include this text under “economics” because it is listed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on its list of “References on Macroeconomics

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and its impact on Women in Egypt and the Arab Region.” UNIFEM, “References on Macroeconomics and its impact on Women in Egypt and the Arab Region (N-Z),” 2004, UNIFEM, 20 Feb. 2005

<<http://www.aucegypt.edu/src/macroeconomics/References%20N-Z.htm>>.

<sup>45</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Jan./Feb. 1980, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives. Womanbooks, Newsletter, July/Aug. 1980, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Womanbooks, “Come Celebrate Zora!,” Flyer, Nov. 1979, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Batchelder, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Dec./Jan. 1979, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives. The volleyball Sundays started three years earlier, in 1976. A 1976 Womanbooks newsletter explained, “The first volley is dedicated to all of you who patiently and not so patiently queried, made suggestions and nudged us onward no matter how discouraging it seemed; never letting us forget just how many and how badly women want the opportunity to play volleyball together. It took nearly forever, it seems, to find an available and affordable space (\$20 per time with ‘unlimited use’) and now we have it – with special thanks to Rebecca Concepcion. Beginning February 27<sup>th</sup> and every Sunday thereafter at 1PM at The Hartley Street Settlement House.” Womanbooks, Newsletter, Spring 1976, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Womanbooks, Customer Log, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Lassila went on to become the editor of *OnEarth*, the publication of the National Resources Defense Council, and the first woman editor of the *Yale Alumni Magazine* in 2002. Lindsey Mergener, “Yale Alumni Magazine Taps First Female Editor,” *Yale Daily News* 3 Dec. 2002, 27 Mar. 2004 <[www.yaledailynews.com/article.asp?AID=21035](http://www.yaledailynews.com/article.asp?AID=21035)>.

<sup>51</sup> “Coeducation Timeline,” Dartmouth College, 27 Mar. 2004

<[www.dartmouth.edu/~coed25/timeline.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~coed25/timeline.html)>.

<sup>52</sup> “Womanbooks Buying Guide,” 11-14.

<sup>53</sup> Batya, Brenda, Karyn [London], Roz, Sharon, “Greetings,” *Reading, Writing & Rhythm: women’s works in review* 1.2 (1981): 2, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Bluestockings opened as a feminist bookstore in the East Village in 1999, but after changing owners it has become “a radical bookstore” rather than a feminist bookstore. Bluestockings, 2005, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.bluestockings.com>>.

<sup>55</sup> Kristen Grimstad and Susan Rennie, eds., *The New Woman’s Survival Catalog: A Woman-Made Book* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1973) 24.

<sup>56</sup> Nancy Porter, “The Ground Revisited,” *Politics of Women’s Studies*, 345-352, 350.

<sup>57</sup> Johanna Brenner, personal interview, 25 Feb. 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Portland City Data Profile, American Community Survey, 2003, U.S. Census Bureau, 7 July 2005

<<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2003/ACS/Tabular/160/16000US41590001.htm>>.

<sup>59</sup> Sue Burns, personal interview, 30 June 2005.

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- <sup>60</sup> The Amazon Bookstore Cooperative opened in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1970, twenty-four years before the founding of Amazon.com. A 1999 lawsuit, financed by the American Booksellers Association, against Amazon.com for trademark infringement ended in an undisclosed settlement after much unrelated lesbian-baiting of Amazon women on the stand by Amazon.com lawyers. For information about Amazon and the settlement, see Elizabeth Noll, "Book Warriors: Women's Bookstores Struggle for Survival," *Minnesota Women's Press Newspaper* 28 Aug. 2002, 30 Mar. 2004 <<http://www.womenspress.com/newspaper/2002/1812book.html>>. For information about Amazon.com's lesbian scare campaign in the courtroom, see Nomi Schwartz, "Internet Giant's Lawyers Bring Sexual Preference into Trademark Case," *Industry Newsroom*, 22 Oct. 1999, American Bookseller's Association, 30 Mar. 2004 <<http://www.bookweb.org/news/btw/2490.html>>. See chapter two for more information.
- <sup>61</sup> Catherine Sameh, personal interview, 12 Dec. 2003.
- <sup>62</sup> Els Debbaut, personal interview, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>63</sup> Sue Burns, personal interview, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>64</sup> "Mission Statement," *Otherwise: News from In Other Words Women's Books and Resources* (Holiday 2002): 4, In *Other Words Papers*, IOW.
- <sup>65</sup> *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzladúa, was originally published by Persephone Press in 1981, republished by the newly founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1983, and again republished in 2002 by Third Woman Press, which closed in 2005. The most recent edition shares its date with *This Bridge We Call Home* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- <sup>66</sup> Sue Burns, 2003.
- <sup>67</sup> Sue Burns, 2005.
- <sup>68</sup> Bridget Kinsella, "Powells.com Gets Facelift," *Publishers Weekly Daily*, 8 July 2005, 8 July 2005 <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/PWdaily/CA510344.html>>.
- <sup>69</sup> Sue Burns, 2005.
- <sup>70</sup> Sue Burns, 2005.
- <sup>71</sup> After a suit from Mattel, Seal Press continued to publish *Adios, Barbie* with the new title *Body Outlaws: Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity*.
- <sup>72</sup> In *Other Words*, "May Events at In Other Words Books and Resources" (May 2000), *In Other Words Papers*, IOW.
- <sup>73</sup> Textbook orders are only a small part of the resources feminist bookstores provide to women's studies. Three different viewpoints came up around this issue that should broaden professors' conceptions of the functions of textbook ordering. First, for some feminist bookwomen, textbook orders were so unwieldy that they performed these orders only in order to provide a service for women's studies. At Womanbooks, Karyn observes that women's studies professors "many of whom wanted to help, would order course texts, but that could become very complicated. If the books were short discount, (less than standard trade discount) and then the students didn't come and purchase the books-it could backfire and become a financial burden, by tying up dollars in large quantities of specialized books, and be difficult for many of the bookstores." Class books often come from university publishers, who "short-discount" their books, so while feminist

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bookstores might get other books at a forty percent discount, university press books might carry only a twenty percent or less discount; occasionally such books are nonreturnable. Eleanor explains why Womanbooks continued to provide textbooks: “we continued to do it, particularly for professors who felt that just coming to Womanbooks was an experience in itself for their students, that they wanted them to have. And so they strongly urged them to come here.” Nina Wouk and Karen Umminger, formerly of BookWoman, in Austin, Texas, note that often students are reluctant to buy their books at the feminist bookstore. Nina remembers, “We did, at first at least, stock the textbooks and were quite excited about getting some students in there. [...] But we ended up shipping a bunch of them back, which one always does.” Karen points out that university regulation provided another challenge to textbook sales: “There were these rules: where they had to get their books, and you weren’t allowed to come on campus and sell books. [...] It looks like it’s still going on, but there are professors who are willing to do that. But, again, it’s a little like pulling teeth [...]. You know, why would people want to go out of their way a few blocks to go to wherever BookWoman was? But we would lug those books up there, go to the classrooms and sell them.”

However, from the second viewpoint, other feminist bookstores thrived on textbook sales. Gilda Bruckman of New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, remembers that textbooks provided “a reasonable source of revenue.” Catherine Sameh of In Other Words speaks more enthusiastically about textbooks: “I guess in the sense that Johanna is the chair of the Women’s Studies Department [...], from the beginning we’ve always had a link there. And, we do textbook sales to the whole department, which is really why we’re still around. I’m sure you’ve discovered that with other stores.” These accounts suggest that some stores did rely on textbook sales. The third viewpoint removes us from the question of who supported whom and at whose expense by reading textbook orders as an articulation of an obvious political connection between feminist bookstores and women’s studies programs. Gilda details how this works:

In some cases they came to us, but after a while we really went out and cultivated, well, we cultivated them by sending letters out to women’s studies departments saying, “We can do this for you.” And they responded. We felt it was a natural alliance between ourselves and the people who were teaching women’s studies; we had the same interests, and frequently those people came into the bookstore looking for ideas about what to teach. So a lot of course material came from here to begin with. It seemed like a reasonable source of revenue, and a natural alliance.

Here Gilda identifies a shared political project between the bookstores and women’s studies, “we had the same interests,” and she even reads the bookstores as sources for women’s studies courses, “a lot of course material came from here to begin with.” Gilda’s use of the term “natural alliance” oversteps considerations of profitability and emphasizes the relationship between the institutions. Carol Seajay of *Old Wives’ Tales* in San Francisco also narrates textbook orders as markers of the almost inseparable simultaneous work of women’s studies and feminist bookstores:

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Pretty much from the beginning, Paula and I would take books to classes to sell them. Women, lesbians and feminists wanted to support the store, often with the introductory women's classes. How could you be feminist in San Francisco and take a women's studies class and not go to the women's bookstore? It's like you had to. It was like breathing, you had to; it was, as important as anything you would read.

For Carol, then, the bookstores themselves serve as a women's studies text, "as important as anything you would read." This last reading of the work of textbook sales at once recognize the independent work of feminist bookstores and women's studies as well as their mutual interests. Feminist bookstores become resources as and through texts because of the independent work they carry out as community women's studies institutions. Karen Umminger, personal interview, 18 Nov. 2002. Nina Wouk, personal interview, 4 June 2002. Gilda Bruckman, personal interview, 23 July 2003. Carol Seajay, personal interview, 17 July 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Anne Colby, Tom Erlich, and Liz Beaumont, "Preliminary Comments on Visit to Portland State University: February 2-3, 1999," The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, In Other Words Papers, IOW.

<sup>75</sup> Melissa Kesler Gilbert and Catherine Sameh, "Building Feminist Educational Alliances in an Urban Community," *Teaching Feminist Activism: Strategies for the Field*, ed. Nancy A. Naples and Karen Bojar (New York: Routledge, 2002) 185-206, 188.

<sup>76</sup> Gilbert and Sameh 191

<sup>77</sup> Sue Burns, 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Gilbert and Sameh 191.

<sup>79</sup> Sue Burns, 2005.

<sup>80</sup> Wendy Judith Cutler, "Lesbians with Cancer: UNST 421," Syllabus, Winter 2001, In Other Words Papers, IOW.

<sup>81</sup> "Lesbians Aware: Cancer Awareness, Prevention, and Care," Flyer, May 2001, In Other Words Papers, IOW.

<sup>82</sup> Melissa Kesler Gilbert and Sally Eck, "In Other Words Bookstore Scavenger Hunt," Course Materials, Summer 2005.

<sup>83</sup> "Girl Power: Portland State University Women's Studies Program Girl Power Capstone," course materials, n.d.

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Dougher, personal interview, 29 June 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Carol Seajay, introduction, *Feminist Bookstore News*, 16.6 (Mar. 1994): 1.

Chapter Four  
The Feminist Shelf: Bringing Feminist Books Together in One Place

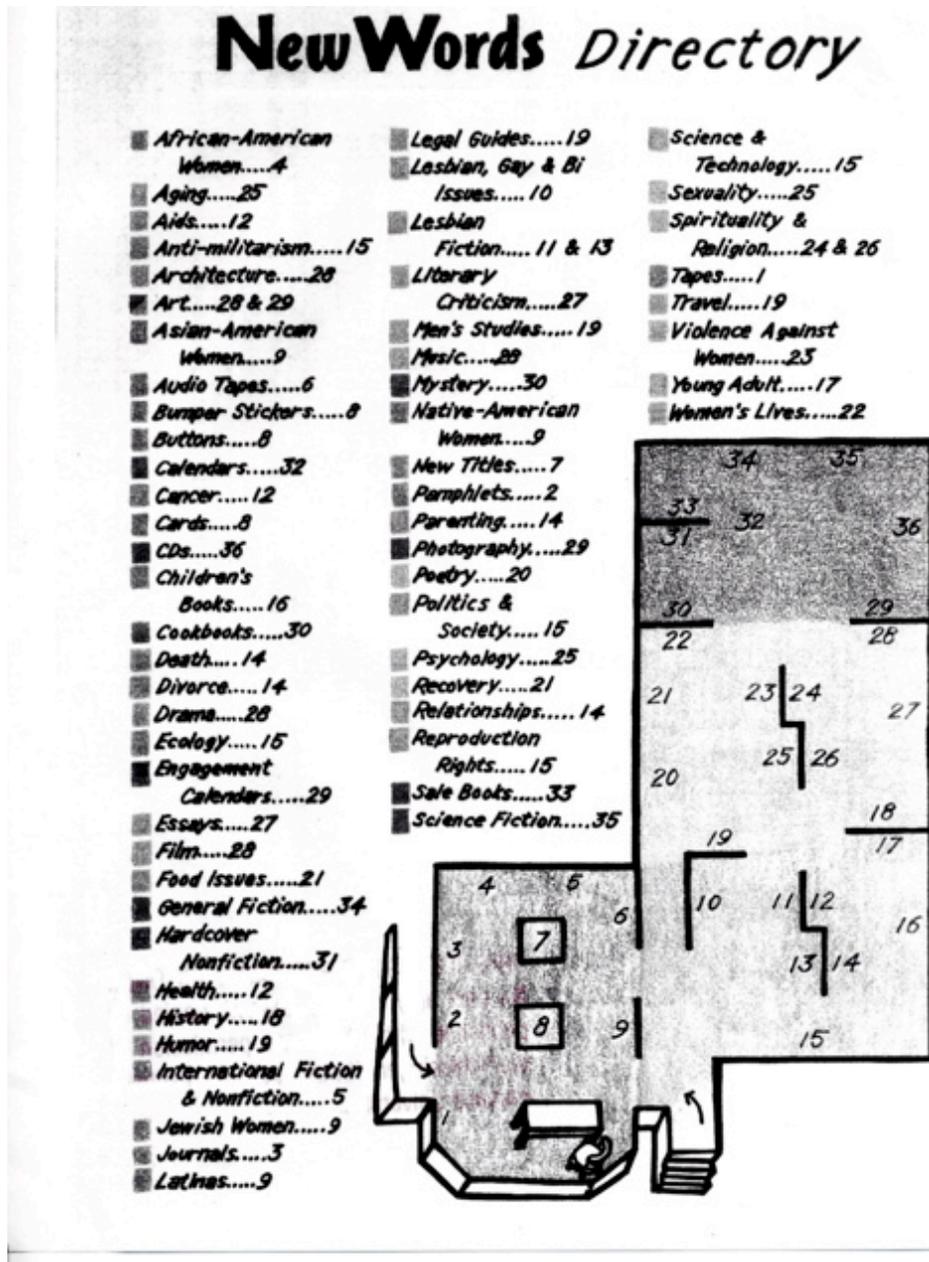


Figure 2: Joni Seager's 1986 map of New Words feminist bookstore<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, New Words, the feminist bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts, completed a Ford Foundation-funded study on the future of feminist bookstores. Using focus groups and consultants, New Words developed a revised form for the cultural and

political function of a feminist bookstore, what New Words co-founder and Center for New Words collective member Gilda Bruckman refers to as “making the turn,” “moving out of the classic bookstore event, which is an author-focused event, to events that will really reach into other corners of the community and serve other functions in terms of expanding the voices of women in our community.”<sup>2</sup> This articulation of the new formation utilizes spatial language as metaphor and as sign for real locations: “making the turn,” “moving,” “corners of the community,” “in our community.” Such a combination of spatial referents marks the continuing attention of New Words and its new incarnation, the Center for New Words, to actual space as the women of New Words develop site-specific events and webstream selected events to allow broader access. This chapter makes the case that the place where a reader acquires a book shapes how she reads it, and that for women’s texts in particular feminist bookstores offer a useful context that complicates simplified or isolated readings of women’s literary, historical, and critical presence.

In a 1986 newsletter addressed “Dear Folks,” New Words introduces a new collective member, Joni Seager, and immediately claims her work as a feminist geographer as useful to articulating the significance of New Words:

New Words has our very own geographer, Joni Seager. A feminist geographer you ask? Yes and when you come into the store ask for your own New Words’ floor plan complete with list of sections mapped out by Joni. (Bet you can find at least one section you didn’t know about.) Joni is also co-author with Ann Olson of Women in the World, Simon and Schuster, 12.95, an informative collection of colorful,

subversive and striking maps of the world with artful graphs depicting, among other topics, the incidence of women's illiteracy, infant mortality, plus noting our presence in the media and the work world. There are more than forty maps. This is great for gift giving, women's studies courses, conversation starters, and a prominent spot on your reference shelf. Publication date in October and a party here in November.<sup>3</sup>

Joni's work as a feminist geographer provides a framework for speaking about the space of feminist bookstores because this map, with its overview of the store, offers readers a cognitive map in which to place their own reading at hand, in connection with a range of women's texts. The letter above invites readers to "find at least one section you didn't know about," indicating that the section titles themselves introduce readers to new categories of information. Later in the letter the collective acknowledges the shifting sections of the store, explaining, "We have a new section on books about Adult Children of Alcoholics. The number of books on the subject has grown amazingly in the past year." That's a fifty-third book section, one too new to appear on Joni Seager's map of the bookstore. The increasing "number of books" about Adult Children of Alcoholics generated a new section, so that sections also change and shift to reflect a cultural map. Joni's own atlas of the world, originally published in 1986, emerged coincident with her mapping of New Words, and thus places the space of the bookstore in conversation with a range of political maps. Her issue-driven world atlas points out the political nature of geography, and here I draw on her mapping of New Words to articulate and explore the political nature of bookstore space.<sup>4</sup>

Joni's map and the New Words collective's description of how to read that map offers a view of feminist bookstores as significant physical spaces with a collection of women's texts. I call this unique space of collected texts the feminist shelf. I have chosen to use the feminist shelf as the unifying image of this chapter because I want readers not to imagine a theoretical grouping of texts but to visualize and consider the physical presence of women's books collected on an actual shelf, a feminist shelf. This chapter draws on reader-response theory, feminist geography, and anthology criticism to explain that the space where we find, access, and purchase books matters, that the feminist bookstore by its very existence makes a claim about the book we buy there. The feminist bookstore claims that the book we buy is part of an interdisciplinary conversation about women's rights, gender construction, and even the representation of historical events; the feminist bookstore claims that the book we buy is only one part of a vast body of writing by women of all identities. The feminist bookstore makes this claim while other purportedly "general" places, like chain bookstores, online sites, and even general independent bookstores discount and disavow this claim.

I will not argue that every feminist bookstore provides the exact same space; in fact, one importance of the independent bookstore, and the feminist bookstore in particular, is that it is a part of local geographies and cultures. Instead, I am interested in particular manifestations of feminist bookstores as influences on our literature and as models for the future work of feminist bookstores and feminist scholarship. This chapter takes as its frame one feminist bookstore, New Words, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, because of the broad interdisciplinary backgrounds of its collective members, its attention

to diversity, its sense of women writers world-wide, and its consistent attention to issues of the bookstore's space and geographic location.

This chapter develops the theory of the feminist shelf through three sections. First, I demonstrate how feminist bookstores both establish a women's literature and produce feminist activist readers. Placing feminist bookstore narratives and archives in conversation with reader-response criticism, feminist geography, and anthology theory identifies how feminist bookstores take part in these disciplinary conversations and intervene to establish that the space where a reader finds a book impacts her reading of that book. Second, I track women's written and oral accounts of shelves as a collective definition of and claim to the significance of the feminist shelf. Third, a history of New Words focusing on space and geography explains how feminist bookstores developed the preceding theory and definitions by following the life of the bookstore. Ultimately, I intend this chapter to advocate for a critical reading practice that considers the site of encounter with or purchase of texts as contributing to the reading of those texts. Feminist bookstores figure as particularly important sites of encounter and purchase for developing and supporting the feminist literature and readership necessary to social justice activism.

### **Where Did You Get That Book?**

Feminist bookstores have explicitly defined themselves as constructing a particular reading practice. In 1976, three feminist bookstore collectives published similar statements of purpose that define their attention to collecting women's books together in one place. The shared language of these three collectives, across two continents, suggests that this revised reading practice was a feature of an international feminist bookstore

movement. In Austin, Texas, the Common Woman Bookstore Collective founded their bookstore in 1975 and wrote in an early brochure, “It is important to us that works by women be allowed to define their own context by being brought together in one place.”<sup>5</sup> In 1976 in New York, a Womanbooks newsletter opened with the same words, “It is important to us that works by women be allowed to define their context by being brought together in one place.”<sup>6</sup> In 1975 in Milan, Italy, a Milan Women’s Bookstore flyer read, “We want to bring together, in the same place, the creative expression of some women with the will to liberate all women.”<sup>7</sup> This transatlantic shared language of “the same place” emphasizes the physical proximity of women’s texts as an important part of the feminist bookstore’s function. This new context, then, created by the spatial configuration of the bookstore and the books within would change the reader’s experience of the book, since it was important not only that the books existed (for which feminist publishers and presses might have been sufficient) but that they existed together.

In feminist bookstores, readers encounter a physical claim to the existence of an interdisciplinary women’s literature and, through reading in connection with such spaces, readers are produced as feminist activists.<sup>8</sup> This section poses this consciously constructed reading practice as a significant contribution to reader-response criticism: just as readers respond to and interact with texts, so do readers respond to and interact with collections of books and bookstores.<sup>9</sup> There is room for analysis of the range of spaces of book access, including online, chain, and general or niche independent bookstores.<sup>10</sup> I use the term “spaces of book access” throughout in order to emphasize the application of this critical reading to any space where readers access books, including libraries, homes, and

a range of bookstores. I hope literary critics and community scholars will engage in a broad conversation about how spaces of book access influence reading; this project is particularly important for feminist scholars, since feminist bookstores have served feminism by producing several generations of readers as feminists and since chain bookstores cannot take up this project. The apparatus of newsletters, feminist bookwomen's narratives, and bookstore geography that shaped readers' experiences of texts at feminist bookstores offers a way of reading spaces of book access at large and argues for the particular and necessary support of feminist bookstores for women's literature and feminist activism. Throughout this chapter I use the feminist bookstore documents and feminist bookwomen's narratives as a framework for examining the connections feminist bookstores draw between reader-response criticism, geography, and anthology discourse. These connections explain how the space in which a reader finds a text, not just the assumptions she brings to the text or the publisher's shaping of the text, changes her reading experience.<sup>11</sup>

While reader-response criticism has foregrounded readers' interactions with texts (over a previously argued true interpretation of texts),<sup>12</sup> there has still been little discussion of how a reader's interaction with a text is influenced by where she finds the book she is reading. The contribution of feminist bookstores' feminist shelves to reader-response criticism and to literary activism is important because it offers a new view to a central question reader-response criticism takes up: what are we doing when we read texts? The feminist bookstore statements above suggest that feminist bookstores shift a reader's experience in two ways. First, readers encounter the book as part of a (re)defined

field of women's literature as the books "define their own context" outside of other genre or period designations. Second, the configurations of feminist bookstores make readers into feminist activists or at least allow feminist activism to act on readers, since the collection of the books expresses the "will," thus indicating the belief in the concrete possibility of "liberat[ing] all women."

Rather than producing a space only for an already-formed and exclusive community, feminist bookstores as public spaces interact with a range of readership groups and take part in shaping (I consider this a kind of teaching) groups of readers. Not all people who come to a feminist bookstore take part in the same interpretive community;<sup>13</sup> that is, the space is not entirely self-selecting of an audience that reads in a particular way. New York's Womanbooks co-founder Karyn London explains the range of demographics their bookstore served: "We welcomed women from Australia and around the country and wherever they came from, but especially local neighborhood women who'd stop in on their way home from work, to check out the rental library. They might have had no idea about feminism or women's bookstores, but began coming, and over time felt at home in woman defined space."<sup>14</sup> The women from different countries or from "around the country" visiting Womanbooks as a site for travel and purchasing books to return home with surely used the bookstore differently from those women coming in "on their way home from work" and renting books without necessarily sharing a political reading practice. This difference might also be defined as between those who seek out the feminist bookstore as an immediately comfortable site and those who feel comfortable only "over time." With such a range of readers encountering books at

feminist bookstores, it is worth exploring how their experience at a feminist bookstore might be different from that at a general bookstore.

### *Proving Women's Literature*

Even though the Center for New Words currently runs feminist literary events without a bookstore, readers still call the Center for text-based resources on a range of women's issues, indicating that mainstream spaces of book access, by virtue of their "general" selection, disperse women's literature, making it less visible and less accessible. Gilda points out that people come by the Center to say, "Oh, I really miss the bookstore, I can't get these books anywhere." When I asked which books, Gilda clarified that "It's not so much the, the specific books as the topics," the collected bodies of reading, that people are looking for. Gilda explains,

People still call here looking for topics, for books for high school students who are dealing with gay and lesbian issues, or transgender issues. Nobody's focusing on that the way we did. Other bookstores have a couple of books on this topic, but we actually had a bibliography and the books to match it, because this was an area of specific interest to us. We felt there was a lack, and I watched for those books. I also watched for books for kids on disabilities, because I felt there just weren't enough of them around, and teachers would come into the store shopping for libraries. So, wherever we identified a need that we thought existed in our community and was not being met, we put a certain amount of energy into filling that in with books.

The range of topics cited by Gilda here offer a view to the broad spectrum of what takes place as “women’s literature” in a feminist bookstore. The dispersed books at “other bookstores” with “a couple of books” on particular topics don’t carry the force of the “bibliography and the books to match it,” and certainly don’t visibly connect together as part of a body of feminist knowledge. That is, the collection of books marks the body of literature and marks the space of the bookstore as advocating for particular issues in ways that purportedly “general” bookstores cannot. As a result, feminist bookstores have publicly proven women’s literature as a field, that is, they have made it visible in its complexity and this collection has served as proof to readers and visitors that women’s literature exists and thrives.

Readers encountering texts in these spaces confront (and eventually become conversant with) the existence of a body of literature and a set of vocabulary particular to that body.<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Long articulates the collection as part of an “infrastructure”:

“Reading requires [...] an infrastructure as a social base, in much the same way as modern transportation requires a physical infrastructure of highways, airports, and fuel supplies.”<sup>16</sup> Visioning this activity of reading as propped up, as it were, indicates its connectedness to a landscape of activities and services taking place in and bounded by physical space. Strangely, though, Long underestimates the constructedness of this infrastructure, primarily in her description of how chain bookstores are at times preferable to “even the most literary bookstores” because chain stores have a “wide range of titles and [an] inclusive, non-judgmental atmosphere.”<sup>17</sup> Here Long characterizes large general bookstores as physical spaces devoid of judgment. I argue instead that the space

of the bookstore is always judgmental. Bookstores choose what books to include, how to group them, what kinds of readers to invite in to the space through reading events, resources provided, and whether or not the bookstore also buys and sells used books or manages a library component, all acts of judgment. If one critic overtly makes the assumption that a space is without judgment, perhaps this explains why none have articulated the physical space where we acquire books as a place that impacts a reading.

Feminist bookstores carefully articulate the space of the bookstore in order to include a wide range of women in a feminist conversation. Gilda Bruckman describes how arrangement influenced the inclusion or exclusion of interpretive communities:

How we displayed our books and how we featured books had a big effect on who came. Pretty early on, we moved the African American section front and center, created a Latina section, and created an Asian American section. We featured those pretty strongly. Then, in keeping with the changes in the communities, we organized books to reflect what we felt the community wanted. So there was always a gay and lesbian section, there was a transgender section, there was always a health section—I'm trying to think back on what were the interesting things—there was a Jewish women's section, there was a violence and sexual abuse section. We tried to address the needs of the community as we could identify them in how we displayed our books. There was a racial awareness and identity section, in the last couple of years, which dealt with issues around multiple racial identities, or racial identity that was not simply a matter of African American or Asian American, but crossed boundaries. That was a really exciting

collection of books. For us, it was always very gratifying to put these books together. It put a new face on the life of our community, and made available resources that hadn't been seen together.

Gilda's first sentence emphasizes the judgment of any space as readers feel included or excluded based on the visibility of their identities in the bookstore. By allowing the sections to shift, New Words could respond to its reading of community needs, adding a racial awareness and identity section to cross the previously disparate ethnically identified sections. In the last sentence, Gilda emphasizes that the arrangement of the books matters as much as having the books. Through the book arrangement, New Words "made available resources that hadn't been seen together," thus introducing a new way to conceive of the place of a single book within a collection. This collection also establishes, proves, a broadly conceived women's literature that includes diverse voices and perspectives.

Feminist bookstores' acknowledgement of these deliberate spatial choices situates feminist bookstores as places which articulate a clear process of constructing a literature through spatial choices. Feminist geography helps to articulate how space is never without judgment. Lise Nelson and New Words collective member Joni Seager co-edited *A Companion to Feminist Geography* (2005), in which their introduction sets out a general definition of feminist geography, one part of which acknowledges the complex make up of spaces: "[T]o the extent that feminism is at the forefront of theorizing the intersectionality of multiple oppressions, feminist geographers demonstrate how these oppressions are embedded in, and produced through material and symbolic space and

place. Place matters. The particularities of *where* social processes unfold, and how they unfold *in relation to* other social, political, and economic processes, shape the *way* in which they do so.”<sup>18</sup> If, as I claim, a bookstore exists as a place where social processes unfold, then, to fully understand its significance we must examine “how they unfold *in relation to* other social, political, and economic processes.” That is, it is significant that Elizabeth Long, a white professor at Rice University in Houston, had trouble locating African American or Latina reading groups in Houston: “[i]nformal networking among colleagues of color did not yield the kinds of leads I was able to generate among the white community. The Amistad Bookstore, which people said might be a good contact point for black women’s reading groups, closed just as I was beginning the research.”<sup>19</sup> If the chain bookstore were indeed without judgment, a range of community members would have felt comfortable there and the chain store could have connected her with white *and* African American and Latina reading groups.

Instead, the chain store, too, makes a judgment through its arrangement of texts and what it carries not to focus on serving particular socioeconomic groups. This split in relationship networks impacted by a range of political factors is then reflected (if not always readily interpretable) in the work of a space. Minnie Bruce Pratt remembers, “In my tiny Alabama town, Centreville, there was no public library; across the river, in Brent, there was a one-room collection behind the fire station, for white folks only. The school libraries were all even smaller, and locked up during the summers.”<sup>20</sup> Here spaces of book access participate in and perpetuate broader networks of exclusion. That Gilda and the New Words collective needed to foreground the women of color fiction indicates the

need for the space to physically reject both these networks of exclusion and a monolithic idea of feminism, as well as to provide books not readily available at the general stores then open. If racial breaks in feminism and in literary discussion, then, are mapped, even reparatively, onto the spaces of bookstores (or onto spaces marked by the bookstore hauntings, like the Amistad Bookstore no longer there, but documented and remembered), then spaces bear the judgment of and take sides on the interpretation of that segregated history.

I will not, then, claim that everyone's, or even every woman's, experience of every feminist bookstore is the same. Liz Bondi and Joyce Davidson explain, "The notion of places as producing shared experiences and the notion of space as abstract geometry both conveniently ignore the myriad ways in which differences of gender, age, class, 'race,' and other forms of social differentiation shape people's lives."<sup>21</sup> For example, feminist bookstores, however much meant to act as community centers, are defined in part by the cost of books, which, in turn, can produce a class-specific readership. Some bookstores, for example, *Old Wives' Tales* as told by Carol Seajay, developed lending libraries to counteract this limit on the constituted reader:

Sometimes somebody just needed to read a book, and, and it was a way that you could also provide books with dignity to people. Like, someone would come in, and you'd know she needed that book—she'd be looking at it, and you knew she couldn't afford it, or she'd say she couldn't afford it, or whatever—then you'd say, 'Well, let me see if it's in the library.' And you'd take it back and slip it in the library, and there it would be! Or, you'd say, 'I know of two other women

want to read this, so let's put it in the library, and you can just be the first person to borrow it.' You'd do things like that.

A bookstore with a lending library, then, may indicate a broader class-based readership, while one without lending libraries makes a particular judgment based on economic access. This distribution process also emphasizes the importance of a body of women's literature not only to revising the literary canon but also to validating women's lives by seeing a collection of such lives represented on feminist bookstore shelves.

Taking as a given that all bookstores practice exclusion, I turn now to emphasize the possibilities for inclusion practiced by feminist bookstores. British anthropologist Linda McDowell explains, "places are by very definition exclusive. They define themselves and their inhabitants as 'different from,' although this is not to deny the multiple senses and meanings of place constructed by the co-inhabitants of any place."<sup>22</sup> I will be liberal with her words here and consider books as the co-inhabitants of a feminist bookstore. The feminist bookstore, then, does exclude books of a certain nature by including only those books that speak to women's lives; these books, though, as co-inhabitants, do construct "multiple senses of meanings and place" through their exclusive and broad range. Carol Seajay describes what kinds of books they stocked at Old Wives' Tales (San Francisco, 1976-1995) in 1976:

We had every book of fiction published by a woman of color that we could find. And we ordered books sometimes from England, we ordered books from Canada. We went as wide as we could; we'd order from Mexico. We had books in Spanish by women when we could get them. We were committed to having every lesbian

novel and nonfiction and pamphlet we could get our hands on. For me, those were the driving forces. We were committed to having really good women's fiction, because that, to me, seemed to be what affected most women's lives most intensely. [...] Paula was committed to having every science fiction novel by women, so we had every science fiction novel by women. We wanted to have a good selection of history. We had what biography we could get, there wasn't as much. We were committed to having good kids books, non-sexist, anti-racist kids books, and certainly all the feminist press-published kids books at that time. There wasn't much for middle-school and high-school kids at that time. We had that one book, that one pamphlet on incest, until there began to be some books about incest, and then of course we had those. [...] We wanted to have a range; we wanted every woman who came in there to find something that spoke to her life.

This inclusive ordering practice prioritizes a diverse women's literature even as it constructs a particular kind of desire. The desire that "every woman" would "find something that spoke to her life," combined with a consideration of the exclusions of feminist bookstores' inventories (not carrying politically or socially conservative books, for example), seems truly a desire that women would be changed by the bookstore. The collection at once argues for a body of women's literature and seeks to influence reading practices.

Choices involved in constructing anthologies clarify two important factors of collection as it influences a reader: first, the exclusion and inclusion involved in

generating a collection of texts, and, second, the framing of the collection for a critical or political purpose. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager warn,

Producing an anthology is, as colleagues once wrote, a ‘terrifying experience’ (McDowell and Sharp, 1997). As editors, the problems of ‘selecting in’ and ‘leaving out’ produced in us constant moments of indecision and doubt. [... We] offer this *Companion* as a mosaic: in close view, each chapter can be read alone for its own distinctive contribution, but stepping back from each contribution we see an assembled portrait of a vibrant field.<sup>23</sup>

Nelson and Seager’s academic anthology uses institutional language to articulate the importance of their collection that articulates “a vibrant field,” but this description of the anthologizing process suggests that even a limited collection can approximate the kinds of activist choices made in shaping a feminist bookstore. Joni Seager’s own experience with such shaping as a bookwoman at New Words in the 1980s and now as a board member of the Center for New Words connects her collaboratively written anthology introduction with the physical shaping of the bookstore. Though Nelson and Seager exclude and include variously in their anthology, each piece makes a contribution. Most significantly, the contribution of the piece becomes more immediately apparent in the collection because the reader, “stepping back,” can see “an assembled portrait,” a context. Karen L. Kilcup comes just short of offering up bookstore space as a kind of subversive anthology: “If we were able to resist or evade the economic pressures of publishers, perhaps we could envision anthologizing in a comprehensive as well as individual sense, that is, to consider press series (or even the publishing landscape in individual areas) as

another form of this activity.”<sup>24</sup> I expand Kilcup’s concept of comprehensive anthologizing beyond publishing landscapes to the site of the feminist bookstore. I use her call to suggest the use of feminist bookstores as readers’ companions and as teaching tools, establishing a full women’s literature as context for any single book explored.

The construction of such a context may well be, as Nelson and Seager claim, “terrifying” because any collection (even large, “general” bookstores) makes a series of decisions about what literature looks like. In oral history interviews, feminist bookwomen make clear that they have been conscious that the content of the bookstore’s collection can shape a reader’s understanding of women’s literature. Susan Post of the Common Woman Bookstore Collective (Austin, Texas, 1975-present as BookWoman) emphasizes quantity, diverse feminist focus, and local women authors as priorities for the Common Woman collection:

We would try to carry as many books as were available, and of course there was Kitchen Table[: Women of Color Press], we carried every book by them [...].

And the Feminist Press is right in here with us, they were rediscovering women’s lives, and also women of color; so whatever books they published we carried.

And I think there were a few things from the University of Texas Press. There’s a woman in town named Martha Cotera, and she’s a big name in the Chicana community. [...] She had a consulting company for Chicanos and Chicanas, and she published a few books about Tejanas.<sup>25</sup>

In her 1985 textbook (now in its fifth edition) *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women’s Studies*, Sheila Ruth articulates this refiguration: “These readings, diverse as

they are, go together. They have been selected for their collective power to provide a picture of the pattern of ideas about women.”<sup>26</sup> Feminist bookstores, too, draw on this “collective power” of bringing particular kinds of women’s books together into one place to establish the existence, scope, and rich conversations within women’s literature.

### *Producing Feminist Activist Readers*

The body of women’s literature at feminist bookstores proved to readers, publishers, and literary critics that there was such a thing as women’s literature,<sup>27</sup> and then used this collection to teach a range readers a new kind of feminist reading practice. Carol Seajay explains that producing readers was one central function of feminist bookstores:

One of the things I like to say that we did and did best was create a kind of literacy. We both taught lesbians to read, and, I think, less successfully—or maybe I just have to say less personally, because I’m a white woman—that some women of color came in and got books both [at Old Wives’ Tales] and at A Woman’s Place and became book-users. They got something that they needed out of those books, found books to be a tool for them, and found a way to use this tool for themselves. That’s what I consider literacy. There’s the letters and the words and the paragraphs and the sentences, and making sense out of it, and then there’s making that leap that “this has something to do with me.” That, in my experience, certainly makes a big difference in how people can read. I’m one of those late reader kids that found a book that had something important in it for me and figured it out, that moment in second grade when there was a book with a girl’s

name Carol in it, and a kid that needed to get out of her house and liked going to her best-friend's family farm. Sort of like, "Makes sense to me, yes, oh, yes!" We gave that to a lot of people, and that's not literature like most English departments want to talk about literature, but it is library-usage literature. That's, I think, one of the most important things that we did. And we 'taught' white women to turn to fiction by women of color and watch that body of literature become core reading in their lives.<sup>28</sup>

Producing through a collection of women's literature a particular "literacy" in which books about women "have something to do with me," the reader. Carol's language here indicates the ways in which feminist bookwomen imagined their role "creat[ing] a kind of literacy," creating "book users," and "mak[ing] a big difference in how people can read." Reading feminist bookwomen's articulation of this practice alongside reader-response and literary geography critics demonstrates feminist bookstores producing a means by which the space of the feminist bookstore creates a particular kind of activist reader. This transformation emphasizes the important role of feminist bookstores in the feminist movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and teaches readers to examine spaces of book access inform their reading practices.

The role of literature in making readers into feminists or enabling women to act more freely in society has a link to a consistent thread of reader-response criticism. Jane P. Tompkins, in the closing essay of her 1980 landmark collection of reader-response criticism, accused literary critics of neglecting the political work of language and reading. She argued that reader-response criticism, instead of challenging the formalism of the

New Critics, had simply re-emphasized formalism's definition of interpretation as the search for the meaning of the text. Reader-response criticism's challenge to formalism, Tompkins posits, is "their opposition to the belief that meaning inheres completely and exclusively in the literary text."<sup>29</sup> But regardless of where the meaning is located, both discourses "assume that to specify meaning is criticism's ultimate goal."<sup>30</sup> She offers another option by reaching back to Greek rhetoricians "for whom mastery of language meant mastery of the state."<sup>31</sup> Put this way, interpretation (and the power granted to certain types of interpretation) influences the structure of society.<sup>32</sup> Recent feminist authors have taken this up, including Rita Felski whose book *Literature after Feminism* takes a look at "how feminism has changed the way people talk about books." Her book is meant to refute scholars' readings of feminist literary criticism as polemical and solely useful for political rallying. Felski explains, "Part of the problem, I think, lies in [...] the conviction that literature and politics are irredeemably opposed and that writers and critics interested in social issues therefore cannot do justice to the demands of art. This idea is a relatively new one—it would have made little sense to the Victorians—but is often invoked by conservative critics as a sacred and timeless truth."<sup>33</sup> As I have described in the above section, interacting with literature is necessarily political in the sense that books and their collection articulate inclusions and exclusions and even the existence of identities and build a vocabulary for discussing social issues in the public sphere.

Feminist bookstores revise this theory, emphasizing the necessity of a framework in order for literature to develop social change. Gilda Bruckman explains how the Center for New Words generates such public discussions geared towards social change:

We had a great event this fall [in 2002] with Anika Nailah, who wrote a book of short stories called *Free*. She's an African American woman in Somerville, here in the Boston area, who works with young people in a writing program, and she wrote this wonderful book of short stories. She had a panel of Black and white women, all of whom had read the book, and she led this panel. She started off by reading the first story out loud, and then the panel discussed it, in terms of the racial issues, and the characters, and their racial identity and experiences. It was terrific because the audience knew what the story was, because she had just read it out loud; the people on the panel had read it and thought about it. It was a mixed race panel, it was a mixed race audience, and somehow in talking about literature rather than talking about one's personal experience the conversation became much more expansive. It was a real eye-opener to me to see how completely literature does what we wanted it to do, that is, create a venue for conversation, expression, and expansion in the best possible way.

Gilda's explanation emphasizes the continued intention of feminist bookwomen, "literature does what we wanted it to do," and points out that literature, within a particular framework, can enact change, "expansion," in readers and discussants. Feminist bookstore booklists contributed to this project and expanded on the identification of issues by section title in the bookstore. Feminist bookwomen developed

bibliographies by topic on handouts both to validate these topics of inquiry and to inform readers about vital resources. Lists like Womanbooks' "Toward a Radical Feminist Analysis of Pornography" and the multi-page "lesbian booklist," as well as Old Wives' Tales' "Books on Abuse of Women and Children," collected books into readable tools for using books for personal social justice activism.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, the collection of the feminist shelf in bookstores and on booklists produces feminist (activist) readers. Carol Seajay explains that through providing feminist books and guiding readers through them, feminist bookstores "creat[ed] readers." I draw on Jonathan Culler's description of how reading constitutes a reader to explain how readers are influenced by feminist bookstores. Culler builds a structuralist context for reading, seeking to articulate a form for a system that gives meaning to a text: "A structuralist pursuit of codes leads critics to treat the work as an intertextual construct—a product of various cultural discourses on which it relies for its intelligibility—and thus consolidates the central role of the reader as a centering role."<sup>35</sup> That is, the text at hand draws on a range of cultural texts that lend meaning and become unified in the reader. What, then, if those cultural texts were actually present rather than implied in a linguistic pattern or structure? In that case, a configuration of texts might change the meaning of a single text found there, for the reader's "centering role" would act as center for the texts physically surrounding the book in hand. For example, a book on a list of "Books on Abuse of Women and Children" becomes part of a group of texts in response to an acknowledges social structural problem; the list generates a particular kind of legibility for that book.

Culler approaches this sense of context and articulates its use for feminism in his section “Reading as a Woman,” in which he explores the ways that feminist criticism teaches its readers to be critical feminists, and which might better have been titled “Reading as a Feminist.”<sup>36</sup> His survey of feminist literary critics and their stories of their personal reading experiences points, by virtue simply of the collection of these authors, to the possibility of forming an interpretive system out of a spatial configuration, in this case, out of feminist literary critics of the 1980s. I use this as an example of a spatial configuration because Culler arranges in his text a series of feminist critics and refers to the collective force of their texts; thus, the reader would not have the same experience encountering a single one of these texts as encountering the group. Feminist bookstores embody the physical counterpart (and more) to Culler’s collection. For Culler the reader herself becomes a text as the “appeal to the experience of the reader provides leverage for displacing or undoing the system of concepts or procedures of male criticism.” But since experience, according to Culler, is an unstable reference point (“it has always already occurred and yet is still to be produced—an indispensable point of reference, yet never simply there”),<sup>37</sup> the reading itself is part of constructing the identity of the reader through practice: “a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman.”<sup>38</sup> Then the construction of the reading subject through this contextual reading practice becomes a means of situating the reader for social change, since feminist criticism “has a considerable stake in the question of the relation of the reading self and the experience of the reader to other moments of the self and other aspects of experience.” That is, the reader might use her identity gained from reading (as “a woman reading as a woman

reading as a woman”) to critically read other situations, thus performing the political force of a collected body of feminist literature: teaching readers to become feminist readers of texts and spaces. In my oral history interview with her, Carol Seajay positioned herself as such a reader and described how feminist bookstore collections made her into a feminist reader:

I started reading Gayle Jones, her stuff particularly, and Toni Morrison, and some Alice Walker, [...] and Zora Neale Hurston. [...] Those books gave me an image of being a strong, independent woman. That the Black women were writing about being strong, about being independent, about being women that were not based in suburban nuclear families, and that might’ve been an ideal, but it wasn’t a lifestyle. And, there were these women just being fierce, and raising children, and doing what needed to be done, and fighting through, and taking care of each other. And those were the images that really helped me cement that distance between the way that you had to be a lesbian and the options that I saw in the sixties, in the world around me and in the books that existed then, where your choice was you could get killed by a falling tree or you could run away to a big city where you could choose between being an alcoholic and committing suicide. To learn these kinds of survival skills, for me, it was very much Black women’s literature.

Here, Carol’s experience reading Black women’s literature informs her reading both of lesbian literature and of her life as a white lesbian, indicating how a collection of texts about women can teach women readers to interpret a range of related texts.

The feminist activist anthology suggests the possibilities for using the collection (the anthology or the bookstore) to teach the reader to interact with the text and with her world. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her article provocatively titled “Creating Anthologies and Other Dangerous Practices,” explains, “[A]s a reader I have also come to expect that the anthology is connected to something a little more dangerous and enticing, an intellectual, social, and political project that has something ‘at stake.’”<sup>39</sup> Smith at once acknowledges the inherently “political project” of anthology making (including and excluding to shape a context) and reveals how a collection impacts a reader. Positioning herself “as a reader” and describing what she has “come to expect,” Smith suggests that her following statement finds support in her previous reading experiences of anthologies that are “connected to something a little more dangerous and enticing.” Her reading experience, then, impacts what she understands as the work of the anthology. Seen this way, Smith’s statement implies the power of the anthology not only to make or identify meaning but to create action, the power Jane P. Tompkins calls critics to recognize in literature. Such action can take part in the production of activist anthologies. Carol Seajay in fact tracks the close connection between the popular feminist movement and the anthology:

I have heard the women’s movement and women’s presses credited with creating this wave of anthologies, because we collect things—*Notes from the First Year*, *Notes from the Second Year*, *Notes from the Third Year*—[...] partly because we believed ten minds were better than one, and partly because no one had time to write a whole book on something. I think that’s another important form, piece of contribution that we’ve made to literature.<sup>40</sup>

For Carol, then, the collection, like the feminist bookstore, is a practice of activist history and a redefinition of literature.

Anthologies also claim to serve as spaces of refuge or meeting, suggesting that similarly-collected texts inside a feminist bookstores identify the bookstores as safe places infused with the meaning of the texts lining the walls; providing this space is essential to reader transformation. This conscious spatial choice to ensure the comfort and safety of readers allows and invites close examination of the texts and an engagement in ongoing and new conversations. Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that “the anthology [...] acts as a meeting place, a conversation, or more often a debate between disciplines.”<sup>41</sup> This potential, then, indicates the vital contribution of feminist bookstores which serve as physical meeting places drawing on these literary spaces to generate diverse and vital conversations. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa’s 2002 introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* explained that the book “created a reflective and passionate space for discussion by representing many of our diverse faces. It continues to be a refuge, linking us with each other, renewing old connections among women of color, and prompting old alliances with the younger generations of women and with women and men of other tribes and continents.”<sup>42</sup> While a book might travel where a bookstore might not, a bookstore can provide the physical space for which the anthology serves as metaphor.

Feminist bookstores contribute to women’s literary history through articulating a space accessible to varied populations of women. Susan Post and Nina Wouk, co-founders of the Common Woman Bookstore spoke with me about their deliberate

physical choices for the space of the bookstore. Susan described that “big white sign, with our old logo of the two girl heads, and Common Woman in red, big red, bold. [...] It was this big, red nylon banner, with grommets and yellow letters that Dede [Spontak] and I made. She sewed it, she knew how to sew. That was a big project. And we chose those colors because they were revolutionary, red and yellow.”<sup>43</sup> Nina worked with Dede on the inside of the bookstore, choosing the paint: “My original version of it was royal purple walls with crimson trim. I sort of ended up with more violet. Which in the end was probably much more spacious.”<sup>44</sup> For Susan, Nina, and Dede, colors mark the revolutionary intent of the space. This space in which readers encounter and acquire their books is a deliberately constructed space, and a space articulated through its collection of women’s texts.

From reader-response theory and the structures that impact the reader to feminist geography and the politics that impact the space I return here to a combination of literature and space. These studies still do not talk directly about what it means to have a collection of women’s texts (or any texts, for that matter) together in one place—perhaps because the idea is still so revolutionary, perhaps because the collection of women’s literary history is still whispered about and not discussed in polite company. Minrose Gwin, in her article appropriately titled “Space Travel: The Connective Politics of Feminist Reading,” warns, “Shaking things up requires knowing how they work.” She draws on Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson to claim that “a text, be it a book or a living space, is not *representative* of ideology but is a *product* and *producer* of ideology” (Culler and Nelson and Seager would surely claim along with me that a text is all

three).<sup>45</sup> Gwin suggestively links texts with spaces: “textual spaces (of women’s stories)—reveal the dynamic and incessant productions of ideology, as do our readings of them, and as do our readings of our own readings.”<sup>46</sup> Taking as a model this reading of textual spaces as places we might traverse, I argue that the space in which the texts are found together is shaped by and in turn produces ideologies and reading strategies.

Minrose Gwin, like Culler in his collection of feminist literary critics, establishes a beginning to this literary spatial theory by arguing that reading various women’s texts together, overlapping each other, produces a complicated sense of women’s identities.

As women reading women, we may often find ourselves visitors in a different land, perhaps a strange land [...]. I see our journey across the shifting landscape of women’s stories as a movement into what Minnie Bruce Pratt has called a ‘world of overlapping circles,’ where we may learn ways of exploring female identity and cultural productions of difference that are ‘more accurate, complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensional, more truthful’ (1984, 17). [...] Their overlap can transform our sense of where we are, and who we can become.<sup>47</sup>

Gwin’s opening directly invokes Culler’s concept of reading as constructing a social identity, a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman, and tracks this construction through Pratt’s ‘world of overlapping circles,’ which points to Nelson and Seager’s “intersectionality of multiple oppressions” as well as to McDowell’s “multiple senses and meanings of place.” The texts themselves function as spaces such that their physical space in a feminist bookstore can amplify their connections. This transformative overlap in language and sense indicates that the space of the texts together change the reader and

the reader's future. Learning a feminist literacy through feminist bookstores, readers transformed their own lives and transferred their reading skills to interpreting cultural as well as literary texts.

These conversations should call our attention to the *where* of where we acquire our books, and, particularly, to the value of the feminist bookstore as a literary space that offers a context for women's writing, a meeting place for a range of women's writing and for its readers, as well as a training in feminist activist reading practice. Before examining in depth how the life of a feminist bookstore unfolds through its development of a feminist literary space with an influence on readers, I bring the concept of space and women's literature closer together in the concept of the feminist shelf. I invite you to browse a few feminists' shelves.

### **Where Did You Put That Book?**

"I didn't think of reading as dangerous,"<sup>48</sup> Minnie Bruce Pratt writes, letting us know that she does now. She titles this essay "Books in the Closet, in the Attic, Boxes, Secrets," a pile of nouns, three hiding spaces (closet, attic, boxes) book-ended by books and secrets, suggestively connected by their parallel positions in the title. While I have found only one discussion in print of readers' relationships with feminist bookstores,<sup>49</sup> women do talk about their relationships to books and to shelves. Exploring the affective connections between feminists and their books introduces a new claim about the feminist shelf: in order to find support for imagining new ways of living, women need stacks of feminist books. Tracing these personal narratives of feminist shelves documents the diverse forms feminist shelves take and indicates the significance of the feminist

bookstore as a public instantiation of the private feminist shelf. Minnie Bruce Pratt begins with a story of what happens when literatures are dispersed, disconnected, hidden, indicating that private feminist shelves cannot be sufficient to support a population of women. Such disconnection emphasizes the potential for the feminist shelf, defined as what happens when feminist texts are grouped together, marking carefully constructed space, and providing context for each other, making dangerous reading safer.<sup>50</sup>

Individual identities and even who gets to read are restricted by the spaces in which books are collected. Space in Minnie Bruce Pratt's remembrance, excludes: the collection for white people only, the locked school libraries, the closets and attics hidden, the glassed-in bookshelves hidden in their separateness, too.<sup>51</sup> Pratt recognizes this space as a context for the stories she finds, "looking": "What was I looking for [...] Perhaps I was hunting for escape [...]. And perhaps I was looking for an explanation. The only answer that I'd ever been given for my life was the Bible [...]. Almost all the other books I found, searching around town, had stories that existed within this preordained boundary."<sup>52</sup> These restrictive, bounded stories share the status of the hidden books, none of which spoke to "the fearfulness and uncertainty of [Pratt's] own life, in the midst of anxious contradictions of huge secrets."<sup>53</sup> These books held in secrets, provided "escape" without explanation.

The shelves, too, identified both the commodification of someone's definition of literary culture and the construction of class and sexual identity. "Of lesbian and gay existence, I read not a word, except for a passage in Dante's *Inferno*, an old translation from the Harvard Five-Foot-Shelf-of-Books."<sup>54</sup> The Harvard Five-Foot-Shelf-of-Books,

that must-have middle-class starter kit held something unexpected, a mention, a hint, a break in the “preordained boundary.” The surrounding absence made that moment stand out, but too obvious a challenge to the boundary, like Lillian Smith’s *Strange Fruit*, a novel of interracial relationships in the South, was too great a risk. “Why didn’t I read Lillian Smith’s novel that sat quietly, openly, on the bookshelf in my own house, where I had read and reread almost every other book? Perhaps because with a glance at even one of the pages, I knew she was going to tell secrets not from three hundred years ago, but from now, near me. Perhaps because the book was only one voice, and there was no other.”<sup>55</sup> Pratt here indicates a need for an entire shelf of books like these in order to produce a language through which to understand, a validation through which to accept the connection with herself she would find in that single text. A group of similarly status quo-challenging books or a group of women armed with such books could make “a guide through [the] chaos” that opening Smith’s novel would unleash.<sup>56</sup>

Explaining that such bounded literature may be common even in shopping malls, Adrienne Rich narrates her “search for poetry in the mall” to talk about how contemporary public spaces shape literary access. The mall, presented as objective in its size and variety, exhibits a (not so well) hidden judgment. Rich connects this judgment with a history of literary control: “This is not sociology, but the pursuit of an intuition about mass marketing, the so-called free market, and how suppression can take many forms—from outright banning and burning of books, to questions of who owns the presses, to patterns of distribution and availability.”<sup>57</sup> Her short essay, “Those two shelves, down there,” reads quickly, forceful in its brevity, angry, even, at finding poetry

relegated, at finding space making hidden claims about books.<sup>58</sup> “Here is a chain bookstore,” she gestures to the readers, *here*, we all know where the closest one is, “stacked novels lettered in high-relief luminescence, computer manuals, intimacy manuals, parenting manuals, investment-management manuals, grief-management manuals, college-entrance manuals, meditation manuals, manuals on living with cancer, on channeling, on how to save the earth. I walk past these gleaming romances, these secular bibles, and ask the young clerk at the register where the poetry is.” Her repetition emphasizes the impracticality of these books deemed solely utilitarian, instruction manuals on almost everything, they become “gleaming romances,” “secular bibles,” directive, opinionated. And, finally, the shelves of poetry indicate their place in this commodified version of literary culture. The clerk “walks me toward the back of the store: ‘Those two shelves, down there.’ Poetry is underneath, and intermixed with the books on rock music, movies, and theater—not a bad thing, I think, but poetry is awfully low ‘down there.’”<sup>59</sup> Low, hidden, hemmed in, these shelves display the way that space and surroundings can validate or discredit a book.

Establishing a woman’s library, Paulette Rose challenges that other sense of the accomplished library, the gentleman’s library. Paulette Rose’s woman’s library articulates physically and through its titles the long history of transatlantic women’s literatures. I met with Paulette Rose, dealer in women’s rare books, at the Grolier Club, a “membership organization founded in 1884” and “devoted to printing, bibliography and the arts of the book.”<sup>60</sup> While Florence Farrington and others have been working on oral histories with women members of the club, our surroundings were still pointedly

masculine. Paulette Rose contrasted the Grolier Club shelves with her own concept of “a woman’s library”: “Instead of going into a dark room, lined with walnut or mahogany shelves—displaying the works of such familiar writers as Shakespeare, Trollope, and Scott—consider the contrast when entering my library. Here, the floors are rose colored, the walls are cream, and the bookcases are of oak, maple, with cherry reveals. My shelves are filled with sets and single volumes by such women writers as Willa Cather, the two Georges—George Sand and George Eliot—and Mrs. Trollope (Anthony’s mother), Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and Mrs. Gaskell. Included, too, are many notable and understudied French authors, among them Mme de Genlis, Mme de Staël, and Mme Riccoboni.”<sup>61</sup> For Paulette Rose, her reference collection in her office is reflected in the shelves themselves: instead of having shelves running straight across, they are curved shelves, Rose explains, “in an undulating form in keeping with the specialty of books by and about women.” While certainly every woman might generate a different blueprint for her woman’s library, the sense of having an identifiable shape and identity to contrast that familiar institution of the “gentleman’s library,” Paulette Rose’s semipublic “woman’s library” attempts to figure women’s texts as just as venerable, remarkable, canonizable as those in the “gentleman’s library.” The argument through the space both validates the women’s literature she collects and validates Paulette Rose’s work as a feminist literary critic.

Minnie Bruce Pratt has reclaimed the attic and houses her woman’s library there. Her writing space fills an attic “lined with rows of books [...], [b]ooks that might provoke a discussion between two women sharing a house and a bedroom when, just

before family is to come for a visit, they debate if the books should be moved to a higher shelf, if they should be boxed up and put in the closet.”<sup>62</sup> She says, “It’s true our books give our secrets away,” but where we put them determines whether we recognize them in their own context: books on a “higher shelf” or even dispersed draw less attention than those grouped together. This description of spatial meaning emphasizes the significance of having these books permanently and publicly available, visible, and collected at feminist bookstores. Pratt describes her own home shelves: “During the time that I was falling in love with a woman and coming out as a lesbian, my mother arrived for a visit. I had her stay in my tiny bedroom-study, and left my books as they were, *Lesbian Nation* stacked on top of *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, clues about who I was becoming.”<sup>63</sup> These books, not neatly next to each other, not on the higher shelf, but intimately used, stacked on top of one another, books touching books begin to make a feminist shelf. Her relationship with these books, “clues about who I was becoming,” indicates a dialectical interaction between herself and the books, one that helped her to develop a vocabulary to contextualize herself and to become a feminist activist writer.

These shelves exist in living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, hallways, and offices all across this country. Women’s feminist shelves vitally inspire and support their work and their lives. Sara Zia Ebrahimi and Naomi Skoglund’s short film *On the Shelf* describes the aesthetic, political, and affective powers of the feminist shelf, tracking a young black lesbian’s search for the perfect lover (the one with the best-stocked feminist shelf). The film’s opening sequence sounds the voices of women reading from the books shown with close-ups of pieces of their covers: Elaine Brown’s *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s*

*Story*, Anne Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, and June Jordan's *Some of Us Did Not Die*. The narrative frame positions these as a feminist shelf. Friends in a range of gender-norm-challenging dress and attitudes, among them one who works at the local feminist bookstore, surround the central character identified in the credits as "the book lover." The film focuses several shots in two feminist locations in New York: Bluestockings (a feminist bookstore in New York from 1999-2002)<sup>64</sup> and Toys in Babeland, a feminist sex toy shop. Using this context, the film challenges the limits of the feminist shelf, including books by men of color and expanding the qualification for "feminist" to include books supporting social justice. After the opening sequence, the book lover picks up her wallet off of a stack of books: Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*, and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. Books are everywhere in the book lover's apartment.

A first date ends in failure when the book lover discovers her date only has a few books, on a shelf on top of the television, and the book lover gives her Bluestockings clerk friend a list of books with the request, "If any girl comes in and picks any one of those books up off the shelf, call me immediately on my cell."<sup>65</sup> Soon after this agreement, the bookstore friend watches a woman come into the bookstore and pick up Edwidge Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory* and calls the book lover on her cell phone. The book lover arrives just as "the dream date" gets to the front desk with bell hooks' *All About Love: New Visions*. The book lover talks with the dream date, and flirts earnestly, "You know, I'd really love to hear your opinion about the book." The connection works,

and the dream date replies, “Maybe I’ll even read you my favorite part.” This exchange sets up the interest in a particular kind of book as an indication of political conviction and even passion. The book becomes the love making as a later scene shows the two in a coffee house talking and the dream date reading from hooks’ book. The connection between analysis and affect in hooks’ text carries over to the film itself, claiming both a vital need and a love for these books and for book lovers. The film follows the two lovers to the public library, at home making a protest sign reading “war is racist!,” and walking to the dream date’s apartment. The protest sign links the politics of identity with the politics of literature, noting the support structure enabled by the feminist shelf: with a woman who loves the same kinds of books, the book lover could find a political and personal partner. Finally, the dream date’s shelf is full of books, and the book lover takes one from the shelf after the camera pans the titles. The closing sequence shows yet another series of books, stack upon stack, evoking the pleasure of looking at the books in volume as well as the importance of each as part of a context for each other.

The feminist shelf refers to the individual shelf, the new or old collection of texts on a specific issue, and the public feminist bookstore-wide context of interrelated, overlapping, and constantly reorganized sections. The context of the books changes how we read. Carol Seajay remembers feeling the force of this context for the first time: “When I started working at A Woman’s Place, when I walked in there, there were two whole shelves of lesbian fiction. Now, granted, most of those books were face front, but there were two shelves, and that was more lesbian books than I’d seen in one place in my whole life, and probably more lesbian books than I had seen, altogether, in my entire

life.” The quantity, the collection stays with her. Two shelves, just like the “two shelves, down there” Adrienne Rich found at the mall, but here the space emphasizes the shelves, builds a conscious context for the books. Gilda Bruckman of New Words describes building this context: “There was something inherently exciting about putting books together in collections, and everybody who walked in here had that response. Even up until the end, there was this sense of, ‘Wow, I didn’t realize there was so much.’” These women indicate how physical collections and placement of texts makes an argument about their importance (or their isolation). Once faced with a set of books, through searching or through existing collection, though, readers understand the books differently.

### **New Words – How a Feminist Shelf Works**

The argument I have been making above, that a collection of feminist texts in a single public space (a feminist bookstore) connects a single work with a women’s literature and teaches the reader to be a feminist activist, comes directly out of the work of feminist bookstores. Looking here at a single feminist bookstore, New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I offer an extended case study as a narrative argument: the story of this bookstore explains how feminist bookstores consciously set out to produce a contextual claim to a women’s literature and to make readers into activists. This case study reads feminist bookstore ephemera (such as newsletters and flyers) and feminist bookwomen’s interviews (the recorded stand in for the undocumented verbal exchanges of hand-selling or daily discussion at the feminist bookstores) as the framework that produced the feminist bookstore as a space that would influence readers’ understandings of women’s

literature and participation in feminist activism. Like a single text in a feminist bookstore, this case study should be understood not as an exception but as one instantiation of practices and ideas shared throughout the feminist bookstore movement; that is, New Words' collections, events, and rationale frequently share books, speakers, and language with other feminist bookstores.

The 2004 National Women's Studies Association Conference (NWSA) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, featured Rita Arditti, a co-founder of New Words, as one of the keynote speakers in a panel called "Feminist Uses of Science & Technology."<sup>66</sup> After the keynote, we met at a hotel coffee table, one floor up from most of the conference proceedings. She was a bit shorter than me, seventy that year, with short stone-gray hair, and wearing slacks. Her voice inflected with a slight accent, she unraveled the double-stranded history of New Words' beginning. Born in Argentina, she earned her degree at the University of Rome, then came to the United States to research genetics and to continue her political practice of science. By 1973, these combined interests had led Rita to a teaching position at the alternative Union Institute and University (UI&U) while living in Cambridge. There, she began to imagine a feminist bookstore:

I was thinking about the need to have a feminist bookstore, a place for women to buy books about women. Because in those days, if you would go to a regular bookstore and ask about books for women, one, they would have almost nothing, two, they wouldn't pay attention, or they would look at you like you were a weird person. And if there was something, it was difficult to find, so. And the idea of a whole space devoted to women seemed to me very important. I had lived in Italy,

and I used to go to a left-wing bookstore near Rome, and I thought, “How come there isn’t a bookstore for women?”<sup>67</sup>

Rita began making plans with Barbara Starrett to develop “a whole space devoted to women.” Barbara, a women’s studies PhD student in her last year at UI&U working on her dissertation, *Women, Art, and Evolution*, mentioned their idea to Mary Daly, the feminist philosopher and theologian. As Barbara told Rita, “Mary Daly said, ‘Oh, there are two other women who want to open a women’s bookstore.’ And those other two women were Jean MacRae and Mary Lowry. So, we said, ‘Well, we have to get together, we are not going to open *two* feminist bookstores.’” Mary Daly connected the women with each other, and the four decided to collaborate and to fund the bookstore startup themselves. Here, Rita recalls, “Barbara dropped out. She thought that she couldn’t do it, it wasn’t really the right moment,” and the remaining three sought a fourth woman. Emily Culpepper, another Cambridge-based feminist theologian, hosted feminist discussions on a public access television show. One show featured Mary Daly and several of her students, and they mentioned the incipient feminist bookstore. Watching from home, Gilda Bruckman had just graduated with her master’s degree and was working in a bookstore. She called and offered her help. This map of beginnings, women connecting from across the city, indicates the widespread need for a space of women’s texts and positions feminist bookstores as spaces that feminist readers like the New Words collective built in order to be able to read what they wanted in an exciting environment. Gilda Bruckman, Jean MacRae, Mary Lowry, and Rita Arditti opened New Words at 419 Washington Street in Somerville, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1974.

Even the naming of the store emerged from a dual history of women's authorship. Just a year before the bookstore opened, Beacon Press published Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, in which she writes, "Women are really *hearing ourselves* and each other, and out of this supportive hearing emerge *new words*."<sup>68</sup> Mary Daly's explanation of the feminist explosion also articulates the way that "supportive hearing" produces new kinds of writing and reading, "new words." Though Rita, Jean, and Mary had already chosen the name when Gilda signed on, Gilda prefers not to draw exclusively on Daly's legacy. "I have to say, in all honesty, the first source was a quote in Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*. [...] And there was a Virginia Woolf [quote], not so dissimilar, in *Three Guineas*. We used to fudge it when people actually said, 'Which?'"<sup>69</sup> In 1938, thirty-six years before Daly's book, the Hogarth Press came out with Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*. In one of Woolf's footnotes, she writes, "In a transitional age when many qualities are changing their value, new words to express new values are much to be desired."<sup>70</sup> The Daly quote appears in New Words' first summer flyer, and the cover of the flyer announces, "A Women's Bookstore, New Words," followed by the list, "Feminist Presses, Journals, Poetry, Biography, Fiction, Records, Posters, Silk Screen, Cards, Space, Time."<sup>71</sup> Space, following Rita's vision of the bookstore as "a whole space devoted to women," already appeared as a central feature of the bookstore, as important as its content.

The space immediately held both books and events, a combination that modeled feminist reading as interactive, requiring reader involvement.<sup>72</sup> A set of unsigned notes for a speech recounts of the bookstore: "At 419 Washington St. we held a couple of series

of readings/events: a paper by Jane Lilienfeld; a talk by Mary Daly; a performance by New Harmony Sisterhood; and educational programs around issues of health and political stuff. I personally will never forget a film by Emily Culpepper or a demonstration of self vaginal exam on one of Jenny Pierce's dinner tables. The Susan Saxe speak out was a sensation."<sup>73</sup> Performance, education (including self vaginal exams), and sensation, the language of this historian emphasizes audience involvement in two ways. The readers would come to the store and interact with authors and educators (and could connect this practice to their own reading), and some of the readers became presenters: these events provide a view to the larger Cambridge feminist community at the time. Jane Lilienfeld, a PhD candidate at Brandeis, talked about Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly probably talked about her newest book, *Beyond God the Father*, Emily Culpepper's short film was titled *Period Piece*, and a recent *Curve* magazine names Susan Saxe a "lesbian feminist icon." (*Curve* explains that Saxe served prison time for a "1970 bank robbery that included felony murder."<sup>74</sup>) In the bookstore, readers were involved in contemporary feminism.

The collection that surrounded these events was consistently emphasized. Among the New Words papers was a print of a Susan Saxe poem from the Common Woman Press in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, dated 1976, that echoes the call for new words, beginning, "there is so much we have to know; a whole hystery to be recreated." This collection of women's history, newly cast as hystery in a reclamation of those feminists written of as hysterics, is embodied by the bookstore's collection. Saxe's poem ends with the claim, "but the proof is growing!"<sup>75</sup> This sense of "growing" proof indicates the importance of collected volume for validating the presence of women's voices.

New Words' collection of a large body of women's literature in one place contributed to the national feminist bookstore project of making visible and readable a women's literature. New Words' first order to a local wholesaler, Paperback Booksmith, placed on March 12, 1974, includes around two-hundred titles on a handwritten list. A quick run through the alphabetical list offers a sense of the collected force of this space: Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution*, Geraldine Brooks' *Selected Poems*, Toni Cade Bambara's *Black Woman*, Dorothy Day's *On Pilgrimage*, George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, Nikki Giovanni's *Gemini*, Lillian Hellman's *Unfinished Woman*, Elizabeth Janeway's *Man's World, Woman's Place*, Hellen Keller's *Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years*, Billie Jean King's *Tennis to Win*, Denise Levertov's *Poet in the World*, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Anais Nin's *Spy in the House of Love*, Joyce Carol Oates' *Expensive People*, Marge Piercy's *Dance the Eagle to Sleep*, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.<sup>76</sup> The list crosses (humanities) disciplines, time periods, nations, ethnicities, sexualities, and more, making a claim to a diverse women's literature.

In 1976 the bookstore moved to 186 Hampshire Street. In 2003 I met with Gilda Bruckman at that address, now the offices not of the bookstore but of its new, bookless incarnation. The compact, Victorian-looking wooden building still bears a sign announcing New Words: A Women's Bookstore. When the bookstore first began, there was no room for readings here, but even then the surrounding community of feminist spaces made up for the size by creating a larger interactive environment for readers who

would also be feminist students, entrepreneurs, patients, and foodies. Gilda describes the neighborhood in the late seventies and early eighties:

In the building in which we were located, there was, upstairs from us, Goddard Cambridge Graduate Program in Women's Studies. The spot that we're sitting in now was the Boston Feminist Federal Credit Union. Upstairs was, and still is, Focus, which was a counseling center for women and their friends. Down the block was the Women's Community Health Center, which did self-exams, taught self-examinations and provided other health services; and directly across the street from them where there's a very fine restaurant now called Oleana, there was a women's restaurant that opened called Bread and Roses. Up the block in the other direction was Gypsy Wagon, which was a women's craft store. We had constant fantasies of creating a feminist trail in our neighborhood, because there was so much activity going on, and it really became a destination for women coming from other parts of the country.

New Words had incorporated with the help of the Women's Law Collective, later borrowed money from the Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union, and participated in a multi-faceted gathering of feminist organizations that provided a supportive context for the bookstore. The feminist bookstore as emblem of this community went national with Ellen Shub's 1976 black and white photo of a young girl reading a Wonder Woman book underneath a "Women Working" sign at the end of a set of shelves in New Words.<sup>77</sup>

From the bookstore's beginnings it has kept up a conversation with its public not only about texts and resources but also about the structure and inner workings of the

bookstore itself, thus offering the bookstore as a readable text.<sup>78</sup> “Birthday” statements came out regularly each April until the regular newsletter of the 1990s took over their narrative function. The “Statement from New Words on Our Fourth Birthday, April, 1978,” tells again the story of the bookstore’s beginnings, explains the wages (\$5 per hour as well as insurance and paid vacation) and hours (12-40 weekly) of the collective workers, the choice of the “for-profit” business structure (“gives us more autonomy in relation to the government and the IRS”), and emphasizes the connections of New Words to a community of women’s work: “Although we have not yet realized any significant profit, we have made contributions in the form of small donations (\$15-\$100) or items from the bookstore to a variety of local groups on an ad hoc basis. Among the groups we have supported in this way are Women’s Community Health, Women, Inc., Transitions House, Respond, the United Mine Workers, Rosie’s Place, Vocations for Social Change and the Women’s Center in Cambridge.”<sup>79</sup> This outside community also impacts the physical space inside the store: “When we moved we hired a crew of women to paint the store. We are also proud of our bookcases and furniture which have been made over the last four years by six different women carpenters. Our lawyer and accountant are women. We occasionally ask other women to work at the store and pay them at the same rate we pay ourselves.” This all follows the “policy of not accepting volunteers” (broken once, they note, when twenty women helped the store move “from Washington Street to Hampshire Street in less than two hours”), and indicates that the women’s space of the bookstore gives women jobs and participates in a woman-centered economy. This

birthday statement also chronicles the numbers of women (readers of some sort) invested enough in the bookstore's work to collaborate with the bookstore.

In 1979 Rita discovered that her breast cancer had spread to her lungs, and she left the daily work of the store to seek medical treatment. Though she continued to be listed as a collective member on public documents, Rita's departure was the beginning of an ongoing fluctuation of collective members as the vital store involved a range of women in its daily work. By 1986, poet and teacher Kate Rushin was involved with the collective, and geographer and teacher Joni Seager signed on in 1988.<sup>80</sup> The variety of people involved with New Words, one of the largest feminist bookstores, kept the work of New Words inclusive and expansive. Gilda explains, "When I was ordering books, I was always aware of what there was in feminist geography, because I looked for it, because I had a relationship with Joni as part of the store, and I knew about that field. [...] We were all affected by each other and made aware of each others' interests." The collective eventually included nine members working actively in the store, and their varied interests created a vital collection of feminist texts.

The work of the feminist bookstore, to influence and involve readers, required an interactive environment. In 1981 New Words rented the basement of the building. The basement became the New Words reading and performance space, the home of the regularly held Women's Craft Market, and a rentable meeting space for women's organizations. Readings happened regularly and included well-known as well as new authors. I include in full the list of events for the spring season of 1984 to provide a sense of the books available in the space and of the various feminisms represented here.

Third Thursday Fiction/Poetry Series

Feb 16: Pamela Westcott – fiction

Debra Gorlin – poetry

Mar 15: Monica Raymond – fiction

Carol Potter – poetry

Apr 19: Marita Golden – fiction

Other Readings and Events

Jan 29: Videotape and discussion on the II Encuentro Feminista Latinamericano y del Caribe held in Lima, Peru July 1983. \$2 donation for the Third World Women's Archives in New York. 2:00 pm

Feb 12: New Series! Works in Progress. Open readings of fiction, poetry, drama. Sign up as each session is limited to four readers. Call New Words. ... Second Sundays of the month from 2-4.

Mar 4: Cheryl Clarke reading from her work. Check New Words for time.

Mar 22: Nicaragua Libre! Slide show and discussion on the revolution and U.S. Policy in regard to Nicaragua. Jean Gallo.

Apr 7 & 8 New Words Tenth Anniversary!!

Apr 14: Workshop on editing and publishing with Nancy Bereano, editor of the Feminist Series at Crossing Press. Limited space. Please call for details.

Apr 15: Kathleen Fleming, author of *Lovers in the Present Afternoon*, reading from her work. 2 pm.

Apr 28-29: Writing Workshop with Maureen Brady, author of *Folly* [Crossing Press] and *Give Me Your Good Ear* [Spinsters, Ink]. Space is limited. Call New Words, 876-5310 for further information.

May 6: Judith Schwartz, author of *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy* with slide show/talk about women in Greenwich Willage [sic] 1912-1940. 2:PM [sic] Donation \$3.00

May 13: WORKS IN PROGRESS. Fiction, poetry and drama. Sign up at New Words as each session is limited to 4-5 readers. From two to four. Free. Also Sun., June 10

May 20: *The Goddess & the Machine: Masculine Myths & Feminine Realities* – meet the author of *Machina ex Dea*, Joan Rothschild 2p.m.

May 31: Book party for *Out From Under* – Sober Dykes and Our Friends with editor Jean Swallow.

June 3: Party for SAGE: A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL ON BLACK WOMEN, celebrating the first issue.<sup>81</sup>

I want to emphasize three features of this schedule: the diversity of the author list, the awareness of international feminisms, and the foregrounding of the women in print movement as a space for readers to become activist writers. The readers in the spring of

1984 included African American and white women, straight and lesbian women, and others whom I am not able to identify through research; the spring's inclusion of authors of different identities was carefully carried out through each of their seasons. African American author Marita Golden, a memoirist as well as fiction writer, would go on to found the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation in 1990 to "support the national and international community of Black writers."<sup>82</sup> In 1984 she might have read from her first novel, *A Woman's Place*, published in 1986; the novel connects the geographies of the northeastern U.S., Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Cheryl Clarke, African American lesbian poet and activist, had published *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women* in 1982 with Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Kathleen Fleming, white lesbian author, read from her new novel about lesbians in the U.S. in the 1960s. The "Nicaragua Libre!" slide show and discussion and the II Encuentro Feminista Latinamericano y del Caribe screening and discussion indicate New Words' acknowledgement of international feminisms and demonstrates the diversity of the community surrounding the bookstore.

The events also drew on the resources of the women in print movement to help women not only get connected with reading that might speak to them but also to become part of the movement as writers themselves. Nancy Bereano spoke about editing and publishing practices; she would go on to found her own feminist press, Firebrand Books, a year later. Maureen Brady, professional writing coach, offered a writing workshop; she had founded the feminist publisher Spinsters, Ink, in 1978. And Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Patricia Bell-Scott, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and others co-founded SAGE in 1983; the

celebration of their first issue publicly marks the beginning of a women's publishing project. The space of the bookstore offered a physical location for these publishers to interact with readers and writers. Again, the list indicates the numbers and range of women involved with the women in print movement; feminist reading was not a passive activity, readers would also be writers, publishers, printers, and discussants. This model of an involved reader has been consistently modeled at feminist bookstores.

Perhaps on an even larger scale than *Womanbooks*, *New Words* attracted and sustained an international feminist readership. Their location in a metropolitan, east-coast area, their size, and the diversity of their collective were among the interrelated factors that may have helped them draw an international following. Letters from international visitors emphasize the importance of the space and the range of books available. In 1980 a group of Brazilian women wrote to gather resources for their plan to "create a women's center, library, bookstore, a place to gather, talk, discuss between ourselves, a women's publishing house, a place where women could find information on our history, our struggles, our memory."<sup>83</sup> A letter from Vivienne Crawford at King Saud University began, "I am marooned in a city in which there are no bookstores like yours (women professors here are still fighting, so far in vain, for access to the university library, that's the level things are at) so asked a friend to pick up some material from you for a poetry reading I was helping organize."<sup>84</sup> In 1984 Laura Memurly sent this letter to the collective, "A Bostonian far from home, I was at the demonstration for International Women's Day here in Buenos Aires when the letters of support were read. What a surprise out of the blue to hear the name of *New Words Bookstores*, Cambridge

(although as ‘Nuevas Palabras’ it took a few seconds to sink in).”<sup>85</sup> These moments became part of a larger pattern of New Words’ international service, as Gilda remembers, “There was someone in Japan who was an academic of some standing, and she was ordering books from us pretty regularly. There were also women who would come from Europe, and South America, and come in and visit, and then ask us to send books. So we did that.” This international exchange was a way for reading not to happen in isolation but to happen through contact with a feminist space.

New Words also involved local readers in international relationships. In June of 1988, Kate Rushin and Laura Zimmerman traveled to Montreal, Quebec, Canada, to represent New Words at the Third Annual Feminist Book Fair. In their report to New Words newsletter readers, Kate Rushin and Laura Zimmerman described their hopes for and experiences with the 1988 Fair, which promised to include publishers and booksellers from more “Third World”<sup>86</sup> countries than had the previous Fairs in London (1984) and Oslo (1986): “Imagine, no one mentioned the USA during the first two sessions we attended! Instead, we heard about feminist periodicals published in Morocco, Venezuela, and France, and about Stree Lekha [sic], the only feminist book place in India.”<sup>87</sup> Correspondence between Streelekha and New Words would increase over the course of the next two years. New Words’ fall 1988 newsletter announces the collection of used books for the Bangalore bookspace: Streelekha’s “‘wish-list’ includes books that focus on Third World women in development, literature, and politics, and books by feminist theorists. They welcome books from University presses, Zed Press, Kitchen Table Press, and other progressive and Third World presses.”<sup>88</sup> And in 1989, New Words

held a benefit, featuring Casselberry-Dupree with Annette Aguilar and Toshi Reagon and special guest Hattie Gossett, to raise money for Streelekha to purchase a bookvan.<sup>89</sup>

Streelekha, in turn, sent *New Words* copies of the journal they published, making international feminism visible, and at least one author found her way to *New Words* through the informal transnational feminist bookstore network to bring her books to U.S. feminist bookstores. In 1990, Laura Zimmerman wrote a letter to Donna at Streelekha that suggests this connection: “Just as I was writing this to you, Sakuntala Narasimhan came to the store with her new books. At a moment like this, international feminism becomes a reality! She told us that you’re all doing well, and that you continue to do the legal advocacy work which must make such a difference in the lives of women.”<sup>90</sup> The importance of feminist bookstores as mappable spaces within a transnational feminist bookstore network marks them as unique spaces of exchange that can be visited, that can archive information, and that can make books and meeting space available on a regular basis.

At the end of the century the bookstore began a transformation that would renew this focus on interactive reading. In 1999 *New Words* added *New Words Live*, a non-profit arm “dedicated to presenting diverse women authors and writing from the many realities and possibilities of women’s lives.”<sup>91</sup> The non-profit arm kept readers involved with the bookstore through more than one event every week, including, on September 30, 1999, the return of Jane Lilienfeld, “*New Words*’ first speaker,” with her book *Reading Alcoholisms: Theorizing Character and Narrative in Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf*. This academic crossover event was accompanied in

September by Debbie Stoller with *Bust Guide to the New World Order*, Helen Elaine Lee with *Water Marked*, Kiana Daveport with *Song of the Exile*, and the inaugural event of a feminist cultural series called Cultureshock, starting with Futuregirl: Voicing Feminist Visions of Community. These events reached back across New Words' history with Jane Lilienfeld, stayed local with Lilienfeld and with Kiana Davenport (a Cambridge-based Hawaiian writer), and invited readers (future girls) to get involved with conversations about the new needs for feminist communities. The language readers acquired in their reading at and of the bookstore would help to reshape the future of feminist bookstores.

In 2000 the Ford Foundation awarded New Words Live a \$75,000 grant for “looking at the cultural and community role of a feminist bookstore and at multiple scenarios for the future of New Words and New Words Live.”<sup>92</sup> After conducting a series of focus groups and interviews, New Words closed its doors in October, 2002, to transform into the Center for New Words (CNW).<sup>93</sup> New Words deposited its papers at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, an indication that the history of feminist bookstores is recognizably significant to institutional archives. Visions of what the Center will become have shifted throughout the process. The *Boston Sunday Globe* reported in September of 2002 that CNW's goal “is to become a premier regional center for the cultivation of women's and girls' writing, publishing, and ideas. A new New Words bookstore will anchor the center, which Bruckman expects to be located in Cambridge. The store will be surrounded by performance, meeting, and workshop rooms. The possibility of partnering with a women's café is being explored.”<sup>94</sup> *Publishers Weekly* reported that same month,

“Whatever the final location for CNW, the directors would like to give women and girls, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, ‘a room of their own,’ which will foster writing and creativity through workshops, conferences and symposia. They also want to provide access to materials by and about women and girls.”<sup>95</sup> A *New York Times* article in June, 2003, drew on quotes from collective members, from Carol Seajay, and from Ann Christophersen, then American Booksellers Association president and co-owner of the Chicago feminist bookstore Women and Children First. The article reported, “The board members say they want a larger space, with room for performances, classes and even a new bookstore. Women could buy books, take writing workshops and join discussions on political and current events with other women, Ms. Bruckman said. There are also plans for a bookmobile that would reach neighborhoods without such resources.”<sup>96</sup> Coverage in these prominent papers attests to the significance of a feminist bookstore changing shape, and, as the *NYT* put it, “not acting the way a failed business should.”

Currently the CNW holds readings, discussions, and workshops in their reading room, the site of the old bookstore on Hamilton Street, keeps up a lively website complete with webstreamed events, and works on grant writing for building the full vision of the space. Joni Seager, now back at work with the bookstore as part of the CNW board, explains, “We really see our mission as engaging women and girls with the entire word cycle, from literacy, through reading, through writing, publishing, you know, having a voice in civil society.”<sup>97</sup> This women’s word cycle framed by the history and work of a feminist bookstore invite readers to imagine new ways of interacting with women’s texts. Similar to what I have been claiming is the implicit work of the feminist

bookstore shelves, the CNW now seeks explicitly to involve readers with texts and to teach readers to read women's texts. In 2004, at the first of CNW's now annual Women, Action, and the Media conference, the CNW brought in Katha Pollit, Amy Goodman, and others, for, as Joni explains, "a one-and-a-half day symposium on women's voices in the media, and how women get there, and how women don't get there."

The CNW has broadened the definition of the feminist bookstore, as what the *NYT* calls a "bookless bookstore,"<sup>98</sup> CNW can reach a broader readership. Gilda Bruckman explains, "A bookstore is a space with books, and the people who come to it are those who have the ability to travel and whose interest is in the material within. By expanding our programming, we think we can reach farther into the community, and also we've begun to move more of our programming to other parts of the community." This space-less-ness is temporary, Gilda points out, "Where we choose to put our feet down is really going to be the deciding factor," but the transition period to the new space allows site-specific events that, like the arrangement of books in the store, indicates the priorities and possibilities of a new feminist bookstore model. Gilda explains the bookless bookstore's use of space-less-ness:

We've now begun doing some programming in Jamaica Plain, and we're looking into programming with Roxbury Community College, which is really the heart of the African American community. We're also starting a new series called Converge/Emerge, which will pair established local, or even non-local, poets with emerging local people. And the first one we're doing is Latina writers, so I think we will have a Spanish-language component to that kind of programming. [...]

And we're looking to doing one in Chinese as well. We feel, because we're not completely bound by a space, we have the ability to move into other places. New Words, a feminist bookstore with a consistently overt discussion of its space and geography, fittingly becomes without a set space. Through its events, archived on its webstreamed site, it has begun to build a new kind of context for women's reading, an immediate sense of communication with national (and even transnational) web-audiences, as well as local workshops and readings. Currently webstreamed events include:

- Drawing Diversity with Jennifer Camper
  - Jennifer Camper, comic artist, editor
  - Howard Cruse, comic artist
  - Joan Hilty, comic artist
- Risking Hope: Women, Prison, and Life Behind Bars
  - Cristina Rathbone, journalist, author
- Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era
  - Contributors
- Taking Our Place in the Public Conversation
  - Medea Benjamin, director, Global Exchange
- Hip Mama: From the Cutting Edge of Parenting
  - Ariel Gore, editor, Hip Mama
  - China Martens, contributing writer, Hip Mama
  - Annaliese Jakimdes, contributing writer, Hip Mama
- Under Her Skin: How Girls Experience Race in America
  - Pooja Makhijani, editor, author
  - Patricia Goodwin, author
  - Judith Chalmer, author, poet
  - Lisa Drostova, author
- Ruth Ozeki: All Over Creation
  - Ruth Ozeki, author, filmmaker
- Grassroots: A Field Guide for Activism
  - Jennifer Baumgardner, author
  - Amy Richards, author
- The Curious Feminist
  - Cynthia Enloe, author<sup>99</sup>

These events, all in connection with feminist print culture, collect the force of women's writing into one place, emphasize the range of issues women's writing addresses, point out even now how important a (non)space like the CNW is for women's voices. Their brochure explains, "As spaces for 'alternative' culture narrow and close, our mission becomes more pressing today than it was when New Words opened thirty years ago."<sup>100</sup> And they still hope to open a new feminist bookstore. For Joni Seager, the five-year vision of the CNW, "is to have a building, with a bookstore, again, and a real diverse range of cultural arts-education programming for women and girls to create a space where, as we say, where women's words matter."

Critics asking how feminism has changed the way we read have thus far neglected the work of feminist bookstores. This inattention to the spaces of book access and how they impact our reading practices allows readers to underestimate the significance of feminist bookstores and even the significance of where they get their books. If chain and online bookstores carried every text available at feminist bookstores, it would still be important to have the space of the feminist bookstore to do the work of contextualizing and mobilizing that literature. If there is less feminist literature available today, after the closure of a number of feminist presses and the conglomeration of most trade presses, than at the height of the feminist movement, the collection of the remaining literature into one space still accomplishes important work by contextualizing and mobilizing what is available. There are still twenty feminist bookstores remaining in the United States, including Broad Vocabulary, a new one in Milwaukee, indicating that the feminist

bookstore movement is certainly not finished. In 2002 the CNW's founding study searched for "the cultural role of feminist bookstores,"<sup>101</sup> and came up with a new model, suggesting a continued role for feminist bookstores in the changing cultures of bookselling and feminism.

The Center for New Words reports, "The strongest message that emerged from the year-long study is this: there is no less need today in American civic and literary culture than 30 years ago for institutions that support, catalyze, promote, and incubate the educational, political, and creative communities of women and girls that pivot around the 'written word.'"<sup>102</sup> The significance is both in the content and in the space of the bookstore as an "institution." The space of the bookstore articulates a women's literature; as Gilda Bruckman explains, "There was something inherently exciting about putting books together in collections, and everybody who walked in here had that response. Even up until the end, there was this sense of, 'Wow, I didn't realize there was so much.'" And the space of the feminist bookstore makes readers into activists, readers who can use language as the political power Jane Tompkins calls for (remembering when "mastery of language meant mastery of the state"). Readers learn to master language in this way by taking part in interactive events like the 1986 II Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe screening and discussion and by becoming authors through mentorships like the contemporary "Converge/Emerge, which will pair established local, or even non-local, poets with emerging local people."<sup>103</sup>

Through this study of feminist bookstores we should both be alerted to the construction of all spaces of book access to either limit or challenge our understandings,

and we should acknowledge the role of feminist bookstores in proving a women's literature and producing feminist activist readers. Where did you get this book?

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<sup>1</sup> Joni Seager, "New Words Directory," 1986, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>2</sup> Gilda Bruckman, personal interview, 23 July 2003.

<sup>3</sup> New Words Collective, open letter, 1986, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>4</sup> Continually revised to this day and published as *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*.

<sup>5</sup> Common Woman Bookstore Collective, Brochure, 1976, BookWoman archives, Susan Post, Austin, Texas. The Common Woman Bookstore is now BookWoman.

<sup>6</sup> Womanbooks, Newsletter, Spring 1976, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 92.

<sup>8</sup> I use the designation *women's* literature broadly, and I see the space of the feminist bookstore as providing through its collection of books the opportunity for a diverse and even contradictory understanding of women's literature; this conversation about the designation takes place at feminist bookstores as constitutive of the feminist literary public sphere, as defined in chapter one.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Darnton sees the study of book history as having much to say to reader-response criticism by locating and examining evidence of "what books meant to people" (46). Briefly, the study of book history explores the social, economic, artistic, and other structures shaping a book's production and reception; reader-response criticism explores how specifically defined groups of readers choose, interact with, understand, and interpret print materials. I bring together these two pieces of Darnton's essay to call for not only the examination of "the iconography" or other telling features of books as evidence of how they meant to relate to readers, but to call for the examination of the bookstore as a carefully configured space that indicates and shapes readers' relationships to a group of texts. Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 27-52.

<sup>10</sup> In 1997 Janice Radway significantly began this exploration with her study of how the Book-of-the-Month Club list constructs a middlebrow readership, however, this attention to spaces of book access has not been elaborated. Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Rita Felski thoroughly addresses the influence of a reader's expectations on her reading experience, acknowledging and challenging Judith Fetterley's 1978 claim that a woman reader must practice "self-defense" against male texts, using Shoshana Felman's caution against the resulting possibility of "resisting reading," and ultimately arguing for a "bi-

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textual” feminist reader who both resists and risks change, and who identifies with a range of characters in different ways. Shoshana Felman points out that feminist readers use literature in dialogue with their own experiences to construct a personal autobiography, indicating both the ways readers’ expectations influence their reading and the ways in which a full collection of women’s literature might affect both their reading and their lives. Felman writes, “Feminism, I will suggest, is indeed for women, among other things, reading literature and theory with their own life—a life, however, that is not entirely in their conscious possession” (13). This life “cannot *become* a story except through the *bond of reading*, that is, through the *story of the Other* (the story read by other women, the story of other women, the story of women told by others)” (14). And Janice Radway describes how the context of reading both is constructed by the reader’s social circumstances and affects the reader’s experience of a text: “Books are always read within a set of specific circumstances, and their final meaning and impact may well be a function of the way those circumstances constitute the reader as a social being” (67). Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2003). Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993). Janice Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 113.3 (Summer 1984): 49-73.

<sup>12</sup> For a vivid example of how reading practices and institutional articulations of reading practices can produce obstacles to or support social justice movements, see Minnie Bruce Pratt’s essay including analysis of the New Critics’ “escape” from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and positioning her co-editors of the lesbian feminist journal *Feminary* among a counter-establishment offering a new kind of reading connected with social issues. Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Books in the Closet, in the Attic, Boxes, Secrets,” *Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991*, Minnie Bruce Pratt (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1991) 151-165.

<sup>13</sup> Reader-response criticism has argued that readers belong to groups within which readers share similar interpretations of texts. Janice Radway, for example, claimed that “different readers read differently because they belong to what are known as various interpretive communities, each of which acts upon print differently and for different purposes” (Radway, *Romance* 53). Radway adds to Stanley E. Fish’s original definition of “interpretive communities” as groups of readers who create the text they are reading through their expectations of it. Radway suggests that, rather than consciously using interpretive strategies (Fish 182), interpretive communities are “larger collections of people who, by virtue of a common social position and demographic character, unconsciously share certain assumptions about reading as well as preferences for reading material” (Radway, *Romance* 54), so that these “assumptions about reading” affect a reader’s interaction with a text. What if a space could influence those assumptions? Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984). Stanley E. Fish, “Interpreting the *Variorium*,” in *Reader-Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 164-184.

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<sup>14</sup> Karyn London, personal interview, 11 Dec. 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Annette Kolodny emphasizes the need for a (figuratively) collected body of women's literature as a reading practice for women's literature in her essay "A Map for Rereading." I suggest that feminist bookstores made her figurative suggestion palpable, practical, and invited a range of feminist vocabularies, some in contradiction. Kolodny writes, "To set ourselves the task of learning to read a wholly different set of texts will make of us different kinds of readers (and perhaps different kinds of people as well). But to set ourselves the task of doing this in a public way, on behalf of women's texts specifically, engages us—as the feminists among us have learned—in a challenge to the inevitable issue of 'authority... in all questions of canon-formation'" (59). Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 46-62.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) 11.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Long strangely equates independent bookstores with more "literary bookstores" (117).

<sup>18</sup> Lise Nelson and Joni Seager, introduction, *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, ed. Lise Nelson and Joni Seager (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 2-11, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Long xv.

<sup>20</sup> Pratt 153.

<sup>21</sup> Liz Bondi and Joyce Davidson, "Situating Gender," *Companion to Feminist Geography*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Linda McDowell, "Introduction: Rethinking Place," *Undoing Place? a geographical reader*, ed. Linda McDowell (London: John Wiley & Sons 1997) 1-12, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson and Seager 7.

<sup>24</sup> Karen L. Kilcup, "The Poetry and Prose of Recovery Work," *On Anthologies: Politics and Pedagogy*, ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2004) 112-141, 118.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Post, personal interview, 29 Jan. 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Sheila Ruth, Preface, *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, ed. Sheila Ruth (1980; Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990) ix-xi, x-xi.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter one for an example of how feminist bookstores proved women's literature to publishers and chapter three for an example of how feminist bookstores proved women's literature to literary critics.

<sup>28</sup> Seajay, personal interview, 17 July 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Jane P. Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response," *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 201-232, 201.

<sup>30</sup> Tompkins 200.

<sup>31</sup> Tompkins 226.

<sup>32</sup> For recent examples of reader-response-based criticism linking reading practices with social change, see Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the*

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*Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998); Maylei Blackwell, "Contested Histories: *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, Chicana Feminisms, and Print Culture in the Chicano Movement, 1968-1973," *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*, ed. Gabriela F. Arredondo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Patricia Zavella (Durham: Duke UP, 2003); and Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn, eds., *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2003) 19.

<sup>34</sup> Womanbooks, "lesbian booklist," n.d., Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives. Womanbooks, "Toward a Radical Feminist Analysis of Pornography," n.d., Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives. Old Wives' Tales, "Books on Abuse of Women and Children," Fall 1989, Courtesy Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, the Old Wives' Tales Bookstore Collection.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 32.

<sup>36</sup> Culler 43-64. Rita Felski points out, "[W]hen feminist scholars in the 1980s championed the cause of 'reading as a woman,' what they often really meant was 'reading as a feminist critic.' This, of course, is a learned technique, not something that flows naturally from the fact of being female" (52-3). Since Culler's point is that "reading as a woman" is learned, it makes sense to push his title a bit after Felski. See also Diana Fuss' clearly titled chapter, "Reading as a Feminist." Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Culler 63.

<sup>38</sup> Culler 64.

<sup>39</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Creating Anthologies and Other Dangerous Practices," *Educational Theory* 50.4 (Fall 2000): 521-533, 521.

<sup>40</sup> *Notes from the First Year* (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1968). *Notes from the Second Year* (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1969). *Notes from the Third Year* (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> Smith 524.

<sup>42</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "Foreword, 2001," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981; Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002) xxxiv-xxxix, xxxiv.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Post, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Nina Wouk, personal interview, 4 June 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Minrose Gwin, "Space Travel: The Connective Politics of Feminist Reading," *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 21.4 (Summer 1996): 870-905, 874.

<sup>46</sup> Gwin 874-5.

<sup>47</sup> Gwin 900.

<sup>48</sup> Pratt 152.

<sup>49</sup> Kathleen Liddle, "More than a Bookstore: The Continuing Relevance of Feminist Bookstores for the Lesbian Community," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9.1/2 (2005): 145-159.

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<sup>50</sup> Linda Kerber offers a review of the ways feminists have used the women's sphere, and since feminist bookstores draw on these predecessors, this history of feminist bookstores speaks to Kerber's question "We do not yet fully understand why feminists of every generation—the 1830s, the 1880s, the 1960s—have needed to define their enemy in this distinctively geographical way. Why speak of worlds, of spheres, or of realms at all?" (55). She reads "the idea of separate spheres as primarily a trope," and an imperfect one at that (55). The most interesting part of her article is her use of another trope, that of the shelf of women's books. She says of Estelle Freedman (author of the 1979 article "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930"): "Embedded in her essay, however, was also the observation that feminists had been most successful when they had commanded an actual physical space of their own, which they could define and control. If we imagine Freedman as staking out an empty shelf in the bookcase of women's history in 1979, we could now say that the shelf is crowded with books and articles that illustrate her point" (51). These observations answer Kerber's later wondering about the need for a geographical anchor, and the reference to the bookcase of women's history indicates a full shelf as recognition of a fully recognized experience. While Kerber would suggest the term separate spheres is a mere trope, she also suggests throughout her article the roots of the trope and how significant geography, actual spatial spheres, are. Similarly, there is a cultural history to the trope of the bookcase. Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *No More Separate Spheres!*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 29-65.

<sup>51</sup> Pratt 153.

<sup>52</sup> Pratt 153.

<sup>53</sup> Pratt 154.

<sup>54</sup> Pratt 154.

<sup>55</sup> Pratt 155.

<sup>56</sup> Pratt 156.

<sup>57</sup> Adrienne Rich, *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (New York: Norton, 1993) 31.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet's observation that literary critics use spatial metaphors to class texts indicates the subversive possibilities for physically (re)organizing them: "[S]ome of our most familiar critical figures have distinguished between *legitimate* 'intrinsic' and *illegitimate* 'extrinsic' criticism, 'central' and 'marginal' genres, 'core' and 'remote' languages, or 'high' and 'low' forms of art. Such figures reinforce, however inadvertently, the status quo. They confirm the canonicity of texts by authors who in the majority have been white, European or North American, male, and on top" (197). Margaret R. Higonnet, "Mapping the Text: Critical Metaphors," *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994) 194-212.

<sup>59</sup> Rich 30. Rich's language here echoes the feminist reclamation of women's vaginas as unspeakable, referred to as "down there" rather than by name. This articulation of and

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resistance to the un-naming was taken up by a feminist press called Down There Press (founded in 1975 in San Francisco), focusing on sexual health texts.

<sup>60</sup> The Grolier Club, 2005, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.grolierclub.org>>.

<sup>61</sup> Paulette Rose, personal interview, 10 Dec. 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Pratt 158.

<sup>63</sup> Pratt 158.

<sup>64</sup> Bluestockings is still open in New York, but after changing owners it has become “a radical bookstore” rather than a feminist bookstore. Bluestockings, 2005, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.bluestockings.com>>.

<sup>65</sup> *On the Shelf*, writer/director/producer Sara Zia Ebrahimi and Naomi Skoglund, Spark to Fire Productions, 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Newly familiar with the names of many feminist bookstore founders and workers through the research of this dissertation, I had begun to see these names in other various contexts, including academic ones. The combined interests of these women made sense, considering that the bookstores served as community centers for various projects.

<sup>67</sup> Rita Arditti, personal interview, 19 June 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Appropriately, Mary Daly’s full quote containing the New Words name argues, as does this chapter, that the context of women’s language changes its meaning: “It would be a mistake to imagine that the new speech of women can be equated simply with women speaking men’s words. What is happening is that women are really *hearing ourselves* and each other, and out of this supportive hearing emerge *new* words. This is not to say necessarily that an entirely different set of words is coming into being full blown in a *material* sense—that is, different sounds or combinations of letters on paper. Rather, words which, materially speaking, are identical with the old become new in a semantic context that arises from qualitatively new experience” (8; emphasis in original). Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

<sup>69</sup> For further discussion on the debate over Mary Daly’s work, see Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; San Diego: Harvest-Harcourt Brace and Co., 1966) 176 n.11.

<sup>71</sup> New Words, Flyer, Summer 1974, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>72</sup> Lynne Pearce speaks to this dialogic model of reading in her analysis of reader-response as constructed by feminist fiction: “Whether or not the instances of conspiratorial dialogic address that feature in contemporary women’s fiction constitute no more than a reactionary strategy, a bonding and a discursive exclusivity, brought about by the women’s own marginalization as a group, remains a moot point. The pervasiveness with which the feature occurs is, however, sufficient for me to propose it as a defining characteristic of much of the contemporary women’s writing that we would wish to call ‘feminist’. Feminist fictional writing, according to this rationale, is thus writing which enacts or describes a dialogue between women *as allies*: a dialogue in

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which the meaning of any utterance depends upon, and is defined by, reciprocity of address within the consciousness of a gendered contexts” (74). Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> Speech notes, n.d., Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records. New Words, Flyer, Summer 1974, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>74</sup> “Lesbian feminist icon Susan Saxe pled guilty to a lesser charge at trial for a 1970 bank robbery that included felony murder. (Her lover, Byrna Aronson, according to historian Dell Richards, was banned from the courtroom for outbursts during the trial.) The FBI had escalated its surveillance of lesbian feminist activities in the 1970s (a 1973 report claimed the newspaper *Off Our Backs* was ‘armed and dangerous — extremists’), so when anti-war fugitives Kathy Power and Susan Saxe were on the run, the bureau flooded womyn’s communities nationwide. When Saxe fled to Kentucky, several lesbians went to jail rather than divulge information about their community to the FBI.

“Saxe later served several years in prison for her role. So where is Saxe now? While she didn’t return our calls or e-mails, she appears to be working in Pennsylvania as a Jewish and same-sex activist. She penned the manual *Points to Consider in Counseling Same-Sex Couples for Marriage/Commitment Ceremonies* for students in a local rabbinic program.” Diane Anderson-Minshall, “Whatever Happened to Her?,” *Curve* 12.4 (2002) 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.curvemag.com/Detailed/447.html>>.

<sup>75</sup> Hystery

There is so much we have to know;  
A whole hystery to be recreated,  
from the negative imprint of lies,  
from the dinosaur bones of truth.  
A whole hystery to be created,  
from the footnote that leads us  
to suspect the lie,  
to a tale passed down  
from someone’s maiden aunt,  
confirmed by a fragment of an ancient  
woman’s grave,  
a myth, a hint, an intuition.  
So little time in which to learn so much,  
but the proof is growing!

- Susan Saxe

Susan Saxe, “Hystery,” Milwaukee: Common Woman Press, 1976, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>76</sup> New Words, Order Form for Paperback Booksmith, 12 Mar. 1974, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

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<sup>77</sup> The photo is still distributed as a postcard through Syracuse Cultural Workers (SCW). The back of the postcard reads: “WONDER WOMAN © 1976 Ellen Shub; Photograph taken in New Words Bookstore (186 Hampshire St., Cambridge MA 02139 (617) 876-5310 [www.newwordsbooks.com](http://www.newwordsbooks.com)) August, 1976. Feminist bookstores across the US carry many resources for and about girls as does SCW.”

<sup>78</sup> Kathryn Thoms Flannery’s recent book *Feminist Literacies 1968-75* offers a wonderful model of how to read documents from the late-twentieth-century feminist movement and how these materials should inflect our understanding of feminism. She does not address feminist bookstores as particularly poignant spaces for understanding such materials, and I hope my work here will work in connection with hers to build a conversation about feminist publishing and reading. Kathryn Thoms Flannery, *Feminist Literacies 1968-75* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Rita Arditti, Gilda Bruckman, Mary Lowry, Jean MacRae, “Statement from New Words on Our Fourth Birthday, April, 1978,” Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>80</sup> Feminist bookstores at large occasionally had feminist authors and professors running or staffing the store.

<sup>81</sup> New Words, Flyer, Spring 1984, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>82</sup> “The Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation,” 2001-4, Marita Golden, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.maritagolden.com/foundation.html>>.

<sup>83</sup> Coindesfemmes Collective, letter to New Words, 7 Jan. 1980, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>84</sup> Vivienne Crawford, letter to New Words, 15 Mar. n.d., Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>85</sup> Laura Memurry, letter to New Words, 9 Mar. 1984, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>86</sup> I use “Third World” after the Streelekha women’s own use of the term. For a consideration of feminist uses of “Third World,” see Nancy A. Naples, “Changing the Terms: Community Activism, Globalization, and the Dilemmas of Transnational Feminist Praxis,” *Women’s Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*, ed. Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai (New York: Routledge, 2002) 3-14, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Kate Rushin and Laura Zimmerman, “International Feminist Book Fair,” New Words Newsletter, Summer 1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>88</sup> Gilda Bruckman, Mary Lowry, Kate Rushin, Joni Seager, Laura Zimmerman, “Book Donations Wanted, or, from your library to theirs,” New Words Newsletter, Fall 1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>89</sup> New Words, Newsletter, Summer 1989, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

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<sup>90</sup> Laura Zimmerman, letter to Donna at Streelekha, 16 May 1990, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>91</sup> New Words Live, Reading Series, Fall 1999, New Words Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records. Charis Books & More in Atlanta also added a non-profit arm, Charis Circle.

<sup>92</sup> Gilda Bruckman, Joni Seager, Laura Zimmerman, open letter, 18 Sept. 2000, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.

<sup>93</sup> Gilda Bruckman describes the consultants: "We had hired consultants from, pretty much within the community, who knew the bookstore, and they came up with a plan for how we could achieve this goal. So they did numbers of focus groups, lots of people were interviewed. Some from other feminist bookstores, from women in the community, people who were in various segments of a community were identified. All of the people who had been involved in the bookstore were interviewed."

<sup>94</sup> Jan Gardner, "New goal for New Words," *Boston Sunday Globe* 8 Sept. 2002, *City Weekly*, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Judith Rosen, "New Words to Close, Will Reopen in 2003 as Nonprofit," *Publishers Weekly* 16 Sept. 2002: 22.

<sup>96</sup> Julie Flaherty, "Women Try to Preserve a Place of Their Own," *New York Times* 23 June 2003: E5.

<sup>97</sup> Joni Seager, personal interview, 28 Apr. 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Flaherty E5.

<sup>99</sup> Center for New Words, Events, 2005, WGBH Forum Network, 10 Sept. 2005 <<http://forum.wgbh.org/wgbh/forum.php?organization=Center+for+New+Words>>.

<sup>100</sup> Center for New Words, Brochure, Spring 2004.

<sup>101</sup> Center for New Words, "An Introduction to the Center for New Words," n.d.

<sup>102</sup> Center for New Words, "An Introduction to the Center for New Words," n.d.

<sup>103</sup> Bruckman, interview.

**Chapter Five**  
**Feminist Reading Practice: Selections from Feminist Bookstore Shelves**

BLITZ\*\*\*\*URGENT\*\*\*\*\*DO IT NOW \*\*\*\*BLITZ\*\*\*\*URGENT\*\*\*\*  
Write to WW Norton & ask them to put May Sarton's AS WE ARE NOW  
in paperback. Tell them you're getting requests for it from teachers who  
would like to use it in classes but can't ask students to buy the hardcover.  
Tell them that customers keep asking when it will be out in paperback.  
Tell them you want to give it to your grandmother.... If we all blitz them,  
they will probably respond. They put THE SMALL ROOM in paperback  
on the request of ONE women's studies teacher in Colorado, or so I've  
heard.  
\*\*\*\*\*<sup>1</sup>

This news alert in the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* went out in 1979, one of an energetic series of calls to action that articulated feminist bookstores' self-definition as literary activists. The *Newsletter* documented feminist bookstores' activist projects from calls like these to announcements of success and republication. Carol Seajay, author of this "blitz" call, identified her intricate connections to the literary establishment (or LICE, as the *Newsletter* termed it, the literary industrial corporate establishment) with her closing "or so I've heard."<sup>2</sup> These connections, built carefully through and for her identity as *Newsletter* editor, author, and bookwoman, contributed to the established conversation in *Newsletter* pages between authors, publishers, and bookwomen, to provide feminist bookstores with early information about book endangerment or availability. Through such intricate systems of information, the bookstores became active supporters of a body of women's literature made up of a range of important feminist texts. Reading a shelf of texts supported by feminist bookstores demonstrates both the work of feminist bookstores for women's literary history and the ways that women's literature teaches readers to read and to write.

This chapter serves two functions. First, it offers an abridged list of books that have been in some way made possible or vitally supported by feminist bookstores through writing letters calling for republication, keeping remaindered out of print books available, and supporting and working with feminist authors and presses. The format of the list provides each text's title, author, year of first publication, initial publisher, and probable section designations in the feminist bookstore. Second, it reads the books on this list as a feminist shelf, a collection of feminist texts together as they might be seen at a feminist bookstore, and it analyzes how these books collected in a feminist bookstore give rise to a new kind of reading practice. Each of the three sections below begins with a framework that explains how feminist bookstores supported the texts on the list, and then continues with a literary analysis of the work those books undertake together. The books on the first list collectively describe how to read a feminist literary heritage and how this heritage provides a space for feminist experimental writing. The books of the second list together explore how a collection of texts as feminist life stories makes possible the writing and reading of women's autobiographical and biographical narratives. The books of the third list together articulate how words can function as safe spaces and how combining women's words together, in turn, remakes an idea of home-space into a writing practice that can be shared and handed over to transform women's lives. These three readings emphasize the importance of the individual books and authors, the force of the books collectively read, and the significance of the feminist bookstore as a publicly accessible collection of women's words.

### **Feminist Shelf Selection (A): Getting Books Re-Issued**

*Her Mothers*, E. M. (Esther) Broner, 1975, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston : Jewish Fiction/Fiction

*The Female Man*, Joanna Russ, 1975, Bantam : Science Fiction/Fiction

*Dance the Eagle to Sleep*, Marge Piercy, 1970, Doubleday : Fiction

*Well of Loneliness*, Radclyffe Hall, 1928, Doubleday : Lesbian Fiction/Fiction

*The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison, 1970, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston : African American Fiction/Fiction

By 1977, the year-old *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* was coordinating feminist bookstores' literary advocacy. A handwritten title in the December issue announced, "Strategy Session: Getting books re-issued." The "strategy session," introduced by Carol Seajay, explained to feminist bookwomen how their letters could support women's literature: "Sometimes writing letters to publishers and editors can get books re-issued or issued in paperback."<sup>3</sup> And in our 2003 interview, Carol Seajay pointed out that feminist bookstores have been uniquely positioned to take action: "[W]e're the bookseller, we sell it, so we order some more, and, as soon as it's not available, we know. And, being the troublesome, rowdy women we are, we don't take 'No' for an answer." The official connection of these "rowdy women" through the Feminist Bookstore Network also provided these letter-writing campaigns with national reach: "[W]e could get together 15 or 20 and sometimes 25 letters about a book that mattered to us as a community. And when they came in from all over the country, of course, the sales guy and the money people making the decisions in New York, they don't know we're all networked together, they're just seeing these things coming in from all over the country—they don't know we're a coordinated effort."<sup>4</sup> The *Newsletter* generated this "coordinated effort" by educating readers and serving as a literary activist tool kit.

The *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* printed calls from both authors and feminist bookwomen for feminist bookwomen at large to write letters urging publishers to reprint an unavailable book. An intricate apparatus surrounded these letter-writing calls: sample letters to publishers showed those receiving the *Newsletter* how they could become literary activists, reprinted letters received from publishers held publishers accountable and reminded readers of publishers' different priorities, reprinted letters from authors and descriptions of relationships between authors and feminist bookwomen identified the FBN as a resource for feminist authors. A handwritten note at the bottom of the page added a breaking news item, marking the *Newsletter* as an information center for news of books coming back into print: "Last minute info: ICI-A Woman's Place's Bantam rep said that Female Man will be re-released in April!"<sup>5</sup> Within the context of the "strategy session," this note in the margins also positioned *The Female Man* reprint as (at least in part) the outcome of a successful letter-writing campaign. While the whole of the book production cycle contributes to the availability and accessibility of books, the national group of feminist bookstores, through the *Newsletter*, early identified one of their roles as "getting books re-issued." Combining all of these features into "strategy sessions" in the *Newsletter* reminded readers that writing and publishing women's texts does not guarantee a women's literature: the session indicated by its very title that maintaining this body of work requires strategizing.

By tracing letter-writing projects of the *Newsletter*, I explore how the language of regularly appearing news and action announcements about the publication status of women's books define the role of feminist bookstores as feminist literary activists. A

1977 issue reported, “Paula [Wallace, of *Old Wives’ Tales*] wrote the following letter to Bantam re *THE FEMALE MAN*. Following her letter is their response. More letters, especially from the midwest, where, I hear the book didn’t sell so well, might change their minds.”<sup>6</sup> The FBN here outlined the geographic map important to women’s literature and used its national membership to push for publication. Paula’s example provided the address for Bantam’s “George Sullivan, Vice-President, Direct Sales” and offered a sample letter: “At the ABA I talked to you briefly about a title which Bantam has allowed to go out of print. The book is *THE FEMALE MAN* by Joanna Russ a find [sic] feminist science fiction title. As a feminist bookstore, we have a great demand from our customers for that particular title and have to regretfully inform them the book is out of print. You offered to look into the matter and see if there is a chance for re-printing the book. I would appreciate your help in this matter.”<sup>7</sup> The letter, dated June 3, 1977, immediately followed the early-June American Booksellers Association gathering, and modeled for *Newsletter* readers not only letter-writing but also in-person activism at the annual booksellers’ convention. In our 2004 interview, Susan Post of BookWoman in Austin, Texas, remembered Carol Seajay and the FBN’s coordination of this kind of pre-letter-writing action: “If we were on the show floor, and Carol or someone would say, ‘Go talk to someone and do this,’ I would usually do that. Talk up the Feminist Bookstore Network or talk up, ‘We hear you’re considering....’”<sup>8</sup> Paula’s follow-up letter elicited a response four months later: “In June, I did evaluate the title you were most concerned about, *THE FEMALE MAN* by Joanna Russ. We published this very unique science fiction title in February of 1975, and ceased publication in May of this year.

Unfortunately, for the last year this title was in print, we averaged a very poor rate of movement, and, quite frankly the title has not performed well enough to be kept in print.”<sup>9</sup> George J. Sullivan significantly saw the book as a “very unique science fiction title,” indicating the different stakes for Sullivan and for Paula in its publication. The context of the feminist bookstore claimed *The Female Man* as a *feminist* science fiction title, and one whose project is not entirely unique since it is shared by a range of authors. (Remember from chapter four that “Paula was committed to having every science fiction novel by women, and we had every science fiction novel by women.”<sup>10</sup>)

Chronicling the outcome of the push for *The Female Man*, the *Newsletter* narrated the success of this case as encouragement for feminist bookwomen to write for other books. The *Newsletter* reported success in this case first through the hand-written note, following Paula’s letter and Sullivan’s response, suggesting the book would be re-printed in April. Then, supporting that last-minute announcement, a later issue copied directly onto the page a February, 1978, letter to Paula from George J. Sullivan announcing the book’s reprinting:

Enclosed you will find a sample cover of our reprint of THE FEMALE MAN by Joanna Russ. If you will recall, back in November of last year I had advised you that we had no plans to reprint this title, despite your evaluation of its potential in the feminist and science fiction markets.

Since then, we have had numerous requests and inquiries regarding THE FEMALE MAN. It is now available directly from Bantam or through your local distributor.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your comments. It is this type of relationship between publisher and bookseller that makes this business what it is today.<sup>11</sup>

Sullivan's letter revised his original assessment of the book's classification, adding "feminist" to "science fiction," and he credited not sales but "numerous requests and inquiries" with the book's republication. A handwritten comment from Carol Seajay on the letter announced, "It works!!!" Carol's note and the *Newsletter's* tracking of this exchange presented the advocacy feminist bookstores could, and did, perform on behalf of feminist books.

However, getting books re-published once doesn't guarantee sustained availability. The June, 1981, issue of the *Newsletter*, just three years after *The Female Man* success, announced under the heading "WRITE NOW": "THE FEMALE MAN BY JOANNA RUSS IS OUT OF PRINT. WRITE TO SYDNEY WEINBERG ([woman symbol]) AN EDITOR AT BANTAM TO COMPLAIN."<sup>12</sup> In full capitals, the announcement at the bottom of the page stood out, reminding readers of the continuing work of the FBN as women's literature lookout. Joanna Russ described the result of this activism on the bookstore shelves: "Feminist bookstores helped me by carrying books I wanted to buy, which I couldn't find elsewhere, and by carrying my books."<sup>13</sup> The *Newsletter* made clear that carrying the books and letting publishers know that feminist bookstores want to carry the books, helped not only with visibility but with availability. Today, *The Female Man* is in print with Beacon Press' Bluestreak imprint, "A paperback series of innovative literary writing by women of all colors."<sup>14</sup>

Not all of the letter writing campaigns have certain outcomes, and not all were successful; however, the language of even the uncertain attempts participated in the ongoing training of feminist bookwomen in their role as not just shop keepers but literary activists. “MORE NEWS ON REPRINTS” in 1978 simultaneously acknowledged that the primary source of republication pressure could always be known and suggested that feminist bookstores played a significant role:

WELL OF LONELINESS & THE BLUEST EYE, which disappeared from [sic] Pocket’s list for a couple months have reappeared on the current [sic] list. How & why, I don’t know. Maybe they were just slow getting the books re-printed. Maybe they got letters asking for more copies. We continued to write in orders on their order blanks for large quantities of WELL & BLUEST EYE, to be sure they knew the books were still in demand. This is a low energy & direct way to give request info to companies as the orders are fed into their computers, and the computers (I trust) spit out totals for unfilled orders into the hands of the marketing & sales dept.<sup>15</sup>

With the *Newsletter*’s “strategy session” format as context, Carol’s responsible “I don’t know” was overpowered by the suggestive language indicating feminist bookstores’ impact on these books: “maybe they got letters” or more “orders” than those from Carol’s bookstore. The announcement also offered another method for action: “this is a low energy & direct way to give request info to companies.” Calls for support also endorsed books’ importance to feminist literature. Here Carol continued to “write in orders on their order blanks for large quantities” of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* and Toni

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, documenting these books' significance to feminist bookstore readers. The endorsement and the reminder to literary activists served as publicity both for the books and for the possible successes of continuing to order and write letters about unavailable books.

Letters from authors to the *Newsletter* and to Carol modeled relationships between bookstores and authors, unmediated by publishers. Carol Seajay explained that this contact often began with the feminist bookwomen: "We're calling up the author if we know her, or we know someone who knows her, [...] and saying, 'How come your book's out of print?' Like it was her fault! Took us a while to figure out it wasn't her fault. They never knew. Publishers certainly never called up the authors and said, '[...] We're letting your book go out of print.'"<sup>16</sup> Another 1978 *Newsletter* title announces: "Getting Feminist Books Back-In-Print (Chapter 5)."<sup>17</sup> The parenthetical chapter designation reasserted this work as an ongoing project of feminist bookstores, and the article fulfilled the promise of news updates, reporting on Carol's earlier claim, "One of these days I really am going to write to Marge Piercy about who to write to about getting DANCE THE EAGLE TO SLEEP reprinted. I'll pass that info on when I get it."<sup>18</sup> Carol reported almost a year later:

I wrote to Marge this spring (finally) out of the conversation we had last fall inspired by the conversations we had a [sic] the Women In Print Conf. a year ago last fall (these things take a long time) and inspired by all the customer requests in the meantime. I told her about our interest in organizing campaigns [sic] to get feminist books back in print, and that we were especially interested in this one,

and that women in different bookstores would probably write letters to Fawcett---  
so her [sic] is MP's reply, go to it sisters!"<sup>19</sup>

Again, Carol's explanation provided instruction to readers: talk to authors at the movement conferences (especially when authors are, like Marge Piercy here, involved enough in the feminist publication movement to attend the first Women In Print Conference), talk to authors after conferences, and have patience because "these things take a long time." The near-super-heroine call "go to it sisters!" showed the *Newsletter* drawing on the effort of the entire network, and Piercy's letter indicated authors' belief in the usefulness of feminist bookstore activism:

I remember the conversation we had about getting DANCE THE EAGLE TO SLEEP back into print.

Since then, I proceeded on my own with no success. First of all, Doubleday still controls the hard cover rights. They are supposed to relinquish them to me. They are supposed to be doing so, but at the pace with which mountains wear down.

As for the paperback rights, Fawcett appears to have them. They are not interested in reusing [sic] the book at this time. Their response was something like, if my next hard cover book (the one I'm writing now, not the HIGH COST OF LIVING) should do quite well in hard cover and they should purchase the paperback rights, they would consider at that time reusing [sic] DANCE THE EAGLE TO SLEEP. The [sic] said 'books on the 60's don't do well.'

I would be very pleased to have pressure put on Fawcett to have them reissue DANCE. Fawcett has the paperback rights to all my novels except the first one, GOING DOWN FAST. I would concentrate on DANCE at the moment. [...]

Thank you enormously for your offer of time and energy.<sup>20</sup>

Piercy's letter and the *Newsletter's* reprinting of it offered to feminist bookwomen a lesson in publishers' practices and in authors' limited ownership of their own books. Grateful for the "time and energy" of feminist bookstores, Piercy mapped a strategy for letter-writing efforts, focusing on *Dance*. The *Newsletter* followed the letter with both the Fawcett address and evidence to include in reprint calls: "customer request for more Piercy novels, increasing interest in feminist science fiction/fantasy (ie Woman on the edge of time, female man, etc.) increasing interest in feminist books by & for high school students, native Americans, etc."<sup>21</sup> *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* was reissued by Fawcett in 1982.

Feminist bookstores' work getting books back into print inspired other authors, including E. M. (Esther) Broner, to contact Carol Seajay. In 1977 Carol Seajay opened communication with E. M. Broner: "In the process of tracking down some of her work, I wrote to E M Broner (HER MOTHERS) and asked if she thought this would help her get her book reissued. Her letter follows."<sup>22</sup> Broner's letter gave the address for feminist bookwomen to write concerning her two books *Journal/Nocturnal* and *Seven Stories*. By 1979, just three years after the *Newsletter's* founding, Broner contacted Carol Seajay on her own, this time about *Her Mothers*. Broner's letter, typed under her Wayne State University letterhead, recorded her involvement as an author with feminist bookstores: "I

read about a year ago last Spring at Old Wives' Tales."<sup>23</sup> Then Broner explained how she discovered the work of feminist bookstores in pressuring publishers: "In the meantime, Her Mothers (Berkeley Publishing Corp.) has gone out-of-print. Shebar Windstone, that great nooge and scholar, has insisted that I write to you about it. She said that you were insistent enough to get a reprint of Joanna Russ's book." And Broner provided evidence of a need for the book: "[I]t is taught in almost every college in the country [...]—all courses dealing with contemporary women writers, with mothers and daughters, et al. I am sorry that a book that got into a curriculum so continuously, is not available. It was taught at UCLA in xerox this past Spring, '79!" The letter, representing *Her Mothers* as so vital to women's studies courses that it is taught everywhere, even in "xerox," indicated the importance of the book to the feminist movement and offered a means to pressure publishers who rely on textbooks. Broner explained, "I wanted to urge you/your newsletter to pressure for reissue of Her Mothers." Harper reissued *Her Mothers* in 1983. E. M. Broner's letter joins an archive of letters documenting the publicly acknowledged literary advocacy work of the FBN to construct and preserve a women's literature.

Each of the texts on this shelf employ experimental writing to invoke a feminist literary history (or critique a patriarchal literary history) and to generate a collective story about women. Producing a multilayered narration of women's interconnected lives, these texts establish the sharing of women's narratives as a necessary foundation for producing a women's literature. This shelf, in turn, collects these books together into such a foundation. *Her Mothers* produces a framework for reading the feminist shelf by

redefining women's writing space and by collecting together women writers first as literary mothers and then as a multitude of literary daughters throughout the text. Following the life of Beatrix Palmer, *Her Mothers* narrates Beatrix's strained friendship circle with other girls at her Jewish high school and checks in with each of these women throughout the text. Critically using the language of psychoanalysis, *Her Mothers* describes the women's interconnected development and critiques Beatrix's frequently failed search for male companionship. Ultimately, Beatrix's relationship with her daughter and her work on her own books allow her to emerge as an independent in her connections with other women. Tellingly, she writes about women in history, effectively writing a collective history, and the careful details of Beatrix's writing process as well as interspersed and documented quotes from her thorough research present Broner herself as having done much of the work she follows Beatrix accomplishing. A list of Broner's own mothers frames the text of the novel, creating further connection between the narrative and the life of the writer.

Broner uses familial, matrilineal relationships to map out the physical connection between a woman and her feminist shelf: "Beatrix sits at her desk. A book falls from her nineteenth-century shelf, the spine bouncing on her little toe. She is in pain. So are her authors: Margaret, Louisa, Emily, Miss Forten of Philadelphia and Sea Island. There are other mothers hovering on other shelves: Red Rosa Luxemburg, Mother Doris Lessing, Mother Anaïs Nin."<sup>24</sup> Author/mothers Margaret Fuller, Louisa May Alcott, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Forten, and others crowd Beatrix's "nineteenth-century shelf," and Beatrix, herself an author, becomes a part of the shelf that will rewrite patriarchal

narratives: “Beatrix is notating and recording, for they are each other’s mothers and daughters. Why didn’t Turgenev write *Mothers and Daughters* rather than *Fathers and Sons*? Why didn’t D. H. Lawrence write *Daughters and Lovers* instead of *Sons and Lovers*?”<sup>25</sup> “Notating and recording” a matrilineal version of the patrilineal progression of these titles, Beatrix and *Her Mothers* perform a recovery of feminist literary history. This history, through texts remarkably collected together onto one “nineteenth-century shelf,” guides Beatrix through her own development, indicating the importance of literature to women’s lives. When Beatrix takes up a new book, “She called it, tentatively, *Unafraid Women*, women who both cooked and lived without fear. She had to go back a long way to find them, about a hundred years for some of them.”<sup>26</sup> Beatrix who speaks “tentatively” uses her literary mothers to help her cook and live without fear. This connection between the literary and the daily life, the cooking and the living, marks literature as the space in which to acknowledge the falsity of separations between public and private gendered space. For Beatrix, in fact, the house becomes the publishing house. Broner uses reproductive language to describe Beatrix’s writing, making writing a feminist creative act: “It was an abortive year for Beatrix. Her husband had left her, unsettling her. A publishing house that had an option on her proposed cookbook, *Cooking Without Fear*, let the option drop. When the firm became infirm and Beatrix was generally unhoused from home and publishing house, she determined that everything that could be developed, completed, concluded would be so.”<sup>27</sup> Inextricably bound up with the publishing house, the house is the space of writing, a space of public production rather than private economies.

A plurality of voices narrate this text, invoking a chorus of women. Readers follow Beatrix's life and writing through third-person narration: "Beatrix, for her first book, taped the voices of pioneers, women who went from Kiev to Cleveland, Sevastopol to Staten Island."<sup>28</sup> The narrator also speaks directly in the first person plural: "Beatrix, choose carefully, for we can pick and choose not only our mothers but among their qualities!"<sup>29</sup> The narrator speaks to the literary mothers, "Mother Margaret, you have helped Beatrix,"<sup>30</sup> and asks rhetorical questions of the reader, "Why does Bea treasure these unattractive portraits of unattractive women? Why is Mary Ann Evans there or Rosa Luxembug, Rosa wearing a great bird in her hat at a socialist rally?"<sup>31</sup> The narrator speaks urgently in the first person singular: "Mothers! Sara! Rivka! Lea! Rahel! You have taught your daughters that women fight for the penis of a man. The winner will be honored with burial in the Cave of Machpelah or under a standing marker on the road to Bethlehem. Who named *you* my mothers? Who named *this* a matriarchy?"<sup>32</sup> The book is an act of naming, collecting these voices together just as the books of the feminist shelf are collected together.

In seeking to replace an overwhelming patriarchal narrative, the feminist shelf interrupts the metanarratives of the literary establishment. *Her Mothers* enacts this interruption by following Beatrix's navigation of the publishing world. Her male therapist tries to take over her book project, at her high school reunion she is not allowed to talk about her book seriously, and, in perhaps the most overt critique of the situation of women in the study of literature, Beatrix attends a conference on the "Literature of the Immigrant" at which male scholars including an "American Indian," a "Black Lit

specialist,” an “Egyptian novelist,” “an angry young Jew,” and “Professor Harold Stone,” are all there to make “contacts” and “to fuck some women.”<sup>33</sup> Despite Beatrix’s own work on women immigrants in her book *Pioneers* and in her ongoing work *Remnants*, she is not there to participate in the conference, she is there looking for her daughter who might attend with Beatrix’s ex-husband. The literary conference, then, is a hostile environment for women, but *Her Mothers* creates independent literary validation by claiming literary foremothers and by developing a near-mythic refrain to historicize the individual experiences of Beatrix. The book is punctuated throughout by a chorus in dialogue, variations on the form “Mother, I’m pregnant with a baby girl” with a following answer and question exchange. This chorus alternately unmask patriarchal expectations and offers empowering responses. For *Her Mothers*, the story of birth accompanies a story of writing, replacing Beatrix’s therapist’s definition of her writing as “penis envy” with a maternal connection,<sup>34</sup> ultimately reconnecting estranged mothers and daughters:

‘M, I’m p. with a b.g. and she can’t find her mother.’

‘When did she last have her mother’s address?’

‘A hundred years ago.’

[...] Beatrix finds Mothers Margaret, Louisa, Emily, Charlotte, and other mother superiors in this convent of her search.<sup>35</sup>

Mothering is not only biological, it is a reappropriation of literary foremothers and of religious traditions.

*The Bluest Eye* works with *Her Mothers* in this remaking of literature. Toni Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye* documents a year in the life of Claudia, and much

of the text is told from her point of view, looking back on the events now past. Pecola enters the world of the sisters Claudia and Frieda when Pecola's family arrives in town, and the ensuing exploration of their relationships together examines how girls experience and attempt to cope with incest, racism, and ingrained community silences. Toni Morrison frames her text with the ur-texts of American grammar, the Dick and Jane series. Speeding up the reading of Dick and Jane blurs the language together, and the result emphasizes the original impracticality of the text by including no spaces or punctuation:

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymothe  
rfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappyseejaneshehasar  
edressshewantstoplaywhowillplaywithjane[...]seemothermotherisverynicemothe  
rwillyouplaywithjanemotherlaughslaughmotherlaughseefatherheisbigandstrongfat  
herwillyouplaywithjanefatherissmilingsmilefathersmile[...]lookherecomesafriendt  
hefriendwillplaywithjanetheywillplayagoodgameplayjaneplay.<sup>36</sup>

Toni Morrison uses pieces of this off-kilter grammar to begin each chapter, making her exploration of Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda's collective coming-of-age story a challenge to the understanding of what it means to read. A new kind of primer, Morrison's text teaches readers to reconsider Dick and Jane and to see, through that grammar's cracks, real lives of girls. Together with *Her Mothers*, *The Bluest Eye* begins to develop a language for discussing women's history and lives.

Jane forms the center of the Dick and Jane passage Morrison chooses, and the single girl splits into the three girls that form the center of her text, emphasizing the girls'

experience, the ways their communities read or misread them, and the way that shapes how they read themselves. The novel indicates that what a reader understands is shaped by what she expects to see. Pecola Breedlove's family, except for her father whose ugliness "was behavior," looks "ugly" according to the narrator, but "you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as if some mysterious all-knowing master [...] had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance."<sup>37</sup> The second-person narration draws the reader in, teaching her to discern billboards, movies, and glances structuring a hierarchy of race and beauty.

Within the black community, the ironically named Breedlove family's ugliness radiates out from the sexual abuse of Pecola by her father and the novel tracks Pecola's attempt to escape this reading. To the "astonishment" of Frieda and Claudia, adults implicate the twelve-year-old Pecola as much as her father in the act, "She carry some of the blame. [...] How come she didn't fight him?"<sup>38</sup> Frieda and Claudia "listened for the one who would say, 'Poor little girl,' [...] but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been."<sup>39</sup> In response to such misreading, Pecola desires an unreadable body: "'Please, God,' she whispered into the palm of her hand. 'Please make me disappear.' [...] Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures, all of those faces."<sup>40</sup> Left with her too obvious eyes, she seeks to make them invisible in a

different way, to make them the “bluest eyes in the whole world.”<sup>41</sup> This is simultaneously a desire for eyes that fit in the racial hierarchy generated by primers like those starring the white Dick and Jane and a desire to reshape the narrative built around her own abuse. In a conversation with an imagined friend, possibly even a part of herself,<sup>42</sup> Pecola navigates her conversation partner to confirm Pecola’s blue eyes look “Prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes” and to agree that it could be “easy” for “*somebody to make you do something like that,*” for someone to rape someone else.<sup>43</sup> Pecola’s imagined reader performs as sole witness to the incest that even her mother refuses to believe and to the unique beauty of Pecola’s new eyes.

The unreadable blue eyes, in this aspect similar to the ones with “all of those pictures, all of those faces,” emphasize the illegibility of the abuse. Soaphead Church writes to God, “I gave her the blue, blue, two blue eyes. Cobalt blue. [...] No one else will see her blue eyes. But *she* will.”<sup>44</sup> Pecola’s isolation in this vision, as in her father’s abuse, results in her madness,<sup>45</sup> calling for a more sophisticated reading practice that could save Pecola. By the closing of Morrison’s novel, Claudia explains of her and Frieda’s distinction against Pecola: “[W]e were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. [...] We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word.”<sup>46</sup> The “good grammar” of Dick and Jane (or Alice and Jerry) is not “intellect,” and leaves Claudia, Frieda, and other followers unable to escape “the new pattern of an old idea” to see Pecola. Among the feminist shelf, *Her Mothers*

and *The Bluest Eye* break the patterns of old ideas to remake literary precedents and produce a body of literature that records and enables the reading of girls' and women's lives.

The feminist shelf also draws on literary precedents of women's literature calling for a new understanding of women's lives and women's narratives. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* received male validation from Havelock Ellis, whose "Commentary" still precedes the most recent editions of Hall's text. Ellis claims of *Well*, "It is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us to-day."<sup>47</sup> However, Hall's book claims another distinction for itself. While Ellis does not position the text as a woman's book (or as particularly literary), Hall's "Author's Note" explicitly reveals her identity as a woman author of fiction: "[I]f the author in any instance has used names that may suggest a reference to living persons, she has done so inadvertently."<sup>48</sup> *The Well of Loneliness* follows another woman character through her life as a burgeoning, then successful author. The text documents Stephen's experience of disjunction between her self-identity and the identity assumed to fit her as the daughter of an upper-class white family in England. Eventually, Stephen finds a lover and a career in writing, but she continues to experience torment throughout her life when neither her partner nor her writing can seem to get enough attention. Struggling with gender roles in her personal relationships and in her authorship, Stephen eventually gives up Mary for her writing, claiming that her characters require her to give them voice.

The book tracks an identity shaped as much by an existing patriarchal literature as by individual desire. Stephen, named after the son her titled British parents did not have, wonders to her father, “Do you think that I *could* be a man, supposing I thought very hard—or prayed, Father?” Spurred on by such questions, Sir Philip turns to his gentleman’s library to define his daughter’s situation:

He had one of the finest libraries in England, and just lately he had taken to reading half the night, which had not hitherto been his custom. Alone in that grave-looking, quiet study, he would unlock a drawer in his ample desk, and would get out a slim volume recently acquired, and would read and reread it in the silence. The author was a German, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs,<sup>49</sup> and reading, Sir Philip’s eyes would grow puzzled; then groping for a pencil he would make little notes all along the immaculate margins. Sometimes he would jump up and pace the room quickly, pausing now and again to stare at a picture—the portrait of Stephen painted with her mother, by Millais,<sup>50</sup> the previous year. He would notice the gracious beauty of Anna, so perfect a thing, so completely reassuring and then that indefinable quality in Stephen that made her look wrong in the clothes she was wearing, as though they had no right to each other, but above all no right to Anna.<sup>51</sup>

Like Morrison, Hall here tracks the ways in which readers learn to interpret. Sir Philip, not his wife, has “one of the finest libraries in England,” and the book he buys and keeps safe in that luxurious possession, his “ample desk,” presents another man’s ideas about sexual identity. To this book Sir Philip adds his own observations, making “little notes all

along the immaculate margins,” describing reading as an exchange between men. Hall connects this book reading with Sir Philip’s reading of “the portrait of Stephen painted with her mother,” this time a visual text by a man, and Sir Philip begins to see Stephen and Anna through the lens provided by Millais, Ulrichs, and his own marginalia. Anna, “so perfect a thing,” seems, like the book, an acquisition, and Stephen, orphaned by her sexuality, has “no right” even to her own mother. Sir Philip’s growing sympathy with Stephen’s difference develops not from a relationship with Stephen but rather from a relationship with male scholarship.

*Well* enacts the work of the feminist shelf by replacing Sir Philip and his library with Stephen’s own literary production, here, like Beatrix, making a women’s literary tradition, trying out what a woman’s writing life looks like. While Stephen has trouble escaping her parents’ model of a relationship built on one partner’s dependence (and, interestingly, her partner Mary’s stereotypically Victorian and patriarchally defined unfulfilled need for sex with Stephen<sup>52</sup>) Stephen, like Beatrix, finds literary success: “Stephen’s book, which made its appearance that May, met with a very sensational success in England and in the United States.”<sup>53</sup> Stephen ultimately chooses writing over Mary, believing Martin can give Mary “protection” and “happiness.”<sup>54</sup> Stephen gives in to her “consuming” need to recover undocumented histories: “In their madness to become articulate through her, they were tearing her to pieces, getting her under. [...] The walls fell down and crumbled before them; at the cry of their suffering the walls fell and crumbled: ‘We are coming, Stephen—we are still coming on, and our name is legion—you dare not disown us!’” Stephen’s voice ends the book: “Acknowledge us, oh God,

before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!”<sup>55</sup> Dedicated to “OUR THREE SELVES,” pluralizing gender and broadening the scope of women’s literature, *Well* offers the work of women writers as a public acknowledgement of existence, ending with the threat of madness among crumbling walls just as Pecola became mad amidst the inability of others to read her.

Speculative fiction on the feminist shelf draws on similar dangerous realities to demonstrate a need for the reading practice developed by the feminist shelf. Marge Piercy’s strange and disturbing *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* tracks one woman’s inability to navigate two different systems of male power: the government’s psychiatrists and the resistance movement. *Dance* imagines a time when there “were groups calling themselves Indians in Portland, Oregon, and Iowa City, Iowa, in Austin, Texas, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and they had to be on the road more and more” to escape government control.<sup>56</sup> To be an “Indian” meant “making their own culture,” not “being plugged into the spectacle,” and being “free.”<sup>57</sup> The publisher’s assessment of this as a book “on the 60’s” misses Piercy’s critical exaggeration of both anti-government communal living and the conservative government’s attacks on that protest, giving the novel sinister fantasy elements that make this part of Piercy’s psychological speculative fiction oeuvre. Facing the government-imposed “Nineteenth Year of Servitude,”<sup>58</sup> Shawn suffers repeated psychological attacks that he begins to define as visions: “The eagle stooped on him, dug its beak into his chest and gouged for his heart. Every nerve jumped.”<sup>59</sup> These tests that strengthen Shawn to resist the government, however, also generate a fantasy of male-centric power: “Each man excelled his earlier stages,

proceeding on his own way. Out of the raw agony of the attack he might penetrate to something he must know. [...] Fantasies. Women crawled through his bed like maggots. Tableaux of torture and humiliation.”<sup>60</sup> Shawn’s fantasy then shapes his reality, conflating women with torture, in a description of how men and women learn to relate to each other. Piercy’s *Dance* performs a satire on white activists’ overidentification with ethnic identities to the point of cooptation, a connection between the detribalization of Native Americans and the compulsory draft, and a critique of misogynist elements in male-dominated movements.

Though actively searching for freedom, Joanna finds herself pressured to fit into prefabricated narratives of herself as a woman, and by the close of *Dance* Joanna’s lack of a feminist shelf to produce a successful counternarrative leaves her finally and fatally altered. In direct contrast to Shawn’s visions of women, Joanna “did not want to be somebody else’s wife or somebody else’s mother. Or somebody else’s servant or somebody else’s secretary. Or somebody else’s sex kitten or somebody else’s keeper. She saw no women who seemed to be anybody in themselves. They all wore some man’s uniform. She wanted to be free, and free meant not confined, not forced to lie, not forced to pretend, not warped, not punished not tortured.”<sup>61</sup> Among prolific fantasies of torture, the world of *Dance* describes what happens to women with no place to be “free.” Finding the “Indian” movement and its part biological Native American leader, Corey, Joanna redefines freedom: “She had thought she was free when she was Joanna on the loose, but she had been a sleepwalker. [...] Now she was Joanna alive. She was good because she could help him and he needed her. By his need she measured her strength. And yet ... if

tomorrow he did need her, [... t]hen who would Joanna be? He would still be Corey the leader, but who was she?"<sup>62</sup> By the end of the book government agents have abducted and reprogrammed Joanna, but the result is so close to her transformation within the movement that it critiques both for disallowing women's self-definition. When Joanna returns to Corey, she offers this government-psychiatrist-produced explanation of her affair with Shawn: "I was trying to castrate you. [...] It was the whole matter of my penis envy. I had no good female role models. I wanted to be a boy and I tried to turn myself into one. For instance, sleeping around and running away from home and trying to reject myself—pretending my name was Joanna, pretending I could become someone else. My name is Jill, and I wish you'd use it."<sup>63</sup> Joanna/Jill's monologue describes how both government and communal movements split women away from themselves.

Simultaneously, Piercy highlights the danger in Freudian psychology by making it the means through which the government reprograms women activists. If this carefully satirical speculative novel could be misread by publishers as a book on the sixties, it seems to require the context of the feminist shelf to work as a commentary on institutional investments in controlling women's bodies and minds. While Joanna/Jill emphasizes her lack of "good female role models," Piercy, like Morrison and Broner, reads this differently than the government or Corey.

*The Female Man*, too, describes how a construction of "penis envy" separates women from an empowering feminist history: "I'm a victim of penis envy (said Laura) so I can't ever be happy or lead a normal life. My mother worked as a librarian when I was little and that's not feminine. She thinks it's deformed me."<sup>64</sup> The feminist shelf,

however, proves working with books can be feminist. *The Female Man* slips back and forth between Whileaway, a women's society, and the contemporary U.S. where the central characters begin. A tangle of interwoven narratives, *The Female Man* produces the sense of a narrative overflowing with women's untold and urgent (if sometimes everyday) stories. Joanna Russ combines the stories of four women living in different worlds with differently articulated gender restrictions. By the end of the novel it becomes unclear where the separation exists between the four, suggesting a necessary connection between women's narratives. Combined with these women's stories, a fictional narrator positioned as author also offers her story as a woman writer in the literary establishment that bestows acceptance never on women but only on female men, women within the system.

The comparison between the characters' four worlds generates each world as a subject of research and teaches readers how to interpret women's impractical trappings in middle-class contemporary culture: "modestly high-heeled shoes, double-circle skirts, [...] bangle bracelets that always fell off, winter coats with no buttons to hold them shut, rhinestone sunburst brooches that caught on everything. Horrible obsessions, The Home, for example."<sup>65</sup> The first-person narrator of Joanna Russ' novel teaches readers how to understand similar constructions of women's authorship, sarcastically describing the dismissal of women's language:

You will notice that even my diction is becoming feminine, thus revealing my true nature; I am not saying 'Damn' any more, or 'Blast'; I am putting in lots of qualifiers like 'rather,' I am writing in these breathless little feminine tags, she

threw herself down on the bed, I have no structure (she thought), my thoughts seep out shapelessly like menstrual fluid, it is all very female and deep and full of essences, it is very primitive and full of 'and's,' it is called 'run-on sentences.'<sup>66</sup>

The novel equates the construction of language with the construction of fashion: just as winter coats with no buttons are called fashionable for women, so are women's sentences "called 'run-on sentences,' where the naming highlighted by "called" unmask the way such judgments are constructed. The author then "became a man" as a commentary on gendered authorship. This is Russ' explanation of Pecola's absent/unread story and Stephen's masculine authorship: "We would gladly have listened to her (they said) *if only she had spoken like a lady*. But they are liars and the truth is not in them."<sup>67</sup> These books take up the question, what does it take to write/read/tell/hear a woman's story?

Authorship, according to Russ, requires becoming a man: "I thought surely when I had acquired my Ph.D. and my professorship [...] and my full-time housekeeper and my reputation and the respect of my colleagues, [...] when I had genius, *then* I could take off my sandwich board. I left my smiles and happy laughter at home. I'm not a woman; I'm a man. I'm a man with a woman's face. I'm a woman with a man's mind. Everybody says so."<sup>68</sup> Becoming a writer, as it did for Stephen, requires first becoming a man, or at least becoming male. Joanna Russ' wry narrator performs the histrionics available as cultural modes for women: "I cried as I drove my car, and I wept by the side of the road (because I couldn't see and I might crash into something) [...], for an American woman's closed car is the only place in which she can be alone (if she's unmarried) and the howl of a sick she-wolf carries around the world, whereupon the world thinks it's very comical. Privacy

in cars and bathrooms, what ideas we have! If they tell me about the pretty clothes again, I'll kill myself."<sup>69</sup> At a fever pitch, Russ calls for an accurate reading of women beyond gendered trappings.

As an alternative and woman-run space, *Whileaway* allows Russ to write women's strength to the point of danger: "At home I am harmless, but not here."<sup>70</sup> A male visitor spouting egalitarianism attempts rape and, thwarted, "was muttering something angry about his erection so, angry enough for two, I produced my own." The narrator unpeels her "talons, like a cat's but bigger, a little more dull than wood brads but good for tearing. And my teeth are a sham over metal. Why are men so afraid of the awful intimacies of hate?"<sup>71</sup> This emotional release proves more satisfactory than crying in a car, and offers writing alternate realities as a means to achieving feminist goals. Russ' narrator (four women at once) calls out at the end of the book to the reader: "Goodbye, goodbye. Remember: we will all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will all be free. [...] We will be ourselves. until then I am silent; I can no more. I am God's typewriter and the ribbon is typed out."<sup>72</sup> Then she speaks to her "little daughter-book," the one readers hold in their hands, invoking the feminist shelf, "Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest."<sup>73</sup> She promises that the day on which this book is not understood "we will be free."<sup>74</sup> The work of the daughter-book is woven in with the work of making women free, enacting a space for women's stories, drawing on

literary mothers Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Shulamit Firestone, “and all the rest.”

The closing of *Her Mothers* maps out the importance of reading and seeing these texts together, on the feminist shelf. Beatrix’s newest book, *Unafraid Women*, does not reach publication within the space of *Her Mothers*; instead Broner posits a women’s hall as the ideal space for finding voice: “We have hired our own hall. We hold hands. Our engagement rings do not scratch. Our wedding bands do not disband us. The musicians are women. The one ascending the podium is a woman.”<sup>75</sup> This could be the space of the feminist bookstore, Old Wives’ Tales, where Esther Broner “read about a year ago last Spring.” This space is the collection Beatrix enacted and that the feminist shelf calls together through *Her Mothers*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Dance The Eagle to Sleep*, *The Female Man*, and others.

**Feminist Shelf Selection (B): Keeping Books Alive**

*Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Jade Snow Wong, 1950, Harper : Asian American  
Nonfiction/Autobiography

*Patience and Sarah (A Place for Us)*, Isabel Miller, 1969, Bleecker Street Press : Lesbian  
Fiction/Fiction

*Stage V: A Journal through Illness*, Sonny Wainwright, 1984, Acacia Books : Jewish  
Nonfiction/ Lesbian Nonfiction/Autobiography

For Karyn London of Womanbooks, part of the work of feminist bookstores was making even out-of-print books available, “caring about the [books] that existed [...] and how to find the readers for whom the writer had written. [...] It was both breadth and depth; it was buying books that were being remaindered and being able to keep them alive.”<sup>76</sup> To teach other feminist bookstores how to keep books alive, Karyn wrote a special report on “Doing Remainders” for the December 1977 *Feminist Bookstores*

*Newsletter*. Karyn explained, “Our involvement with remainders [at Womanbooks] first began when individual authors whose books we carried would tell us that their book was being remaindered.” According to Karyn’s article, this could mean one of three things: first, that the “publisher informs the author that her book is to be declared out of print and sold to a remainder house but gives her first option to buy”; or, second, “if the publisher never contacts the author or she declines to buy large quantities of her book, the book is then sold in a lot (usually involving several thousand copies) to the highest bidder”; or, finally, “[s]ometimes books are remaindered while they continue to remain in print” because “the publisher decides [...] that a backlist title is not ‘moving’ quickly enough” and then dumps “a certain number of copies at remainder prices to reduce the expense of warehousing them while still keeping the title in print by holding to a limited number of copies and continue selling these to bookstores at the regular list price.”<sup>77</sup> While selling remainders carried a financial benefit for bookstores, Karyn pointed out that remaindering also offered “the opportunity to give new life to titles that we feel good about but which the publisher had little confidence in and didn’t promote enough, allowing them to die.”<sup>78</sup> Karyn’s article participated in the ongoing project of the *Newsletter* to educate feminist bookwomen and to nourish a full field of women’s literature. Here, Karyn taught readers about remainders but also about how publishers can fail women writers by not promoting them. This indication that the publishers’ focus determines the success of the book reminded readers that feminist bookwomen must provide that lacking publicity.

If distributing remainders could support women's literature, it could also endanger women authors. One drawback of selling remaindered books that are still in print, Karyn pointed out, is that, while the book will be more affordable and better able to reach its readership, the authors will not receive royalties. She offered this solution: "we have sometimes been able to[...] when we know the author personally or how to reach her[...] price the remainder to include the authors [sic] (approximately 10%) royalties and send this amount to her."<sup>79</sup> Four years later, *Old Wives' Tales* reiterated this point, writing, "When we find ourselves selling 150-200 copies of [remaindered] hardcover books like [Adrienne Rich's] *ON LIES SECRETS AND SILENCES*, and [Mary Daly's] *GYN/ECOLOGY*, we see that we then sell noticeably [sic] fewer paperbacks, and that DOES hurt the authors. And these are women whose work matters passionately to us. So we've instituted a compromise: We add 30¢-50¢ to the cost of the remainders of books that we sell in quantity (more than 30), then periodically (when cash flow is healthy) send that off to the authors."<sup>80</sup> The *Newsletter* here reminded readers of the connection between bookstores, books, and authors, modeling attention to a complete cycle.

Karyn explained that Womanbooks served as distributor in this cycle as well. They had the space to store remaindered books: "we had a thousand-square-foot store, plus basement, so I could buy a thousand or so copies of something, and store them down there, and then figure out, over years, how to keep getting the books out to a wider audience of readers." And other feminist bookstores used Womanbooks as a resource, ordering ten copies of a title at a time; "then they could still be everywhere for somebody to find."<sup>81</sup> Karyn stored and distributed "boxes" of a friend's book, Sonny Wainwright's

*Stage V: A Journal through Illness*.<sup>82</sup> And some rare books she would release “only if somebody asked for them [...], you had to want it and treasure it.” She remembers doing this with Audre Lorde’s *Zami* and Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s *This Bridge Called My Back* when they were out of print, along with several books by Joan Nestle. Women from a feminist bookstore in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, would drive to Womanbooks to “fill up their car,” while others called in phone orders.

Even when remaindered feminist books were highly sought after by general bookstores, perhaps in large part because of the low prices, feminist bookstores connected the books both with a context through the feminist shelf and with a readership through the bookstore. The *Newsletter* had an inside connection at a key distributor who provided timely news about remainders to feminist bookstores. Helaine Harris, a cofounder of the feminist book distributor Women in Distribution (WIND), went to work for remainder distributor Daedalus after WIND closed and then got news to Carol Seajay so that the *Newsletter* became a prime place to find out about newly remaindered feminist texts. Carol describes this relationship in a 1981 *Newsletter*, “Daedalus [...] is heads and shoulders above everyone else for remaindered women’s books, because of Helaine Harris (formerly of WIND) – her books are doing very, very well for us. Currently she’s got: (all of these listed are cloth) Gyn/Ecology 3.98; Tell Me A Riddle 3.98; On Lies Secrets and Silence 2.98; Nappy Edges 1.98; The Salt Eaters 1.98; On Women and Revolution (Crystal Eastman) 2.98.”<sup>83</sup> In 1980 Helaine wrote to the *Newsletter* that Daedalus would soon have Rita Mae Brown’s *Six of One*, Marge Piercy’s *High Cost of Living*, and *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters*. She warned, “[T]hey go really

quickly. La Batarde sold out in about a month.”<sup>84</sup> Here Helaine assisted feminist bookstores in connecting these titles with the feminist shelf, offering early information through the *Newsletter*.

Ultimately, feminist bookwomen utilized a range of resources to make out-of-print books available on the feminist shelf. Carol Seajay remembered that at both ICI: A Woman’s Place and Old Wives’ Tales, “We had Jade Snow Wong’s biography [*Fifth Chinese Daughter*] that we would order from her in case lots out of her basement because it had gone out of print, and that was the only way they were available anymore.”<sup>85</sup>

University of Washington Press republished *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in 1989, and by 2000 this edition was in its seventh printing. Eleanor Olds Batchelder of Womanbooks browsed used bookshops for remainders: “We picked up, I don’t know, five hundred copies of the clothbound *Patience & Sarah*, with that wonderful old dust jacket on it. And we were selling it for, I don’t know, two-fifty apiece, or something like that.”<sup>86</sup>

Arsenal Pulp Press released a new edition of *Patience and Sarah*, edited by Emma Donoghue, in September, 2005. Similarly, the *Newsletter* issued warnings of books going out of print, urging bookstores to stock up at regular prices: “It looks like Susan Griffin’s play VOICES is going to be out of print for a while. It’s being screened for a Broadway production, & if that happens (and hopefully if not, too,) it will be available somewhere in another edition. Stockpile copies now!”<sup>87</sup> Another heading offered news from an author: “MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY’S science fiction books go out of print super-fast. Sometimes w/in 2-3 months. She says that science fiction bookstores buy a year’s supply as soon as the books come out. She suggested that we do the same.”<sup>88</sup> In the

Common Woman Bookstore's copy of this *Newsletter*, the reader marked the Marion Zimmer Bradley announcement with a penciled check-mark. Such notations, along with the international reach of the *Newsletter*, indicate that these announcements were widely used as ordering strategies by feminist bookstores. If feminist bookstores had not paid attention, these books might not have been otherwise available, as Eleanor explained: "for us, this was like treasure. For every other bookstore it probably would've been nothing."<sup>89</sup>

The books on this shelf offer creative autobiography as a way of developing women as authors; here writers encourage readers to imagine themselves as writers, thus inviting a different interaction with a range of texts on the feminist shelf as models for a reader's own stories. Expanding to lived experience, these books also offer creative imagining of women's connections as a means of building a supportive network and history for readers and writers. Sonny Wainwright's *Stage V: A Journal through Illness*, in form as well as content, describes the force of the feminist shelf. The memoir collects journal entries from Sonny Wainwright's experiences with breast cancer, framed by her interactions with the public health system in New York and her active participation in a community of lesbian feminist authors. While attempting to generate energy to write, Sonny's journal becomes her writing project, combining a variety of writing strategies and practices. The back cover carries "advance praise" from feminist authors May Sarton, Audre Lorde, and Joan Larkin; Joan Larkin also writes the introduction; and Deborah Edel of the Lesbian Herstory Archives writes the closing commentary. Thus surrounded

by contemporary authors, the apparatus of the book ensures that it will be seen in the context of the feminist shelf. The book itself continues the list of women in this circle, beginning with an index of “People In The Book (women alphabetized by first names),” including “Artists and Writers (no longer living): Anais [sic] Nin, Camille LeBlanc, Djuana [sic] Barnes, Eleanora Duse, Jane Chambers, Joan Kelly, Louise Bogan, Margaret Anderson, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West,” and women from organizations including the Feminist Writers’ Guild, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Lesbian Illness-Support Group, and Womanbooks.<sup>90</sup> The book closes with a glossary of medical terms, positioning the book (like feminist bookstores) both as a converging of feminist authors and as a resource for lesbians navigating public health systems. Sonny Wainwright’s writing through her recurring breast cancer comprises the main part of *Stage V*, but even this journal is not confined to Sonny’s voice. She records dialogue, her own fictional writing, and pieces from other women authors. Broken into three parts, the book introduces each with an epigraph, drawing on writers E. M. Broner, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich. These lists of women grow out of the book and read as a catalog of a feminist shelf as well as a gathering of feminist health advocates.

This multiple-voiced journal, speaking through description, analysis, and narration, draws on the books on the feminist shelf to teach readers how women’s writing works as self-development. Throughout the journal, Sonny remarks on her physical acts of writing, modeling a writing practice through illness and oppression, even despite Sonny’s own dismissal of her journal: “Couldn’t fall asleep last night for worrying. Unable to write or type—here is all this time available for my work, and I’m pissing it

away.’<sup>91</sup> It is clear that for much of her journal she does not consider it the publishable work that it becomes. The journal, however, becomes an obvious marker of her voice and her feminism. One entry from her hospital bed explains,

Am in shock from Lautman’s visit at one this afternoon. He talked about his ex-wife with venom and pointed to my writer’s diary.

‘You’re just like her—a fucking women’s libber. She was a psychiatrist who had this stupid whole approach. I don’t care what you feel about your body; I’m the one practicing medicine. You don’t know a fucking thing about a work-up—you refused Dr. Glass this morning, and now I don’t have the bone-marrow test.’<sup>92</sup>

Sonny begins the entry without a pronoun, hurrying to write out her “shock” at Dr. Lautman’s dismissive anger. Her writing becomes a place to set her intention for her health care as well as for her writing:

No more fooling around. I’m not going back to work until I get a diagnosis and some treatment. Called HIP to talk to the administrator [...] and his secretary tried to get me back to Lautman’s care. I told her there was something wrong with the way my case was being handled and to get Dr. Herman Nayer onto it pronto. She said that he would look at my file and get back to me if he had anything to say. I’m sure I won’t hear from him, so I’m going down to the HIP Center at two and fight: I need some specialists, immediate testing and results. And some treatment or else!!<sup>93</sup>

Wainwright then uses her writing to learn to read her own body, in spite of Lautman's threats: "*I review the pages of this journal and see a pattern of progressive illness emerging. Where will it lead to?*"<sup>94</sup> The journal exhibits a practice of writing for empowerment. Joan Larkin ends her introduction with Sonny's words from a recent phone call, "When are you going to teach another workshop? *We've got to have one!*"<sup>95</sup> This insistence reveals the vitality of writing and connecting with feminist writers. She mentions workshops with Audre Lorde and E. M. Broner as well, mapping out a writer's life in New York for readers to follow.

The journal also tracks a reading list, developing her readers' reading practices. She interweaves her experiences with excerpts from Gloria Anzaldúa's poem "Holy Relics" and Audre Lorde's *Zami*.<sup>96</sup> After lunch with Gloria Anzaldúa (they know each other from the Feminist Writers' Guild), Sonny writes, "She is an intense woman determined to do her writing [...]. I like Gloria's work, particularly her poetry: that poem about the relics of St. Teresa is one that made a permanent and lasting impression—a searing set of images more powerful than anything I have read before."<sup>97</sup> And of Audre Lorde, "Audre Lorde's *Zami* is terrific: as real to me as life, yet readable as a novel and I'm involved in it, because of her honesty about her experiences as a young black woman, and a LESBIAN! Her description of *Hunter High* parallels my own in some ways. For me there was the underlying anti-semitism of some of the teachers, and there was the fat prejudice."<sup>98</sup> Later she includes "*an unsent letter to Audre Lorde,*"<sup>99</sup> part of this dialogic network of voices that inspire her own writing, including reviews like, "I love Cynthia Ozick's 'Puttermesser' and her Golem. She writes fiction so far removed

from those she knows personally, that they could hardly be recognized!”<sup>100</sup> At once attracted by “honesty” and removal, Sonny’s journal offers a collection of identities, lesbian, Jewish, woman, writer, woman-with-cancer, patient, daughter, mother, and reports the struggle to find the place where they all connect. Taking readers with her, she demonstrates the power of women’s writing to model possible negotiations of identity for other readers, readers who, like Sonny, will write her journal into theirs.

Other remaindered autobiographies collected by feminist bookstores onto feminist shelves connect with Sonny’s memoir to produce a range of possibilities both for presenting women’s voices and for imagining an identity as an author. Sonny’s journal pages, crowded with references to other authors and texts, creates a framework for seeing women’s autobiographies as part of a conversation about how and when to write. Jade Snow Wong’s third-person autobiography challenges standard practices of narration and self-expression, combining a representation of artistic culture with a desire to break with some of those cultural conventions. Jade Snow Wong explains in the “note to the original edition, “Although a ‘first person singular’ book, this story is written in the third person from Chinese habit. The submergence of the individual is literally practiced. In written Chinese, prose or poetry, the word ‘I’ almost never appears, but is understood.”<sup>101</sup> Wong’s seeming-contradiction between the first person of the “note” and the third person of the body of the text frames for readers the challenges of writing a woman’s autobiography, and, according to Wong’s framing, particularly a Chinese American autobiography. Nevertheless mapping out a space for her story, Jade Snow Wong felt invested in a feminist literary history, she saw herself writing at “a time when nothing

had been published from a female Chinese American perspective.”<sup>102</sup> Though Sui Sin Far had published in the U.S. in the early 1900s, her work had not been available, indicating the need for a collection of books to provide the range in “perspective” that Jade Snow seeks. Certainly Wong took part in feminist writing communities by sending her books to Old Wives’ Tales, so she and Wainwright would have feminist bookstores in common. Each author wrote herself as part of a public construction of a woman’s life. Though Jade Snow Wong claims to have “maintained my psychological detachment from my personal importance,”<sup>103</sup> she positions herself as a model both by writing and in the content of that writing: “Chinatown was agog. A woman in the window, her legs astride a potter’s wheel, her hair in braids, her hands perpetually messy with sticky California clay, her finished products such things as coolies used in China, the daughter of a conservative family, running a business alone.”<sup>104</sup> Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography, too, reads as a kind of self-primer, modeling a woman’s autobiography in the third person.

Read amidst autobiography, historical fiction, too, gets redefined by the feminist shelf. Tracking the lives of two women in the New England 1800s, *Patience and Sarah* recovers lesbian history based on meager surviving documents and imagining the rest. This kind of imaginative writing of women’s lives becomes a practice for reading women’s lives and developing a broad possible community when read in connection with the feminist shelf. When Sonny and Karyn shower together at the hospital, an enthusiastic nurse “who has two feminist daughters [...] not only approved, but was enthusiastically encouraging and supportive. The revolution makes itself known in many differing and wonderful ways! Perhaps her daughters are more than feminists. ...”<sup>105</sup>

More than feminists, these lesbians, like Patience and Sarah, might have “needed words for it,” and needed a feminist shelf.<sup>106</sup> Isabel Miller explains that her novel “was suggested by the life of the painter Mary Ann Willson and her companion Miss Brundidge, who lived and farmed together for many years on Red Mill Road, Greenville Town, Greene County, New York State, in the early part of the nineteenth century.” This small evidence of their relationship survives: “‘Admirer of Art,’ a friend, wrote a note about Miss Willson and Miss Brundidge. It’s safe in a book.”<sup>107</sup> Putting history safely in books improves the odds they can be found, and here Isabel Miller does the same, writing out the fictional joint biography of Patience and Sarah, including their discovery of lesbian sex, “which later on we made a name for. We called it melting.”<sup>108</sup> Miller imagines what happens for historical women without a feminist shelf to guide their namings with possible shapes of women’s lives, passions, and bodies. Wainwright emphasizes this importance of the feminist shelf by weaving together many women’s words to make sense of her own life and to live through it. At the end of her journal Sonny practices her own naming when a nurse explains,

‘Stage IV is a spread of the original cancer to another part of the body.’

‘What comes after Stage IV?’ I asked.

‘That’s it. There is no more!’

‘There is no more?’ I repeated. ‘But there’s got to be more!’

She shook her head with that smile frozen on her mouth.

So I created Stage V—living with it all!<sup>109</sup>

Keeping books alive through remainders also keeps alive and available to readers (like Sonny) in need of writers to model a new language for women writing (and imagining) through diverse experiences.

**Feminist Shelf Selection (C): Supporting Feminist Authors**

*I Love Myself when I am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive, A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. Alice Walker, intro. Mary Helen Washington, 1979, Feminist Press : African American Fiction & Nonfiction/Fiction & Nonfiction/Biography

*The Cancer Journals*, Audre Lorde, 1980, Spinsters Ink : African American Nonfiction/Lesbian Nonfiction/Autobiography

*love conjure/blues*, Sharon Bridgforth, 2004, RedBone Press : African American Fiction/Lesbian Fiction/Fiction

*Leaving Home, Becoming Home: Girls and Women Write about the Search for Self*, ed. Linda Bryant, 2005, Inner Light Publishing : Autobiography

Feminist bookstores also shape women's literature by publicizing books, hosting events, supporting authors, ordering books, paying authors, publishing books, and putting women's books on shelves together. Feminist authors' work at feminist bookstores indicates both the importance of feminist bookstores to authors' work and the use by authors of feminist bookstores as spaces for support of their work. Minnie Bruce Pratt volunteered at Lammas in D.C., Kate Rushin worked at New Words in Cambridge (and is still involved with the Center for New Words), and Dorothy Allison helped to found Wild Iris in Gainesville, Florida. Later, Dorothy Allison took part in feminist bookstores' work publishing new and established authors by starting the *Lammas Little Review* out of Lammas feminist bookstore in D.C. She explained in an early edition, "The REVIEW itself is my idea and I have chosen to do it as an incentive to my own writing, a way to obtain free copies of books I can't afford and as a way to make standing around in LAMMAS more pleasant. Now when someone asks, 'Dorothy, what did you think of this

one?’ I can just hand them the REVIEW and go on with my reading and gossiping.” Here the feminist bookstore facilitated Dorothy Allison’s writing, each supporting the other, and Allison’s value of the bookstore as a space for “reading and gossiping” suggested the work of the bookstore itself as a news network. Allison’s naming of the collectively written *Lammas Little Review* also drew on and thus emphasizes the importance of women’s literary history: “This version of the LITTLE REVIEW salutes and pays tribute to the original LITTLE REVIEW, Margaret Anderson’s labor of love last published in Paris, 1929.”<sup>110</sup>

Author Sharon Bridgforth identified feminist bookstores as a vital part of the production cycle of women’s literature. The survival of a public literature, Bridgforth explained, requires “the community, the independent artist who’s non-commercial, the independent publishers, and the independent booksellers.”<sup>111</sup> For Bridgforth, as a Black, lesbian, activist, feminist author, “the feminist bookstore is the specific place that I fit. I also live in a lot of other communities, so those are critical, too, but when it comes down to where is the book going to be shelved? Nine times out of ten it’s going to be at the feminist bookstore.” This emphasis on availability, having a place to “fit,” was central to Bridgforth’s early experiences as a writer and feminist bookstore reader. She grew up in Los Angeles, where the feminist bookstore, Sisterhood, was located in a largely-white part of the segregated city. Despite the segregation, Bridgforth found the bookstore one day on her way to get coffee, “And it just, literally, rocked my world, changed my life. [...] I found all those great writers, [...] at that time Alice Walker was really pushing Zora Neale Hurston, I had never heard of either one of them.” She also found Audre

Lorde on those shelves along with flyers for local performance poets that inspired her to her own work. Later, living in Austin, Texas, Sharon started a relationship with BookWoman. She explained, “[T]he feminist bookseller has a lot of power, and [...] for me, I’ve benefited greatly. Susan [Post, owner of BookWoman ...] was instrumental in having the Lambda Literary Foundation pay attention to me and to RedBone Press, and I ended up winning a Lammy, and she was there with her partner. And before I got published, she would tell publishers about me, she was advocating.” The annual Lambda Literary Awards started in 1988, to recognize the work of gay and lesbian authors and publishers. Sharon Bridgforth’s *the bull-jean stories* won the Lammy for Best Small Press Book in 1998. Lisa C. Moore’s RedBone Press has published Black lesbian and gay authors starting with *does your mama know? An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories*, a collection that included Sharon Bridgforth, in 1997. Feminist bookstores provided important public space in this system of feminist (including queer) literary production, keeping books like *the bull-jean stories* on the shelves. Sharon Bridgforth remembered, “When *the bull-jean stories* came out, it was featured in [the *Feminist Bookstore News*], and that made a big difference for us with sales. And even just validating what it is that we were doing as something that they should pay attention to.”

Feminist bookstores as feminist literary public spheres also validated feminist texts through events and signings. Cheryl Clarke read from *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) at New Words the year it was published, and wrote to the bookstore afterwards, “Thank you for the flyers. I sent them to all my relatives. The Feb. 6 reading will always remain special to

me. I am deeply appreciative of your support of women's culture, Kitchen Table, and Narratives. [...] Thank you once again for the wonderful reception. Thank you for the honorarium. It certainly was generous! In struggle, Cheryl Clarke.”<sup>112</sup> Womanbooks listed a 1979 “Open House for the Publication of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing...*”<sup>113</sup> (Feminist Press, 1979) edited by Alice Walker and with an introduction by Mary Helen Washington, both in attendance, calling on readers to “Come Celebrate Zora!” This supported Walker's work with Hurston that found Sharon Bridgforth in Sisterhood in Los Angeles, mapping out a feminist shelf that connects women's literary histories with literary futures. These two events represent a range of readings over the ongoing thirty-five year (and continuing) calendar of feminist bookstores across the continent.

Each of the books in this selection from the feminist shelf has been published by a woman-owned and run publisher. General support from feminist bookstores has been essential to the work of feminist presses, just as the work of the presses has been central to the bookstores. The October *Newsletter* printed a letter from Maureen Brady and Judith McDaniel of Spinsters, Ink., a feminist publisher in New York, explaining that the profits from their first two books, Maureen Brady's own *Give Me Your Good Ear* and Judith McDaniel's own *Reconstituting the World: the Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich* could not fund the publication of their next two books, Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* and Lynn Strongin's *Bones & Kim*. Brady and McDaniel turned to the *Newsletter*: “We are asking you to support the publication of *The Cancer Journals* and *Bones & Kim* by sending your donation today.”<sup>114</sup> Feminist bookstores did respond, as

Maureen Brady reported in a letter published in the June 1981 *Newsletter*, documenting the success of such calls: “We received a wonderful response (when I meant to write you this letter, I had it memorized, now can’t locate the data) at any rate well over \$500 came in. I remember one day in particular when over \$200 came in and the effect on the spirit of a couple of worn down Spinsters was one of ebullient ecstasy, unparalleled since. So we’d like to thank the bookstores.”<sup>115</sup> Even such seemingly small support from feminist bookstores demonstrated the work of the *Newsletter* and the bookstores together with publishers in supporting women’s literature. *The Cancer Journals* are still in print with Aunt Lute Books, and Spinsters, Ink., closed in 2004 and has subsequently reopened as an imprint at the lesbian publisher Bella Books.<sup>116</sup>

Feminist authors have, in turn, supported feminist bookstores as the bookstores have become endangered by the changing book market. In 1994 Alice Walker donated a statement to the Feminist Bookstore Network for a publicity campaign. She explained that she “gave permission to Barnes and Noble to use the caricature [of herself] only in ads, not on bags or T-shirts” because “it is important that an image of a black woman writer is prominently displayed in the mainstream of literary advertising.” However, she noted the distinction between advertising and shelf space at the chain stores: “[M]y daughter checked some of the B&N stores and found only a couple of my books, mass market paperbacks at that, in them. I am also deeply concerned about the impact of conglomerate publishing on women’s bookstores. Right here in San Francisco our beloved Olde Wives [sic] Tales is fighting for its life.” Walker’s awareness of and concern about the status of feminist bookstores marked her connection to their existence.

She explained, “Whenever I see my image prominently displayed in an ad for books from a large mainstream bookseller, I always think of the independent and women’s bookstores across the country that are responsible for so much of the rich diversity in literature and life our culture enjoys.” And she offered her words as support for the bookstores: “Feel free to use [my statement] and the photograph in your campaign.”<sup>117</sup>

In 2005, feminist authors took part in a new feminist bookstore publishing effort by contributing short writing to appear alongside high school girls’ writing in an anthology developed through workshops at Charis Circle, the non-profit arm of Atlanta’s feminist bookstore Charis Books & More. Sharon Bridgforth, Dorothy Allison, and Alice Walker have all read at Charis, and Minnie Bruce Pratt, Alice Walker, Nikky Finney, Shay Youngblood, Alix Olson, bell hooks, and others, contributed to this anthology. Shay Youngblood and Alix Olson were also among those who held writing workshops for the project. This new book is a manifestation of the support feminist bookstores have provided to developing authors. Linda Bryant, Charis co-owner and co-founder, wrote in the introduction, “On Tuesdays, in a little office in the back of Charis Books and More, sitting in a circle, knee to knee, there are young women writers. Surrounded by the published chorus of women’s words, these young women are finding their own voices. When they go away—to school or to travel—they memorize the list of books they will take as essential companions, along with the blank pages they know they will fill.”<sup>118</sup> This description is the feminist shelf, a “published chorus of women’s words” that support and inspire readers and writers “finding their own voices.” Linda Bryant explained, “Each of these published authors encourages the act of speaking the truth as

they help to create a world where truth-telling is possible.”<sup>119</sup> This is the function of the feminist shelf together, to “create a world where truth-telling is possible,” and to help readers learn how to understand and talk about that truth. Writing a new world, like Joanna Russ’ *Whileaway*, and writing alongside each other, like Sonny Wainwright collecting passages from books as part of her own journal, women authors write and rewrite themselves in relationship to a feminist literary history made evident and made possible by the shelves of feminist bookstores.

The books on this shelf articulate how to understand the many voices woven together in them and how to connect them to other texts, shelves, and spaces. These books identify feminist writing as a collective project. Knit together in the acknowledgements, readers find clues to the support networks for a book and the books themselves become support networks, offering texts as safe spaces that encourage and make possible readers’ transformations. In her acknowledgements for *the bull-jean stories*, Sharon Bridgforth thanks “the people who have encouraged, supported, witnessed, reviewed, mentored, produced, presented, performed and nurtured my work” and then for *love conjure/blues* the spaces “ALLGO [Austin Latina/o Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Organization]; resistencia bookstore; bookwoman bookstore.”<sup>120</sup> Alice Walker announces of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*, “[T]his book is dedicated to Zora Neale Hurston. And it is sent off to her wherever she is now [...] as well as to those who gave joyfully of their thought and scholarship and feelings to make this collection an offering from more relatives than one: the intrepid and sharp Mary

Helen Washington, the brave and brilliant Barbara Smith, the thoughtful and insistent Gloria Hull, the women of the Feminist Press, Robert Allen and Robert Hemenway, and me.”<sup>121</sup> For *The Cancer Journals* Audre Lorde writes “a special thanks to Maureen Brady [of Spinsters Ink], Frances Clayton, Michelle Cliff, Blanche Cook, Clare Coss, Judith McDaniel [of Spinsters Ink], and Adrienne Rich, whose loving support and criticisms helped bring this work to completion.”<sup>122</sup> And for *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, Linda Bryant thanks first the “Charis Circle Board, past and present, for all your work to keep feminist voices alive and in dialogue” along with “All the members of the High School Women Writer’s Group: whether or not you have pieces in this book, you are the reason it exists.”<sup>123</sup> These selections from acknowledgements suggest the networks feminist bookstores take part in, along with an entire feminist publishing community, during the development of a book and of a women’s literature.

Sharon Bridgforth’s writing embodies the interactions of women’s stories across time, modeling how reading texts together, hearing voices together, develops a full story of women’s lives. In *the bull-jean stories*, Sharon Bridgforth writes a series of narratives which place bull-jean, a Black, working class bull dagger, at the center of her community in the early twentieth-century. In a preface to *the bull-jean stories*, Sharon Bridgforth describes her fictional narrative as a true re-telling of Black lesbian and community history:

with **the bull-jean stories** i wanted to celebrate the rural/southern working-class Black bulldaggas/who were aunty-momma-sister-friend/pillars of the church always been a working part of our community/giving fierce Love with fineness.

the songs of my childhood / the laughter/the gift of tale-telling/the food that my elders gave me are integral parts of who i am. though i can't dictate their particular words i do understand that the voice of **the bull-jean stories** belongs to them. these are the stories they didn't tell me the ones i needed most. bull-jean is the butch/souther/poet/warrior wo'mn hero i wish i'd known.<sup>124</sup>

Her narrative is "creating-remembering," gathering these untold stories, sharing authorship with the women who lived the words she's finally writing down. She similarly folds history in with the present in *love conjure/blues*, where

the past the present the future the living and the dead  
co-exist together/at the same time  
in a weave of dreams/Prayers/Love expressed.<sup>125</sup>

Bridgforth's work has implications for a range of interconnected communities, and in a feminist bookstore, on the feminist shelf, her work draws on a history of women writing, speaking, and performing both on and around the page.

*love conjure/blues* establishes a community of narratives through its central speaker, cat, who both follows her neighbors' relationships and is visited by her ancestors' voices, thus positioning the narrative as a palpable and transferable spoken community. The textual appearance of *love conjure/blues* emphasizes this physical aspect of storytelling creating a safe space: the words in the novel are carefully placed on the page and vary in emphasis (bold, italics, regular) and in font to indicate the presence of different voices and sentiments. In her introduction, Joni Jones frames *love conjure/blues* with the Yoruba word "igede" which "roughly means 'the realm in which words transform.'"<sup>126</sup> This transformation happens "through the embodiment of words" so that

“fashioning the novel as performance carries the interaction of storytelling, the efficacy of sermon and the transformative power of a Yoruba praise poem. In this genre, the novel is enactment—reading is loud and alive and participatory.”<sup>127</sup> The feminist bookstore, then, as a public space for interacting with reading, can take part in the experience of this new genre, since, for Bridgforth, feminist bookstores are places “where you can go and be safe, and express yourself, whether it’s just walking in and being dressed in a way that’s ‘different’ for women, or whether it’s engaging in a conversation about a lesbian book. [...] It’s a place where you can go and articulate and learn and commune and have ideas and circulate.”<sup>128</sup> It’s a place where storytellers develop.

*love conjure/blues* tracks different kinds of storytelling, teaching readers how to hear and understand new kinds of histories and possibilities. Hoping to convince bettye to love her, a woman named big bill

gave bettye her story like it was a fresh flower  
like she handing herself cut open/for the first time.  
bettye patient as the day is long    kind of.  
so she just sit with she coffee  
stare off the porch till big bill ready to tell it.<sup>129</sup>

In this exchange the “story” stands in for history or identity or love, and the story makes the teller vulnerable. bettye’s listening, in turn, allows big bill to become “ready to tell it.” When this doesn’t convince bettye to love her, big bill employs another kind of telling, this time through big mama. The narrator, named cat, describes her interpretation:

**ummm/i see what it really is right there/is she  
ain’t singing  
na/suh she doing a work for big bill  
ummm  
from big bill straight to bettye by way of big mama sway.**<sup>130</sup>

hell all you have to do is feel her sing. it's enough to  
drive you to rip your heart out  
lay it at her feet in offering.<sup>135</sup>

Speaking or embodying the birth name of big mama sway would “call all them generations of power down,” referring back to Joni Jones’ introduction and Bridgforth’s genre as Yoruba praise poem, speaking embodiment. Joni and Sharon’s stories together, then, shape Sharon’s novel itself as powerful when spoken, invoking power in its history and context.

**i am my Ancestors  
returned  
i am the dead/and the  
living [...]  
i will remember  
i am the one We are  
waiting for  
i  
am  
the conjure  
come back/to Love.**<sup>136</sup>

These books bring history to the shelves and, in telling women’s lives, bring women themselves onto feminist shelves, “**the poem we pen [...] is us.**”<sup>137</sup> The writing itself, the “conjure come back/to Love,” “is us,” again emphasizing writing practice and the books themselves as essential to women’s existence.

Through *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, books also function as spaces for embodiment. Linda Bryant writes of the writing group, “Together, we have made Charis Books and More a sacred space, a space where each person is honored, a place where the holiness of the ordinary is recognized and celebrated, a space of safety and a place to take risks.”<sup>138</sup> And just as writing brings women into being for Sharon Bridgforth, for Minnie

Bruce Pratt in *Leaving Home* the pages of her writing make her path through the world: “Since I was 12 or 13, I have kept a journal, for almost 40 years. During those years, I have had many homes, and only one, the work of my writing. I practice in my journal every day, and the exercise is: *How do I talk to myself without lying? How do I tell myself more than one truth?* Now I write on a computer, not in notebooks, but I still print out every page. The pages laid end to end would be a long walk through the world.”<sup>139</sup> For Pratt, as for Beatrix, writing is a home, a space we make for each other through words. This is why feminist bookstores remain so important, and why the high school women’s writing project through Charis has provided a lifeline for new authors. In her piece, Sarah Austin sees herself shaped by the kinds of tellings I’ve discussed here as she plans to move for college: “I transplant every story that helped shape me into new soil, helped every girl I’ve been grow accustomed to long winters and people without accents like mine. [...] In all my life, I’ve never really left any of my homes; I’ve just added new ones.”<sup>140</sup> These stories she transplants become hers and make possible the addition of new homes. bell hooks, too, likens homes to stories, describing her grandmother’s inextricable identities as architect and storyteller: “Long before I read my Virginia Woolf and connected having a room of one’s own with becoming a writer, I had been told colorful stories about the seemingly haphazard way Baba added rooms to her house, including construction of a room on the second floor—a room where she made quilts, a room for her work. To be allowed entry into those rooms, to hear her stories, to be a witness to her life was an awesome honor bestowed me in my girlhood.”<sup>141</sup> The stories of the rooms become part of the rooms themselves, and then the stories told in the rooms

become part of witnessing to hooks' grandmother's life. This embodiment of words first as rooms then as a story received by a witness turned writer tracks the exchange of stories, just as big bill gave her story to bettye, as transformative.

Around the period of the title change from *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* to *Feminist Bookstore News*, the publication gained circulation not only among feminist bookstores, publishers, and literary agents, but within mainstream publishing as well. The international trade publication *Publishers Weekly* followed and even based stories on *Feminist Bookstore News* articles, and trade publishers believed the publication was a prime place to advertise their books by and about women. This broad circulation emphasized that the early work of the *Newsletter* built the publication and the Feminist Bookstore Network into a force in the publishing industry, trustworthy for news and eager readers of well-placed advertising. However, the increased circulation changed the conversations within the pages.<sup>142</sup> If publishers now knew that the bookstores were networked and read their central publication, letter-writing campaigns could not have the same impact that early, more underground "blitzes" could. As letter-writing became the responsibility of individual stores it would have less of an impact, but with the force of the FBN established, feminist bookstores still influenced women's literature.

An early *Newsletter* report on a consultation with a "feminist literary lawyer" mapped out how the influence after mainstream visibility would work: recognition of the FBN as a national network of feminist bookstores would support the publication of feminist books. During the continuing internal conversations about how and to whom to

Intense bold type builds the vivid scene where big mama “doing a work” as an embodied telling that requires interpretation to “see what it really is.” Sharon wraps these tellings together with past histories, told through the embodiment of a matriarchal line.

Remembering-creating slave narratives, cat narrates stories of ancestors like big paw (“every day they say he tell that story at sunrise”<sup>131</sup>) and ma-dear (“I am the cry that won’t come out”<sup>132</sup>). They and she together tell the story of an enslaved man whose enslaver cuts his fingers off so he can’t drum and puts the fingers in a jar.

isadora the conjuration woman/head unwrapped  
let thick gray braids stand round face and black eyes on  
black black skin she stand there hold jar no smile<sup>133</sup>

Until,

overseers dead dead dead. isadora say they gone  
come back slaves next time.<sup>134</sup>

isadora’s conjuring also serves as a kind of telling, embodied throughout the narrative through her daughters, including big mama sway, daughters in telling stories.

Bridforth’s narrative focuses on women’s lives, drawing Black lesbians throughout history who have full lives and who are fully involved in their unflinching communities. isadora Africa jr.’s naming marks a matriarchal line that threads through the center of this story.

big mama sway real name is isadora Africa jr.  
they been name her  
she mama her mama and her mama after that first  
African conjuration woman/whose real name they  
don’t know or won’t say. everybody call this one  
big mama sway cause well you know  
plus nobody dare speak she birth name/call all them  
generations of power down. but we ain’t crazy/we  
know who she is.

make the *Newsletter* available and what kinds of advertising to accept, Carol Seajay reported in March 1978 on “a conversation I had with Carol Murray, who is a feminist literary lawyer, and also, I think, literary agent.” According to Carol Seajay, Carol Murray described “how FBN as a communications medium could/does facilitate getting more feminist writers published through straight presses.”<sup>143</sup> Specifically,

Carol M. was saying that when she was seeing editors in NYC, she was talking up FBN, and encouraging the publishing houses to advertise their feminist books in FBN (not knowing that we don’t take advertising). Her thinking was that it would generate more income for FBN [...] AND that [...] if] they felt that they had direct access to outlets (stores) for the feminist books they publish they would publish more feminist writers/authors. (Now THAT’S something I’m really interested in.) [...] The problem is not getting feminist books sold, but getting them published.<sup>144</sup>

Eventually, the *Feminist Bookstore News* did accept corporate publishers’ advertisements, emphasizing to publishers the reach and coordination of feminist bookstores as an international movement: “The Feminist Bookstores’ Newsletter (FBN) is an ‘in-house’ publication of the feminist bookstores movement. It is read with a fine-toothed comb by virtually every buyer in all the hundred feminist bookstores in the United States and Canada, and in many European bookstores as well.”<sup>145</sup> Simultaneously, the *News* confirmed its commitment to movement presses with Carol’s handwritten note to small publishers: “The advertising rate (\$250/page!!!) is a way of fundraising for FBN. We don’t expect small presses to advertise. We gladly publish your information at no charge!”<sup>146</sup> This service both prioritized small presses in the bookstores and validated

their work on the pages of the *News* for readers from the literary establishment. The official invitation for advertisements explained to everyone else, “Other publishers are encouraged to advertise in the Feminist Bookstores’ Newsletter.”<sup>147</sup> According to Carol Murray, then, having this advertising venue would encourage mainstream publication of women’s books since publishers would know where to find buyers and readers.<sup>148</sup>

The *News* was able to maintain other activist features of the *Newsletter*, including announcements about remaindered books and reviews of books “From Our Own Presses,” “From the Small Presses,” from “University Presses,” and “On Publisher’s Row.” These designations in themselves prioritized what kind of attention feminist bookwomen should pay to each category, marking feminist presses most important as “Our Own.” In 1986, Ann Dwyer wrote for the *News* about Daedalus’ remainders, still coordinated by Helaine Harris, “Almost all of the first couple years of Doubleday’s Viragos are now available. Helaine reported that quantities are adequate for those who order right away, but be forewarned that they have not appeared in a Daedalus catalog yet and that they will go quickly once the rest of the world knows that they are available.”<sup>149</sup> That the “rest of the world” would want these books indicates the success of the feminist movement in making women’s books important (or at least good sellers). However, these books were not profitable enough for Doubleday to keep from remaindering, and the availability of the books in general bookstores could not provide the feminist literary context of a feminist bookstore.<sup>150</sup> Distributing remaindered books through the *News*, then still served an important function, even for books in wide demand.

In 2000, when the *Feminist Bookstore News* ceased publication, feminist bookstores lost this information network and tool for pressuring the publishing establishment. The work of feminist bookstores to support women's literature, however, continued. Both Sharon Bridgforth's *love conjure/blues* and Linda Bryant's collection *Leaving Home, Becoming Home* were published after the closure of the *News*, so these two texts indicate how post-FBN feminist bookstore activism supports women's literature, through providing space and support for feminist authors and through coordinating the publication of feminist books. The impressive activism of the early FBN influenced the authorship, the publication, and the availability of women's literature remains central to the study of that literature. Without feminist bookstores, these books may have been published but certainly would not have spoken to each other as easily and would not have reached the feminist activist readership that made their subsequent republication possible. The public feminist shelf of feminist bookstores may even have been the presence that vitally supported feminist authors and proved the movement to publishers so that women's literature is stronger and more rich than it would otherwise have been. Certainly the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* and *News* have provided an invaluable frame for reading the publication history of women's literature as a body that was not built of consumer demand, but that required consistent activism on the part of feminist bookstores, publishers, and authors.

Finally, the ongoing work of feminist bookstores includes literary activism and the collection of the feminist shelf. They continue to undertake a public reading project that offers feminist literary context to the books available on their shelves. This context

enables readers to fully understand the books on the feminist shelf as part of a broad history of women's literature and, in the feminist bookstore, the feminist shelf identifies the texts themselves as spaces for conversation and transformation. The feminist bookstore movement began because a public collection of feminist literature has been important to women's lives, maintaining a full store of women's words representing transitions, new possibilities, and difficult choices. Analyzing the work of the literature supported by and available together in feminist bookstores, then, articulates both the significance of reading a body of women's literature rather than single texts and the importance of the bookstore itself. Through collecting and developing readers for this literature, the feminist bookstore also carries out the work of this literature, marking a feminist heritage and encouraging feminist experimental writing, encouraging and teaching the writing and reading of women's lives, and combining women's works together to create safe transformative spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> "Blitz," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 3.2 (1979): 11.

<sup>2</sup> "More Rumors," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.5 (Apr. 1977): 8.

<sup>3</sup> "Strategy Session," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.9/10 (Dec. 1977): 13-14, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Seajay, personal interview, 17 July 2003.

<sup>5</sup> "Strategy Session" 13.

<sup>6</sup> "Strategy Session" 13.

<sup>7</sup> "Strategy Session" 13.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Post, personal interview, 29 Jan. 2004.

<sup>9</sup> "Strategy Session" 13.

<sup>10</sup> Seajay, interview.

<sup>11</sup> George J. Sullivan, letter to Paula Wallace, in *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.1 (1978) 9.

<sup>12</sup> "Write Now," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* V.1 (June 1981): 7.

<sup>13</sup> Joanna Russ, letter to the author, 8 Aug. 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (Boston: Bluestreak-Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> "More News on Reprints," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.2 (1978): 2.

<sup>16</sup> Seajay, interview.

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- <sup>17</sup> “Getting Feminist Books Back-In-Print (Chapter 5),” *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.2 (1978): 2.
- <sup>18</sup> “Strategy Session” 13.
- <sup>19</sup> “Getting Feminist Books” 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Marge Piercy, letter to Carol Seajay, in *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.2 (1978): 2.
- <sup>21</sup> “Getting Feminist Books” 2.
- <sup>22</sup> “Getting Feminist Books” 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Esther Broner, letter to Carol Seajay, 2 Nov. 1979, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>24</sup> E. M. (Esther) Broner, *Her Mothers* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1975) 73.
- <sup>25</sup> Broner 73.
- <sup>26</sup> Broner 62.
- <sup>27</sup> Broner 60.
- <sup>28</sup> Broner 20-21.
- <sup>29</sup> Broner 79.
- <sup>30</sup> Broner 92.
- <sup>31</sup> Broner 91.
- <sup>32</sup> Broner 168.
- <sup>33</sup> Broner 198-9.
- <sup>34</sup> Broner 62.
- <sup>35</sup> Broner 62-3.
- <sup>36</sup> Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970; New York: Plume/Penguin, 1993) 4.
- <sup>37</sup> Morrison 39.
- <sup>38</sup> Morrison 190, 189.
- <sup>39</sup> Morrison 190.
- <sup>40</sup> Morrison 45.
- <sup>41</sup> Morrison 203.
- <sup>42</sup> “When you’re in the house with me, even Mrs. Breedlove doesn’t say anything to you. Ever. Sometimes I wonder if she even sees you” (Morrison 198).
- <sup>43</sup> Morrison 201, 198.
- <sup>44</sup> Morrison 182.
- <sup>45</sup> Morrison 206.
- <sup>46</sup> Morrison 205-6.
- <sup>47</sup> Havelock Ellis, “Commentary,” *The Well of Loneliness*, Radclyffe Hall (1928; New York: Anchor-Random House, 1990).
- <sup>48</sup> Radclyffe Hall, author’s note to the original edition, *The Well of Loneliness*.
- <sup>49</sup> Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) is celebrated as an early gay rights activist.
- <sup>50</sup> John Everett Millais (1829-1896), British.
- <sup>51</sup> Hall 26-7.
- <sup>52</sup> Hall 343.
- <sup>53</sup> Hall 365.
- <sup>54</sup> Hall 433-434.
- <sup>55</sup> Hall 437.

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- <sup>56</sup> Marge Piercy, *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 127. One of the first book orders from New Words feminist bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts, includes three copies of *Dance the Eagle to Sleep*. New Words, Order Form for Paperback Booksmith, 12 Mar. 1974, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.
- <sup>57</sup> Piercy 44.
- <sup>58</sup> Piercy 5.
- <sup>59</sup> Piercy 47.
- <sup>60</sup> Piercy 29.
- <sup>61</sup> Piercy 51.
- <sup>62</sup> Piercy 130.
- <sup>63</sup> Piercy 218.
- <sup>64</sup> Russ 65.
- <sup>65</sup> Russ 84.
- <sup>66</sup> Russ 137.
- <sup>67</sup> Russ 140.
- <sup>68</sup> Russ 133-4.
- <sup>69</sup> Russ 134-5.
- <sup>70</sup> Russ 180.
- <sup>71</sup> Russ 181.
- <sup>72</sup> Russ 213.
- <sup>73</sup> Russ 213.
- <sup>74</sup> Russ 214.
- <sup>75</sup> Broner 241.
- <sup>76</sup> Karyn London, personal interview, 11 Dec. 2003.
- <sup>77</sup> Karyn London, "Doing Remainders," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.9/10 (Dec. 1977) 14-15, 14.
- <sup>78</sup> London, "Doing Remainders" 14.
- <sup>79</sup> London, "Doing Remainders" 15.
- <sup>80</sup> Old Wives' Tales, "Royalties on Remainders????," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* V.1 (June 1981): 6.
- <sup>81</sup> London, interview.
- <sup>82</sup> London, interview.
- <sup>83</sup> Sherry Thomas, "ABA Conference," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter*, V.1 (June 1981): 4-5, 4.
- <sup>84</sup> "Special Announcement" *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 4.3 (Oct. 1980): 20-21.
- <sup>85</sup> Seajay, interview.
- <sup>86</sup> Eleanor Olds Batchelder, personal interview, 3 July 2003.
- <sup>87</sup> "They Went Thataway," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.9-10 (Dec. 1977): 12.
- <sup>88</sup> "Marion Zimmer Bradley's," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 1.5 (Apr. 1977): 8.
- <sup>89</sup> Batchelder, interview.
- <sup>90</sup> Sonny Wainwright, *Stage V: A Journal Through Illness* (Berkeley: Acacia Books, 1984) xix-xxi.

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- <sup>91</sup> Wainwright 26.
- <sup>92</sup> Wainwright 36.
- <sup>93</sup> Wainwright 15.
- <sup>94</sup> Wainwright 17.
- <sup>95</sup> Wainwright xviii.
- <sup>96</sup> Wainwright 14, 23.
- <sup>97</sup> Wainwright 13.
- <sup>98</sup> Wainwright 22.
- <sup>99</sup> Wainwright 73.
- <sup>100</sup> Wainwright 107.
- <sup>101</sup> Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950; Seattle: U of Washington, 2000) xiii.
- <sup>102</sup> Wong vii.
- <sup>103</sup> Wong vii.
- <sup>104</sup> Wong 244.
- <sup>105</sup> Wainwright 72.
- <sup>106</sup> Isabel Miller, *Patience and Sarah* (New York: Fawcett Crest-Ballantine, 1983) 180.
- <sup>107</sup> Miller 181.
- <sup>108</sup> Miller 88.
- <sup>109</sup> Wainwright 135-6.
- <sup>110</sup> Dorothy Allison, *Lammas Little Review*, #1, back page, n.d., Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.
- <sup>111</sup> Sharon Bridgforth, personal interview, 22 July 2005.
- <sup>112</sup> Cheryl Clarke, letter to Madge Kaplan, 11 Feb. 1983, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 2002-M173, New Words Records.
- <sup>113</sup> Womanbooks, Flyer, 1979, Womanbooks Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives.
- <sup>114</sup> Maureen Brady and Judith McDaniel, "Dear Sister," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 4.3 (Oct. 1980): 7.
- <sup>115</sup> Maureen Brady, "Dear Carol," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* V.1 (June 1981): 2.
- <sup>116</sup> Claire Kirch, "Spinsters Ink Finds New Home," *Publishers Weekly* 14 Mar. 2005, 31 July 2005  
<<http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA510291.html?industryid=23630&industry=Small%20Presses>>.
- <sup>117</sup> Alice Walker, letter to Suzanne Staubach, 9 Aug. 1994, The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>118</sup> Linda Bryant, introduction, *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, ed. Linda Bryant (Atlanta: InnerLight Publishing, 2005) 1-2, 1.
- <sup>119</sup> Bryant 1.
- <sup>120</sup> Sharon Bridgforth, *the bull-jean stories* (Austin, Texas: RedBone Press, 1998). Sharon Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* (Washington, DC: RedBone Press, 2004).
- <sup>121</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing ... and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, ed. by Alice Walker, intro. Mary Helen Washington (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1979).

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- <sup>122</sup> Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1980).
- <sup>123</sup> Linda Bryant, ed., *Leaving Home, Becoming Home* (Atlanta: InnerLight Publishing, 2005).
- <sup>124</sup> Bridgforth, *bull-jean* preface.
- <sup>125</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues*.
- <sup>126</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* xvi.
- <sup>127</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* xvi.
- <sup>128</sup> Bridgforth, interview.
- <sup>129</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 16.
- <sup>130</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 23.
- <sup>131</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 12.
- <sup>132</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 13.
- <sup>133</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 52.
- <sup>134</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 53.
- <sup>135</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 56.
- <sup>136</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 88.
- <sup>137</sup> Bridgforth, *love conjure/blues* 87.
- <sup>138</sup> Bryant, introduction 1.
- <sup>139</sup> Minnie Bruce Pratt, "A Long Walk through the World," *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, 93-94, 94.
- <sup>140</sup> Sarah Austin, "Nesting Dolls," *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, 45-46, 46.
- <sup>141</sup> bell hooks, "over home: making place," *Leaving Home, Becoming Home*, 159-166, 164.
- <sup>142</sup> See chapter one for a detailed description of this shift.
- <sup>143</sup> Carol Seajay, "Fate of the Newsletter/advertising?," *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter* 2.1 (Mar. 1978): 7-8, 7.
- <sup>144</sup> Seajay, "Fate of the Newsletter" 8.
- <sup>145</sup> Feminist Bookstores Newsletter, brochure, n.d., The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>146</sup> Feminist Bookstores Newsletter, list order forms, n.d., The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>147</sup> Carol suggested taking precaution against "undue influence by advertisers (individually or as a collective entity)": "I suggest that we not accept more than ½ the operating budget of FBN from advertising monies. Any money that comes in beyond that could go as seed money for the next WIP Conference and/or as 'scholarship' money to help small bookstores get to WIP." Feminist Bookstores Newsletter, brochure, n.d., The Feminist Bookstore News Records, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.
- <sup>148</sup> A 1986 issue of the *News* includes a Warner Books advertisement for *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*. The lesbian Naiad Press first published *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*, edited by Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, in paperback in 1985. Warner's ad nevertheless offers the book as "Finally in paperback from Warner Books," and "Available wherever paperbacks are sold." Warner's flagrant disregard for the audience

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of feminist bookwomen reading this ad may suggest their low consideration for or misunderstanding of the work of feminist bookstores, but the fact that they chose to buy and republish the book from Naiad and advertise it to feminist bookstores through the *News* may indicate that Warner does indeed understand the audience for this book and that the poorly-worded ad copy results from a mass-marketing campaign. The ad and the republication it marks suggests the success of Carol Murray's theory. *Feminist Bookstore News* 8.5 (Apr./May 1986): 20.

<sup>149</sup> Ann Dwyer, "Remainders," *Feminist Bookstore News* 8.5 (Apr./May 1986): 22.

<sup>150</sup> For a discussion of the life of Virago as a feminist press and imprint, see Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

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## VITA

Though she grew up in a city with a feminist bookstore, Kristen Hogan didn't know they existed until she came to Austin in 1994. She saw BookWoman at 6<sup>th</sup> and Trinity Streets, but she didn't go in. That year it moved to 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Lamar Boulevard, where Kristen found it a couple of years later. After she made it into BookWoman, and loved it, she sought out Inklings, the feminist bookstore in Houston, where she grew up. Inklings was in a little house-like building inside the Loop, and it was packed with books and flyers on worn-looking white wooden shelves; Kristen was impressed by the ecofeminism and lesbian fiction sections. She started working at BookWoman in May, 1998, seven months before she earned her B.A. in English from the University of Texas at Austin. Inklings closed around that time. Supported by Susan Post (original collective member and now owner of BookWoman) and Milly Gleckler (Kristen's partner, they met at the bookstore, of course), Kristen started graduate school at UT in 2000; she was inspired by her work at the bookstore to make a life of activist education and literary spaces. She left full-time work at the bookstore, but she continued to work occasional shifts and some volunteer shifts; she was always fed by the space and the women and books in it. In December, 2005, with the help of her partner, her committee, her friends, and many feminist bookwomen across the nation (and in gratitude to feminist bookwomen transnationally), she completed her dissertation, *Reading at Feminist Bookstores: Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network*. She will graduate with a Ph.D. in English and a Doctoral Portfolio in Women's and Gender Studies in May, 2006.

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