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STRATEGIC SPACES:

Towards a Genealogy of Women Artists' Groups in Canada

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A Thesis

in

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ABSTRACT

Strategic Spaces: Towards a Genealogy of Women Artists' Spaces in Canada

Maura L. Broadhurst

As part of an alternative to canonical Canadian art history, this thesis looks at the histories of women artists' spaces in Canada. Overlooked by predominant texts addressing Canadian art history, these spaces have provided a physical place where many Canadian women artists have gathered to train, exhibit, and support each other as professional artists throughout the twentieth-century. The lack of documentation of the activities of the groups has resulted in a widespread ignorance among Canadians of women artists' histories, and in a case of amnesia causing a repetition of history. The creation and growth of women artists' groups have so far been followed by their deterioration and often death. With their activities and successes forgotten, similar groups formed years later are destined, or doomed, to repeat history.

By studying organizations of both "first" and "second-wave" feminisms, this thesis looks at the similarities and differences of several women artists' spaces in order to begin to understand this disturbing cycle. This material is based largely on archival information analyzed through the use of contemporary feminist theory. By pulling together these scattered pieces it is my hope to begin to trace a genealogy of women artists' groups in Canada. In documenting the activities of these spaces, perhaps the cycle can be slowed and the genealogy strengthened.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although this thesis bears my name, my writing is the result of inspiration by the teachings, discussions and support of so many people. Above all my supervisor Dr. Janice Helland inspired me not only with her teaching and ideas, but with her continual encouragement, praise and friendship. Your example has helped me to grow and improve, both as a student and as a person, over the last two years. I would also like to thank my two readers, Dr. Brian Foss and Dr. Catherine MacKenzie, for their time and thoughtful input. As professors and as individuals you share your knowledge generously and as readers you brought this same generosity to my thesis. Thank you also for your respect and your humour.

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The women I have been fortunate enough to study and live with in Montreal are incredibly special. I look up to each of you for your intelligence, your humour and your courage. Cynthia, Caroline, Rhonda, Allyson, Abbie and, of course, Grazyna, you all

make me proud to be a woman.

And finally I need, as always, to thank my family. How lucky I am to have the opportunity to grow and learn continually within a stimulating yet challenging environment. Few people have the unconditional support of so many people. In particular I want to thank my brother Laurence whose interest and input inspired and encouraged me, and my sister Joanna who made Montreal feel like home. By participating in my life here you both helped to link two important worlds in my life.

I dedicate this work
to my three nieces
Annie, Elizabeth and Meredith.
May you know your histories
and carry them with you to create strong futures.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Canadian women artists are descendants of a varied ancestry marked by numerous fighters and survivors. Faced with a continual partial writing of the country's art history, many women artists have had to struggle to have their stories recognized, documented and remembered. To achieve this goal some women have grouped together to form supportive networks from which they could resist discrimination. These groups have included informal gatherings of friends and communities, and more formal organizations like schools, galleries and associations. One of the earliest of these formal groups was the Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC). Formed in 1887, the WAAC was highly active into the 1930s, providing some women with the space to prove themselves as capable professional artists, travelling to Europe to represent Canada in international exhibitions and having works purchased by public institutions like the National Gallery of Canada. The success they gained seemed to indicate an end to the sexist inequality in the Canadian art world and therefore an end to the need for separate spaces.

In *Old Mistresses*, however, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker explain that women's limited access to established schools and galleries resulted in more than a restriction from exhibitions and professional status, "[i]t signified their exclusion from power to participate in and determine differently the production of the languages of art, the meanings, ideologies, and views of the world and social relations of the dominant

culture."[1] Although gaining access to schools and academies resulted in their inclusion in an increased number of exhibitions, women-artists' stories continued to be ignored by the main texts on Canadian art. Consequently, Canadians continued to be largely unaware of the work by individual artists, and of the achievements of many collective organizations. By the end of the 1960s many women artists felt that discriminatory practices were again becoming overwhelming. Women-only groups were re-established but with little or no knowledge of their ancestors. Canada's amnesia with regard to its women artists has helped to create a disturbing cycle. The cyclical nature of women artists' groups in Canada confirms Rosi Braidotti's belief that patriarchy depends on the fragmentation of women's history for its survival.[2]

As a feminist Canadian art historian, I feel that the work of women artists in this country must be accompanied by written documentation and a theoretical analysis of their activities in order to link the scattered fragments. In contributing to this endeavour, I hope that this thesis will strengthen Canadians' knowledge of women artists; and I hope also to act as an intervention in Canadian art history, to destabilize its assumptions and force a continual shift in its knowledge.[3]

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[1]Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 135.

[2]Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A study of women in contemporary philosophy* trans. Elizabeth Guild (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), p. 149.

[3]In her 1996 book *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts*, Griselda Pollock proposes that "[f]eminism demands that certain issues remain in view, and it functions as a resistance to any tendency to stabilize knowledge or theory around fictions of the generically human or the monolithically universal or any androcentric, racist, sexist, or ageist myth of imperial western culture and its (often not so) radical discourses" and that "feminism signifies...a

In the first chapter of this thesis I look back to the creation and development of the first "Canadian" women artists' group. The Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC) provides an example of a "first-wave" feminist art association. By establishing the reasons behind its foundation, its struggles, achievements and its membership, I hope to draw parallels with later women artists' groups. In this sense, the WAAC represents one turn of the cycle.

In Chapter Two, I pose possible reasons for the apparent pause of feminist activity among women artists from the 1940s to the 1960s and then examine the emergence of several women artists' groups in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular I will look at the creation of Powerhouse Gallery in Montreal, Women in Focus in Vancouver, Womanspirit Art Research and Resource Centre in London, and the Women's Art Resource Centre in Toronto. Other groups which I will not be discussing include the Slide Registry of Nova Scotia Women Artists in Halifax (1974-1989), the Women's Cultural Building Collective in Toronto (1981-1983), the Women's Perspective Collective in Toronto (1982-1984), Gallery 940 in Toronto (early 1980s), Mentoring Artists for Women's Art in Winnipeg (1984-present), and Native Women in the Arts in Toronto (1994-present). I have chosen to study the first four examples because of their importance and influence and also because of the availability of information regarding their activities. The thoroughness of printed and archival material varies, some being

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dynamic and self-critical response and intervention not a platform." Griselda Pollock, "The politics of theory: generations and geographies in feminist theory and the histories of art histories," in Pollock (ed), *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 5.

more complete than others. For Women in Focus and Womanspirit, both now dead, finding information proved a particular challenge.

The final chapter merges the material from the first two and analyses it, using contemporary feminist theory. I have brought together the writings of Canadian women's historians, with those of Canadian, American and European feminist art historians and philosophers. By applying their different ideas and perspectives to the histories of Canadian women artists' groups, I suggest possible explanations for the need and development of such groups, and to situate their current position in relation to contemporary theories of essentialism and sexual difference. In this Introduction I will present a brief look at the existing literature, which addresses the activities of women artists' groups, and at the theoretical material which influenced my analyses.

As I have previously mentioned, the main Canadian art historical texts ignore the activities of women artists' groups.[4] Consequently their stories are found in material addressing Canadian women specifically. In 1976, Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj put together an exhibition of Canadian women painters at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre

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[4]The two main texts of Canadian art, Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* and J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada A History*, give only insignificant mentions of women artists' groups, mainly in relation to the activities of men artists. Neither author describes the number of women artists who were members of the WAAC, nor the influence the Association had in raising the status of women artists in this country. In addition, even in his description of the rise of alternative spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, Reid neglects to discuss the activities of even one women-only space. Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988); J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada A History* 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966). In her thesis, Janice Anderson gives a detailed analysis of the Canadian art history canon in relation to women artists. Janice Anderson, "Closed Systems: Alexandra Luke, Hortense Gordon and the Canadian Art History Canon" (M.A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995).

in Kingston. Their catalogue essay demonstrates the wealth of art by Canadian women painters despite their under-representation in art institutions and art history. It is unfortunate, then, that Farr and Luckyj pass over the achievements of the Women's Art Association, suggesting that its existence could not "compensate for the discriminatory practices of the major societies," and that it "was not comparable to the professional organizations."[5] In so doing, they uphold the belief that in order to be successful and valuable, women's groups must mirror those of men.

It was not until Maria Tippett's 1992 book on the history of art by Canadian women that the influence and accomplishments of women artists' groups were acknowledged. Tippett discusses the importance of these groups in providing a space for women artists to train and to find support both at the turn of the century and again in the 1970s. Further, she explains that the motivation behind the formation of such groups was based on women's under-representation in the major art institutions.[6] In addition, she presents the idea that there exists a link between the organizations of both "first" and "second-wave" feminisms and mentions some of the similarities and differences. Unfortunately, this explanation receives only a few pages within the entire book and is given without any theoretical analysis. Failing to provide a feminist reading of this situation, and instead taking the traditional objective perspective, Tippett also reconfirms

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[5]Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj, *From women's eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1976), p.3.

[6]Maria Tippett, *By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 40-42 and 167-168.

the art historical hierarchy, one that assumes the artist as male.[7]

The only texts which focus solely on women artists' groups seem to be found in academic theses. In 1989 Allison Thompson wrote a detailed study of a hundred years of the Women's Art Association.[8] Consolidating archival material on the organization, this thesis offers information never before available in a single text. Thompson's work is important because it documents the work of these women artists and offers other art historians a starting place, a base from which historians can now begin to analyze the activities of the WAAC and contextualize them within a theoretical framework. Heather Haskins does just that in her look at the Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association.[9] Able to look in a more in-depth way at this one branch, Haskins considers these women's roles within the contexts of Canadian art, women's history, and Canadian nationalism. Consequently, I was able to refer to these two theses for historical information on the WAAC, and thus gain space to look at the WAAC as part of a larger history of women artists' groups in Canada.

One other thesis examines the history of the contemporary space Powerhouse

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[7]For sources that discuss art history's assumption that the artist is male please see: Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," *Woman's Art Journal* Vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1983), pp. 39-47; Lisa Tickner,"Feminism, Art History, and Sexual Difference," *Genders* no. 3 (Fall 1988), pp. 92-128.

[8]Allison Thompson, "A Worthy Place in the Art of Our Country: The Women's Art Association of Canada, 1887-1987" (M.A. Thesis. Carleton University, 1989). This thesis is by far the most detailed study of the WAAC, however the McCord Museum in Montreal published a short brochure on the organization in 1993, Elaine Holawach-Aniot, *Women's Art Association of Canada* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1993).

[9]Heather Haskins, "Bending the rules: The Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association of Canada, 1894-1900" (M.A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995).

Gallery, now named La Centrale, in Montreal. To my knowledge Pascale Beaudet's thesis, "La Galerie Powerhouse," is the only study which provides a detailed chronology of the life of a women artists' group.[10] Perhaps the lack of such documentation stems from the fact that these organizations are active currently and as such their stories are not yet finished. What Beaudet's thesis demonstrates, however, is how useful it is to have the history of organizations written as they progress. A simultaneous recording of events ensures that the information is not lost and is relatively complete. Thanks to Beaudet's thesis, the available non-archival information on the creation of Powerhouse Gallery is much more complete than that for other contemporary space.

In addition, members of Powerhouse Gallery were prolific in publishing information on their organization. Nell Tenhaaf has published several articles explaining the mandate, motivation and the success of the gallery.[11] Powerhouse/La Centrale also released two special publications to celebrate their 16th and 23rd anniversaries.[12] Not twenty-five years have passed since the opening of the more recent organizations, like Women in Focus in Vancouver and Womanspirit in London, and yet already it is difficult to find written histories of their origins and developments. The first-hand information put out by Powerhouse/La Centrale, then, has proven extremely helpful. Still lacking,

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[10]Pascale Beaudet, "La Galerie Powerhouse" (M.A. Thesis. University of Montreal, 1985).

[11]Nell Tenhaaf, "A History or a Way of Knowing," *Matriart* (Vol. 4, no. 1, 1993), pp. 4-10; "Powerhouse Gallery: A Formal Statement," *Centerfold* (Vol. 3, no. 3, Feb-Mar 1979), pp. 122-123; "The Trough of the Wave: Sexism & Feminism," *Vanguard* (September 1984), pp. 15-18.

[12]La Centrale (Galerie Powerhouse), *Instabili: La question du sujet/The Question of Subject* (Montreal: Artexte, 1990); La Centrale (Galerie Powerhouse), *Transmission* (Montreal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 1996).

however, is a study with a wider scope encompassing the activities of several groups rather than individual studies in isolation from one another. Such an investigation would allow for an analysis of any trends, common obstacles and common successes among groups, and lead to a better understanding of the needs of women artists in Canada.

Writing on women artists, although often neglected in art history texts, is often included in histories of Canadian women in general. These sources provide a context for artists based on their identity as women, relating their needs and work to those of other Canadian women. In terms of historical information relevant to "first-wave" feminism, Veronica Strong-Boag often cites the activities of the WAAC in her examinations of Canadian women during the first few decades following Confederation.[13] She places this organization within a larger movement at the turn of the century of national women's groups. This perspective links women artists not only with their male counterparts but with women in fields like religion, athletics, politics and other arts, who were joining together for support and strength in raising the status of women in Canada.

Two recent detailed studies of the history of Canadian women are *Canadian*

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[13]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada 1893-1929* (National Museum of Man Mercury Series, History Division, Paper no. 18. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976); Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (eds), *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1986); Veronica Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage: National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century," in Prentice & Trofimerkoff (eds), *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 87-103.

Women: A History[14] and *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada.*[15] Incorporating feminist analyses, these sources provide contextual information, which helps to understand better the endeavours of women artists' groups. These studies situate groups of women artists within the larger "first" and "second-wave" feminisms and within other contemporary social and political movements.

Because most of these texts focus primarily on the history of women in English-Canada, I also consulted a few sources, *L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939* and *Fragments et collages: essai sur le féminisme québécois des années 70*, which deal specifically with the experiences of women in Quebec.[16] Although movements, opportunities and obstacles are often similar, there are many examples in Canada's history where the situation for women in Quebec has been distinct from that of women in the rest of the country. Women's suffrage is a key example of such a difference; others include issues of education, religion and politics. The information in these sources demonstrate that geographic location also influences women's experiences.

In addition to their physical environment, race and class affect women's lives.

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[14]Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy, Mitchinson, Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996).

[15]Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, Lindsay Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

[16]Collectif Clio, *L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Les Quinze, 1982); Diane Lamoureux, *Fragments et collages: essai sur le féminisme québécois des années 70* (Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1986); Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939.* trans. Yvonne M. Klein (Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1994).

Consequently, I have included information based on the writings of Roxana Ng.[17] Ng's perspective as an immigrant woman and a member of a racial minority raises issues of economics, education and accessibility to the activities of these women artists' groups. Her analyses force readers to question basic assumptions in their fields. Questioning which women were involved in these organizations and why sheds light on the groups' ideological structures and also proposes possible clues towards understanding their lack of success in conquering discrimination in the Canadian art world.

In terms of more recent women artists' groups, their stories have been included in what might be labelled "second-wave" feminist Canadian writings. Examples of such texts are *Feminists Organizing for Change, Still Ain't Satisfied!* and *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture.*[18] These texts explain the relationship between these groups and other consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement by linking their activities. They are valuable as contemporary recordings of events and responses, yet they fail to acknowledge a longer history and as such only offer a partial story.

In addition to a link to the women's liberation movement, "second-wave" women

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[17]Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Immigrant Women," in Burt, Code & Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* 2nd edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), pp. 279-308; "Racism, Sexism, and Nation Building in Canada," in McCarthy & Crichlow (eds), *Race, Identity & Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 50-59; "Sexism, Racism, Nationalism," in Vorst et al (eds), *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers* (Toronto: Between the Lines with the Society for Socialist Studies, 1989), pp. 10-25.

[18]Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988); M. Fitzgerald, C. Guberman, and M. Wolfe (eds), *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1982); Rhea Tregebov (ed), *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987).

artists' groups also share a historical association with a proclivity many artists displayed to participate in alternative galleries. Often unable to find room for themselves in the established system, many women artists recognized in alternative galleries what they perceived to be an unprecedented crack in the system and opportunities for inclusion. For the most part, the most accessible information on these alternative galleries is found in contemporary primary sources, in particular the magazine *Parallelogramme* published by the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres (ANNPAC).[19] In addition, the thesis written by Diana Nemiroff examines the creation of the first artist-run centres in Canada.[20]

As members of ANNPAC, Powerhouse Gallery and Women in Focus were included in the listing of parallel galleries in every issue of *Parallelogramme* and were also included in special retrospective books put out by ANNPAC between 1976 and 1980.[21] However, for the most part the articles, particularly in the 1970s, did not address the specific situation of women artists or focus on the activity of women's groups. Similarly, Nemiroff's thesis only mentions the existence of women-only groups but does not study them. Women-only groups, then, have been left with the responsibility of raising public awareness of the status of Canadian women artists and to fight for change.

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[19]This publication changed its name to *MIX* in 1995.

[20]Diana Nemiroff, "A History of Artist-Run Spaces in Canada with particular reference to Véhicule, A Space and the Western Front" (M. A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1985).

[21]ANNPAC, *Parallelogramme Retrospective 1976-77* (Montreal: ANNPAC, 1977); ANNPAC, *Retrospective Parallelogramme 3: Spaces by Artists 1978-79* (Toronto: ANNPAC, 1979); ANNPAC, *Retrospective 4: 1979-1980: Documents of Artist-Run Centres in Canada* (Toronto: ANNPAC, 1981).

Yet, as I have already suggested, most women-only groups have not had the financial luxury to produce histories of their organizations; therefore the basis of this research lies in often incomplete archival material and contemporary newspaper and journal articles.

Influenced by the contextual information provided by secondary sources, this thesis is the result of a reading of archival material and of an analysis of that material through contemporary feminist theories.[22] The main theoretical texts which informed my readings are writings by feminists who approach women's issues from a socio-historical perspective. In particular, I have followed writings which question the social construction of the category 'women' and in so doing provide new explorations into the field of sexual difference.

Primarily, such writers include feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock, as well as Canadian historians Veronica Strong-Boag and Carol Lee Bacchi. In addition, I have chosen to look at the feminist writings of Canadian philosopher Lorraine Code. This decision stems from the fact that as a Canadian, Code's experiences link her geographically with the women artists in this study, and as a philosophical theorist, she unites many of the ideas of European and American feminist philosophers with the knowledge presented by Canadian historians. As the situation of Canadian women artists is specific to this country, Code's position provides a

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[22]In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault discusses the development of a "new history," one of discontinuity rather than continuity, and the power of the archival document therein. Within this thesis I am using archival material not as evidence of the "truth," but as often the only documents available with which to develop possible stories other than the one put forward by the traditional Canadian art history canon. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

complementary reading of their experiences. These ideas are discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

Within these sources there are several terms which I use throughout this thesis but which are open to various interpretations. Consequently, I wish to clarify my position by defining them: first, the notion of "first" and "second-wave" feminism, second, the debate surrounding essentialist definitions of the term "women," and third my use of the word "space."

Within Anglo-American tradition, the history of feminism has been divided into two distinct movements, described as the first and second waves. In Canada, the first refers to the period which began near the close of the nineteenth century and ended soon after the achievement of women's suffrage at the federal level in 1919. After an assumed period of inactivity by women, the second wave is perceived to have emerged in the 1960s with the development of the women's liberation movement.

These terms of "first" and "second-wave" have been used as categories to describe moments of highly visible feminist activity. However, to dismiss the period between 1920 and 1960 as a time of inactivity ignores the continued inequality women in Canada faced as well as the persistent, though perhaps not consciously defined as feminist, endeavours of women. Several texts do overlook this period,[23] declaring it a lull or an ebb in the oceanic patterns of the women's movement. Such a proclamation, however, is inaccurate and misleading.

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[23]Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, and *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972).

Some Canadian feminist historians have acknowledged that the constructed division between these two stages undermines the continuity of the overall feminist movement. Lynne Teather in her 1976 essay "The Feminist Mosaic" labels the period from 1919 to 1960 as "the interim." Of this period she rightly points out that many of the same problems women faced before the vote continued or recurred.[24] Naomi Black explains this metaphor of first and second waves as "reminding us that in social change, as in oceans, calmer patches are followed by new and stronger peaks of activity."[25] The writers of *Canadian Women: A History* describe a similar image. In looking at the resurgence of feminist activity in Canada in the 1960s, they note that, "[t]he women's movement had worked its way through something like the trough between two waves, and the tide of change was ready to move further up the shore."[26] These explanations shed a more positive light on the "idle" years, suggesting that an active feminist movement is created through a conscious effort on the part of women to bring about social change. The "interim" years, on the other hand, while still active years for women in Canada, did not generate a politically active, or cohesive, movement.

Nevertheless, before accepting these two waves as a basic structure for this thesis, I think it is important to look at the activities of women artists' spaces to determine whether or not this model applies to their histories. In fact, I would suggest that it is in

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[24]Lynne Teather, "The Feminist Mosaic," in Gwen Matheson (ed), *Women in the Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1976), p. 312.

[25]Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Burt, Code & Dorney (eds), p. 168.

[26]Prentice et al., p. 343.

part due to this hypothesized division between the two movements that many of the women artists' groups of the "second-wave" were unaware of the history of their ancestors, and therefore worked to re-invent separate spaces. Their lack of knowledge meant they were unable to learn from others' experiences when encountering similar obstacles. As Adrienne Rich has since pointed out, "without our own history we are unable to imagine a future because we are deprived of the precious resource of knowing where we come from."[27]

I believe focussing on the activities of one specific generation imposes unnatural borders and thus hinders knowledge and breeds misconceptions. As Griselda Pollock has commented, this temptation to establish firm categories "create[s] false impressions."[28] Looking at a longer history of women artists' groups in Canada, one that starts after Confederation, will ensure a more complete understanding of their creation, development and, in some cases, demise. Nevertheless, the lack of alternative terms leaves me with few options but to describe the different time frames as the "first" and "second-wave." Although I do not agree that the period between these two movements was inactive, these terms do highlight the periods when there was an emergence of several women-only groups and therefore are relevant terms for this thesis.

The term "essentialism" has been used to criticize the structures of some of the

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[27]Adrienne Rich, "Resisting Amnesia: History and Personal Life (1983)," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), p. 141.

[28]Griselda Pollock, "The politics of theory: generations and geographies in feminist theory and the histories of art histories," p. 14.

"second-wave" feminist groups.[29] Some critics suggest that as segregated spaces they depend on the assumption that all women share a common oppression through their experiences as women. As such members have been labelled essentialists - believing in a fixed essence of womanhood. In her definition of essentialism, Elizabeth Grosz distinguishes it from the terms biologism and naturalism.[30] She explains that although essentialism "usually entails biologism and naturalism," it does not depend on them. What she emphasizes is the universality of such a belief:

> Essentialism entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all times: it implies a limit on the variations and possibilities of change.... Essentialism thus refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization.[31]

It is this element of essentialism that has been highly criticized by many feminists. Suggesting that there is an essence to womanhood denies the many differences among women and has resulted, in Canada, in the experiences of white, middle-class, English-speaking women becoming the "essence."

Subsequently, there has grown a theoretical debate between so-called essentialists and anti-essentialists. Recently, many feminists who have in the past criticized essentialist writings are revisiting the notion and reconsidering their position towards it.

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[29]Although the terminology was not the same, women's groups of the "first-wave" also faced similar criticism.

[30]Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism," in Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (eds), *the essential difference* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 84.

[31]Ibid.

This reaction has been in part to stop the contempt and animosity the debate has sparked within feminist circles.[32] I feel it is important to address this issue when looking at women artists' groups because it has been one of their main obstacles in survival. Therefore, I kept these ideas in mind throughout the thesis and have addressed them more completely in the third chapter.

The third term which I use throughout the thesis is "space." I decided to use the image of women artists' groups as spaces for several reasons. Initially I began using this term in order to include different kinds of groups. I did not want to limit my research to women-only galleries or women-only schools: many women-only groups began as friendships, clubs or schools, and grew to become associations, galleries and resource centres. I wanted a structure which allowed me to discuss all these.

In addition, I use the term "space" because I am convinced that women artists' groups have played an important role in altering the concept of the space in which art might be viewed. As Sandy Nairne explained in his study of alternative galleries in the 1960s and 1970s, "[t]he term 'space' replaced the word gallery ... and was used precisely because it was supposed to avoid the connotations of an institutional or commercial environment where an hierarchical, formal arrangement might determine audience behaviour in pre-set ways."[33] Alternative spaces were able to accommodate new forms of

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[32]Naomi Schor, "Introduction," in Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (eds), *the essential difference*, pp. vii-viii.

[33]Sandy Nairne, "The Institutionalization of Dissent," in Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne (eds), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 396.

art, like performance art, and new media, which established galleries could, or would not. These spaces were establishing new physical places in which the public could see art, but they were also forging a new space in which art could be discussed and understood in different ways.

Furthermore, for women artists, the term "space," both in its metaphoric and physical meanings, takes on critical importance. One main emphasis for the creation of women-only groups at the end of the nineteenth century was the lack of a physical space in which women could work, train and exhibit as artists. Their need for separate spaces stemmed from their physical exclusion from male spaces. With the formation of their own spaces, they were able to prove their artistic talent and their professional ability and thus "they disrupt[ed] conventional associations between Whiteness, masculinity and the workplace,"[34] the latter in this case being the professional art world.

These physical spaces and the successes they have brought to women artists also help to provide a rhetorical space. By providing women artists with a place to gather, work and exhibit, these spaces also provide historians with information not found in mainstream texts. The partial writing of history leaves gaps in which lie the stories of neglected groups and individuals who fail to fit into the constructed norms. It is within these gaps that feminist historians can slip and find a new space: a space that addresses the histories of women artists. Women artists' stories found in these theoretical spaces

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[34]Linda McDowell, "Spatializing Feminism: Geographic Perspectives," in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 39.

are based in part on the recorded activities of the physical spaces.

In 1979 Julia Kristeva stated: "When evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the *space* generating and forming the human species than of *time*, becoming or history."[35] This perception seems to reflect the experiences of women artists' spaces in Canada. Not part of the official history, they occupy a space but as of yet are not a solid part of time. Yet their occupation of space will help provide the information needed for their histories to be revealed. Griselda Pollock develops this idea further, suggesting that feminism does not have to be either spatial or temporal but can slip from one to the other or occupy both simultaneously: "Feminism can be reconceived as a signifying space, the space in which, through a feminist imperative, we both negate existing orders of phallocentric meaning, and in struggle with representation, generate critical, even new, meanings."[36] In addition to aiding women by offering concrete and safe separate spaces, these women artists' groups in Canada also help formulate new histories and new meanings by providing otherwise undocumented traces of activity. They are strategic spaces.

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[35]Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" (1979) in Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 190.

[36]Griselda Pollock, "The politics of theory: generations and geographies in feminist theory and the histories of art histories," p. 9.

CHAPTER 1

ONCE 'ROUND THE CYCLE

Canada's Confederation in 1867 inspired a movement of nationalist groups that worked towards the development of the country's independent identity. Foci of these organizations ranged from religion and politics to literature and athletics. Among them were those formed by and for women, including the Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC). The WAAC was founded to provide women artists with a rare place to train as professional artists. Like many of the other nationalist groups, it reflected society's structures of class and race hierarchies, but the WAAC was distinct in that it resisted, if not vocally then through its activities, the assumption that women's sole roles were those of wife and mother. The creation of the WAAC is pivotal in Canada's art history as it represents one of the earliest documented cases of women artists in Canada coming together to overcome the discrimination existent in the dominant art institutions of the country. However, the way in which its members and activities have been overlooked by Canadian art history texts has contributed to the lack of Canadians' knowledge of this organization and its members. Consequently, this chapter will look at why this organization was formed, by whom and for whom.[1] Through such an examination, I hope to present an understanding of the need for the WAAC and to divulge the hidden

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[1]My primary interest in this chapter is not to provide a chronological look at the events of this organization. A comprehensive history of the WAAC is available in Allison Thompson, "A worthy Place in the Art of Our Country: The Women's Art Association of Canada, 1887-1987" (M. A. Thesis. Carleton University, 1989).

limitations the members placed upon the term "women." Understanding this perception might lead to an explanation of the cyclical character of women artists' groups in Canada of which the WAAC represents a possible official start.

Up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Canadian artists were forced to travel to the United States or Europe in order to receive professional art training and recognition from the public.[2] In response to this lack of opportunity and support in their own country, Canadian artists took up the initiative to establish their own organizations for art training and promotion. The first professional art society in Canada was the Montreal Society of Artists, founded in 1847, followed in 1860 by the Art Association of Montreal.[3] In addition, the national association, the Royal Canadian Academy, created in 1880, and a provincial group, the Ontario Society of Artists, founded in 1872, offered artists the opportunity to train and exhibit within Canada as professional artists on an international level. In its efforts to establish its own cultural identity, Canada placed new emphasis on Canadian art and culture, raising the status of the artist to an important and respected level. However, one belief perpetuated: the term professional artist was still reserved almost exclusively for the male artist.[4]

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[2]Charles Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), p. 35; and Eric Brown, "Canadian Art and Artists: A Lecture by Eric Brown" (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1925), pp. 4 - 7.

[3]Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 34.

[4]Although women were eligible for memberships in the RCA and OSA, their memberships were not the same as the men's as they imposed certain restrictions. Membership item 6 of the Construction and Laws of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts of 1881 stated that "women shall be eligible for membership in the Royal Canadian Academy, but shall not be required to

In 1900, Mary Ella Dignam, first President of the Women's Art Association, wrote about the discrimination facing women artists by the Royal Canadian Academy:

> Women were pronounced eligible for membership, but were not required to attend business meetings, neither could their names be placed upon the list of rotation for the Council, so their position was but a nominal one, and was never really acted upon. It was also thought necessary to supply a clause in the constitution prohibiting the admission of - 'needlework, artificial flowers, cut paper, shellwork, models in coloured wax of any such performance'- which explains the status of women in art and their work just two decades ago in Canada.[5]

Several women artists shared Dignam's frustration, which encouraged them to found their own school in 1884 where women were able to receive the same kind of training as men.[6] Started initially by Miss E.K. Westmacott, the Associated Artists' School of Art and Design (AAS) had a specific mandate: to educate women in handcrafts.[7] Upon her return from studying in Europe, Mary Ella Dignam joined the faculty and initiated the first painting classes in the school, and by 1887 she had become the principal.[8] After visiting

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attend business meetings, nor will their names be placed upon the list of rotation for the council." Similarly, within the Ontario Society of Artists' minutes of July 2, 1872, it was stated that, "lady members participate in all benefits... except [they do] ... not have the privilege of voting or attending meetings except [when] specifically invited to do so." Farr & Luckyj, *From women's eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1976), p. 3.

[5]Mary Ella Dignam, "Canadian Women in the Development of Art," in the National Council of Women, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Their Work.* (Toronto, 1900), p. 214.

[6]Initially the Associated Artists' School of Art and Design also allowed male students but in an article from 1890, the writer commented that only three male artists participated. "Woman's Art Club," *Mail* (9 December, 1890). *Scrapbook 1*, Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

[7]Thompson, p. 54.

[8]In a paper entitled, "Establishing Cross-border Networks: A Study of Mary Ella Dignam and Her American Connections," Allyson Adley details Dignam's role in establishing connections with other women artists in the United States as well as with women in Europe and within Canada. Allyson Adley, "Establishing Cross-border Networks: A Study of Mary Ella Dignam

the school almost by accident, London *Advertizer* contributor Mary S. Werthorne expressed her impressions of its classes in an 1887 article. She wrote, "It is quite certain, I decided, that these rooms come nearer to the best art schools on this continent than any other in Canada."[9]

Continually dissatisfied by the options open to her as a woman artist, Dignam decided in 1887 to focus her energies instead on the creation of the Woman's Art Club.[10] She felt that "[she] had to do something to open the door for women and the only way seemed to be the organization of the Women's Art Association."[11] Her recognition of the need for a "separate space" was likely influenced by her travels to the United States and Europe where many women's groups like the Ladies Art Association of New York (1867), the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs in Paris (1881), and Britain's Society of Female Artists (1857) had already formed.[12] The Woman's Art Club was based on the model of the Art Students' League in New York, providing a "self-governing, mutually helpful society."[13] The Club espoused a flexible mandate, enabling it to adjust to fit the

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and Her American Connections," The Woman Producer, Not the Woman Produced. UAAC. McGill University, Montreal. November 1996.

[9]Mary S. Werthorne, "An Hour in an Art School," *Advertizer* (14 December 1887). *Scrapbook 1*, Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

[10]Thompson, p. 59.

[11]Mary Ella Dignam as quoted in Thompson, p. 58.

[12]Maria Tippet, *By A Lady* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 27-28.

[13]Florence Deeks, "Historical Sketch of the Women's Art Association of Canada," (Toronto, 1912), p. 1.

needs of members. In 1890 it consisted of twenty-seven members, held exhibitions, and offered lectures and workshops.[14]

The growth of the Club during its first few years indicates that it filled a gap experienced by many Canadian women artists. In 1892, the Club incorporated as the Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC), and its membership continued to grow across Canada and into the United States.[15] The demand was such that branches of the Association began to be founded in different parts of the country beginning with Winnipeg, London and Montreal.[16]

Although the only national organization of women artists, the WAAC was not alone in its attempt to bring women artists together. Other groups included the Montreal Society of Decorative Art, organized in 1878, the Women's Art Club of London, instituted in 1893, the Montreal School of Art and Applied Design of 1893, and the School of Art in Picton, Nova Scotia.[17] The Women's Art Club of London became a branch of the WAAC but discontinued its membership in 1896.[18] In her in-depth look at the history of art in London, Nancy Poole unfortunately gives only a brief description of

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[14]Thompson, p. 63; Deeks, p. 1.

[15]Deeks elaborates, "Nearly all the women painters of Canada, many of whom are the best known artists of today, were enrolled as active members, and the increasing list of patronesses and associate members contained many well-known names," p. 3.

[16]Thompson, p. 66.

[17]No date was given for the School of Art in Picton, Nova Scotia. National Council of Women of Canada, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Their Work*, pp. 217-218.

[18]Ibid., p. 217. The information in this source does not explain the reason for the Club's decision to discontinue its membership with the WAAC.

the Women's Art Club, explaining that the Club was made up of both artists and supporters of art and was active between 1892 and the First World War. It sponsored lectures, exhibitions and classes as well as providing studio space for the artists, and according to Poole, was "the centre of artistic vitality in London."[19] Despite its apparent importance and influence, however, it receives only a few lines in this history of art in London.

As a national organization for women artists, the WAAC was one example in an emerging trend of women organizations throughout Canada. With subjects including athletics, culture, labour, politics and religion, these associations and clubs, originating as early as the 1870s right through to 1920, created a sense of unity among women who continued to feel isolated in their positions at home. Women's traditional role of keeper of the house and family, whether on the farm or in the city, often led them to feel alone and disconnected. Consequently they often formed communities based either on their shared religious or cultural affiliations.[20] Jane Errington explains some of the incentives for and environment within which many educated, upper- and middle-class Canadian women were inspired to come together: "They were propelled out of the isolation of their homes by a sense of religious duty and a spirit of expanding opportunity, which combined with their growth and apprehension about the state of Canadian society and

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[19]Nancy Poole, *The Art of London 1830-1980* (London: Blackpool Press, 1984), p. 75.

[20]Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1996), p. 125.

their special place within it."[21]

In fact, religion often provided the forum where women could meet, as well as providing the motivation. Missionary societies were created to spread the Word of God through actions. Soon, however, "[t]hese groups were...joined by a number of secular, although still religiously motivated, organizations."[22] Examples of such groups include the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anglican Girls' Friendly Society, the Dominion Order of the King's Daughters, and the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Stemming from their religious affiliation, these groups nevertheless expanded their activities to include housing for immigrant girls and women, domestic training and recreational activities in addition to religious instruction. Later many also participated in campaigns for women's suffrage.

Although not all these groups were founded specifically to solicit social reform, this often became an objective.[23] Women justified their involvement in social reform by explaining that "they believed it was absolutely essential to infuse the public world with a domestic, female morality."[24] According to Veronica Strong-Boag, women viewed

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[21]Jane Errington, "Pioneers and Suffragists", in Burt, Code and Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993) p. 73.

[22]Ibid., p. 74.

[23]Linda Kealey (ed), *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women & Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 2.

[24]Errington, p. 75.

themselves as morally superior to men, based predominantly on their role as mothers.[25] To succeed as an independent and moral country, then, Canada needed the contribution, and even leadership, of its women.

The desire for social reform was not unique to women. Spurred on by threats of industrialization, Canadian men also took part in this movement of the late- nineteenth century. Strong-Boag suggests that it was in following the actions of men that "[women] too were shocked by urban poverty, industrial unrest and social disease; they too responded to the call of religion, to the warning of British and American reformers and to the pleas of Canadian nationalists."[26] Frequently, the founding members of the women's groups were related to the men who were active in this "Canadian progressive movement."[27] The expansion of cities and the construction of faster and more convenient forms of transportation encouraged this development of national and even international organizations.[28]

White women of the upper classes, especially those able to take advantage of new educational opportunities in Canada, followed the example of these men's groups. In addition, improved technology, with its easing of domestic duties, allowed these women

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[25]Veronica Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage: National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century," in Prentice & Trofimerkoff (eds), *The Neglected Majority* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), p. 88.

[26]Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage," p. 87.

[27]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976), pp. 31-32.

[28]Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson (eds), *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 199.

the time, and thus the opportunities, to meet one another.[29] Marjory MacMurchy, a journalist vocal about women's issues at the time, described the average member of these groups:

> The typical member of these associations ... is married, not single. She is middle-aged. She is a woman with household occupations and yet with some leisure time. Her children are wholly or half-way grown up and she is able to undertake some work outside.[30]

Although these women enjoyed an increased amount of free time permitting them the space to participate in women's clubs, club activity did not interfere with the time needed for women's domestic duties. In fact, one of their primary goals was to uphold the family and virtues of domesticity.[31]

Frequently, clubs were inspired by similar groups either in Britain or the United States. The Young Women's Christian Association, established in 1870, and the Girls' Friendly Society, formed in 1882, were both counterparts of the respective organizations in Britain, and the Dominion Order of the King's Daughters of 1886 followed the example of the existing group in the United States.[32] These Protestant and Anglican-based groups formed to look after young women, particularly immigrants and working-

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[29]Wendy Mitchinson, "Aspects of Reform: Four Women's Organizations in 19th century Canada" (PhD. Thesis. York University, 1976), p. 33.

[30] Marjory MacMurchy, "Women's Organizations" from her book, *The Woman - Bless Her,* 1916, as quoted in Cook and Mitchinson (eds), *The Proper Sphere*, p. 218.

[31]Cook and Mitchinson (eds), p. 199.

[32]Errington, p. 74. bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism*, when commenting upon the American counterparts of these organizations, points out that although not identified in their names, these organizations were "exclusively white." bell hooks *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 163.

class members. One of the earliest and most influential of these women's groups was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded in Ontario in 1874. It, too, was formed after the American model. Its members felt that alcohol caused the evils in society and hence their main objective was to impose prohibition.[33]

The scene was set, then, by the end of the nineteenth century for the emergence of a unified national body for Canadian women. Hoping to bring women from all over the country together with the common goal of improving the moral climate of Canada, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCW) was established in 1893. An off-shoot of the International Council of Women, which originated in England in 1882, the Canadian organization was officially formed at Toronto's pavilion at the Chicago's World Fair. There had already been a few previous attempts to create such a national body, the most recent being the Saint John, New Brunswick meeting of the Dominion Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1891. The participants at this meeting decided to form a committee which would gather together all Canadian women active in all organized societies.[34]

In order to profit from her influential position, the organizers requested that Lady Aberdeen act as the first President of Canada's national women's body.[35] Lady Aberdeen brought with her not only the prestige of her position and name as the wife of Canada's

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[33]Errington, p. 74.

[34]Wendy Thorpe, "Lady Aberdeen and the National Council of Canada: a Study of a Social Reformer in Canada, 1893-1898" (M.A. Thesis. Queen's University, 1972), p. 43.

[35]Ibid., p. 46.

Governor-General John Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, but also her commitment to family, society and country based within an evangelistic faith.[36] Grounded in this view of women's role in Canada as being that of mother, both to family and country, the constitution of the National Council of Women read:

> We, women of Canada, sincerely believing that the best good of our homes and nation will be advanced by our own greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the Family and the State, do hereby band ourselves together to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law.[37]

Within the first year of the Council's existence, local councils were formed in Toronto, Montreal, London, Hamilton, Ottawa, Quebec City, Winnipeg and Kingston.[38]

In addition, in 1893 three other women's organizations became affiliated members: the Girls' Friendly Society, the Women's Art Association of Canada and the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association.[39] By this time, the Women's Art Association had a solid base with a growing membership which sponsored three exhibitions a year. It also offered outdoor sketching excursions, held lectures and live model classes through the Saturday Night Sketch Club.[40] That the WAAC was one of the first three affiliated members of the NCW is significant: Allison Thompson suggests, "By

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[36]Ibid., p. 59.

[37]National Council of Women. *Constitution*. [The Golden Rule: Do unto other as ye would that they should do unto you.]

[38]Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage," p. 99.

[39]"Our First Annual Meeting," reprinted from the *Toronto Globe* (21 April, 1894), p. 8. *Scrapbook 1*, Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

[40]Thompson, pp. 70-71.

uniting with the NCWC, Dignam acknowledged that the WAAC was not merely an exhibiting society for women artists; it had a larger role to play in asserting the active involvement in the social improvement of the country."[41]

As President of the WAAC, Mary Ella Dignam was usually present at the National Council of Women's annual meetings. Each year the WAAC submitted a report of its activities, which was then reproduced in the NCW's annual yearbooks. On several occasions, in addition to a formal financial report, the WAAC included an essay on topics like the history of Canadian art, the revival of handicrafts, and the influence of art clubs in Canada. These essays, written predominantly by Dignam herself, offered a history of Canadian art, which highlighted the role of women artists in the creation of a uniquely Canadian form of artistic expression.

Since Confederation in 1867, Canada had been struggling to shed its image as a British colony and to distinguish itself from the United States. In several papers that she submitted to the National Council of Women, Dignam indicated her commitment to "the development of national Art feeling."[42] She believed women had an important role to play in the advancement of this feeling through the promotion of Canadian art and through the success of women's art clubs.[43] Because of their success in these activities

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[41]Ibid., p. 67.

[42]Mary Ella Dignam, "The Development of National Art Feeling in Canada," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook: Women Workers of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1895), pp. 228.

[43]See for example, Mary Ella Dignam, "The Development of National Art Feeling in Canada;" Mary Ella Dignam, "Arts Clubs and Associations and their Influence on Canadian Art," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook: Women Workers of Canada*

and because of the importance of their role, Dignam thought that Canadian women artists deserved equal opportunity and recognition as men artists.

Dignam's commitment to proving women artists' integrity to Canadian art is evident throughout her career. During her time at the Associated Artists' School, she was quoted as saying, "Our subjects are essentially Canadian and in our own way we seek to make art a patriotic and an educative force in the community."[44] In her 1895 essay, "The Development of a National Art Feeling in Canada," Dignam laid out the opportunities and responsibilities of Canadian artists, whom she continually described as both male and female.[45] She pointed out that in order for Canada to develop a true national spirit, it first needed to be educated about art, an education that could be brought about by a "formative energy." "This energy," she stated, "the women of Canada can help to form."[46]

In addition to its attention to "high art" forms, the WAAC also encouraged women working in Canadian handicrafts. Its enthusiasm in this area of work is clear in the creation of the Ceramic Club in 1897 and of other clubs specializing in bookbinding, woodcarving, jewellery, metal work and tooled leather.[47] At the Toronto branch's twelfth annual exhibition in February 1900, handicrafts were included for the first time.

(Ottawa: Thoburn & Co., 1894), pp.77-82; "Sectional Art Conference," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook: Women Workers of Canada* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1896), pp. 548-557.

[44]*Scrapbook 1*, Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

[45]Mary Ella Dignam, "The Development of National Art Feeling in Canada," pp. 228-232.

[46]Ibid., p. 232.

[47]Thompson, p. 103.

Subsequently, branches of the Association throughout the country took a new look at and found renewed interest in the handicrafts. In many ways it seemed to represent the ideal outlet for Canadian women artists. It promoted working at home, it was an extension of already established women's work and, without taking men's jobs and without requiring a move to the city, it offered women a source of income and the opportunity to contribute to the economy.[48] Furthermore, it was seen as an acceptable way for isolated women to have contact with other women.

After the success of the 1900 Toronto exhibition, members of the Montreal branch organized the *First Exhibition of Art and Handicrafts* later the same year. This became an annual event and expanded to such an extent that, in 1906, the women involved founded the Canadian Guild of Handicrafts.[49] In establishing this national guild, the WAAC demonstrated that it believed that handicrafts were integral to a strong future for Canada. Because handicrafts rely on historical traditions, however, Canadians were hesitant to associate them with this future. The women involved succeeded in making this connection by depending on education as one of their main tools. In all their promotional material, these women stressed Canada's vast history of craft techniques, revealing that Canada did have traditions that straddled ethnicities, ages, and classes. They also believed that increased exposure to handicrafts would improve Canadians'

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[48]Heather Haskins, "Bending the rules: The Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association of Canada, 1894-1900" (M.A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995), p. 50.

[49]Virginia Watt, "The First National Craft Organization in Canada," in Sam Carter, *A Treasury of Canadian Craft* (Vancouver: The Canadian Craft Museum, 1992), p. 33.

overall appreciation of art and thus would help the country grow in sophistication.[50]

In an essay entitled "The Canadian Handicraft Movement," submitted to the National Council of Women at its 1904 annual meeting, Mrs. Peck, a member of the Montreal branch of the WAAC, outlined the history of handicrafts in Canada.[51] Peck commented on how the promotion by the WAAC of Canadian handicrafts resulted in a connection with many women who were otherwise isolated in their artistic endeavours. She wrote:

> We who journey about, ever seeing new lands, gaining new ideas, listening, learning, constantly should try to realize the utter desolation of a life shut off from such delights. The Women's Art Association is coming into touch with isolated women in its work, helping ever so little to brighten the lives of those women whose work is strenuous, whose pleasures are few and evanescent.[52]

Despite the condescending tone of this comment, which clearly separates the women at the meeting from the women creating handicrafts, Peck nevertheless confirmed that one of the main and successful objectives of the WAAC was to bring together Canadian women. Additionally, in this essay she showed that the work performed at home by these women was as important to Canadian culture as any other form of art.

In contradiction of this opinion, many of the WAAC's contemporaries believed that art could only ever be an amateur activity for women. Even Lady Aberdeen, a vocal supporter of women artists, stated that, "after all, art must be associated with repose and

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[50]Promotional pamphlets, 1900, 1902. Canadian Guild of Handicrafts archives, Montreal.

[51]Mrs. Peck, "The Canadian Handicrafts Movement," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 11th Annual Meeting* (London: C.P. Heal & Co., 1904), pp. 6-14.

[52]Ibid., p. 14.

with absence of effort."[53] Dignam, on the other hand, was strong in her conviction that women could, and indeed many did, pursue art as a profession.

Dignam was continually forced to prove this belief both to her colleagues at the National Council of Women and to the still male-dominated art world. The President of the Art Association of Montreal was asked to speak at the opening of the Women's Art Association's 1896 exhibition. He prefaced his comments by pointing out that the exhibition consisted of works by amateur artists and that therefore the works were necessarily secondary to professional work. Dignam responded politely but potently:

> I have to thank Mr. Drummond for his kind words tonight to our Association and assure him that we do not intend to rest with purely amateur work. While we include in the Association amateurs who are serious students, we also have professional members who are giving their most serious life effort to this work.[54]

At the 1905 annual NCW meeting, Dignam again had to defend the professionalism of women artists to the Council. The Women's Art Association had asked the NCW to lend its support in approaching the federal government to purchase works by women artists.[55] Dignam presented her case:

> ...[T]his matter has been already brought before the Dominion Government by the Women's Art Association. But we thought at our Executive, although I fully believe our request will be granted in any case, that the National Council might like to express itself as actively interested in noticing and encouraging Art in its widest and broadest sense, taking this opportunity, which we believe a very

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[53]National Council of Women, *Yearbook* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1896), p. 548.

[54]Ibid., pp. 551-553.

[55]It seems that this particular request was regarding the purchase of works by the "most distinguished sculptress," Miss Wallis. National Council of Women, *Report of the 12th Annual Meeting* (Toronto: W.S. Johnston & Coy, 1906), pp. 127-133.

excellent one, to show its attitude towards Art and Canadian women.[56] Although the members seemed interested to hear that women artists had been discriminated against by the government, one member added, "[I]t seems to me that it is important that we consider carefully before we ask anything that might have a tendency to lessen our prestige with the Government."[57] Some members objected to this comment but others agreed, insisting that it was improper of the WAAC to make such a request of the NCW. In the end the motion to support the WAAC's request was passed, but not without heavy convincing on the part of Dignam.

Dignam herself never publicly disagreed with the NCW's belief that women's proper place was at home, but in her attempts to promote women as professional artists she must have continually met with opposition. Her encouragement of women who chose the career of artist lay in direct opposition to society's pressure for women to concentrate on the role as mother. An indication that she was well aware of the perceived incompatibility of these two activities is found in a brief comment she included in an essay on the role of art associations in Canada. She stated that the activities of a professional artist, "never yet unfitted a woman for what is considered her true sphere in the home, and in the care of children."[58] Nevertheless, as the WAAC was an affiliate member of the NCW, its members either must have agreed with the NCW's view of

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[56]Ibid., p. 128.

[57]Ibid., p. 128-129.

[58]Mary Ella Dignam, "Art Clubs and Associations and their Influence on Canadian Art," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook* (Ottawa: Thoburn & Co., 1894), p. 79.

women or constantly felt its disapproval of their positions as professional artists.

In general, reform groups, of which the NCW was the most public, asserted that an improved Canadian society would help women perform their jobs as mothers better. In addition, this image of an improved society was soaked in Christian ideology; "For most women, religious faith was the underpinning for their activism."[59] The image such groups hoped to evoke was one of generosity and selflessness. Consequently, in order to avoid criticism from the growing backlash of anti-feminists, the National Council of Women initially kept itself separate from the suffrage movement.[60] Instead, the focus remained on women's role as mothers and on the need for social reform to improve their ability to succeed in their duties. As Carol Lee Bacchi explains, "[M]aternal ethos provided a respectable image for those who felt a sense of sex solidarity."[61] The emphasis on the debate as to whether women should work or remain at home to care for their families demonstrates that this definition of the role of women pertained only to wealthier women, as lower-class women had always needed to work.[62]

The relationship of the Women's Art Association to this movement is less clear than it is with those groups that specifically identified themselves as reform groups. Because the motivation behind the WAAC in some ways was to help women move

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[59]Prentice et al, p. 189.

[60]Thorpe, pp. 52-53.

[61]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Same Difference: Feminism and Sexual Difference* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p. 24.

[62]Ibid., p. 33.

outside of the home and into the professional art world reserved until recently for men, it may seem that its purpose clashed with that of organizations like the NCW. Indeed, there is evidence of some tension between the WAAC and the NCW. On the other hand, members of the WAAC did see the need for moral improvement of society in light of industrialization and saw women's art as a way of achieving this end.

Mary Ella Dignam often referred to Britain's Arts and Crafts' revivalist, William Morris, in her speeches.[63] Following his example, Dignam believed that a society deserved the state in which it found itself and that its attitude towards art reflected its moral level. She also shared his view that art should not be for the elite few but for everybody. In her public speeches, Dignam made this point clear: "Art is not, never has been, and never can be confined to one class. Wealth can procure great foreign works of popular artists, but the lack of it does not debar people from cultivating refined taste and artistic surrounding, or from the real enjoyment of the beauties around us."[64]

The relationship between art and social reform was also emphasized in the creation of the Canadian Guild of Handicrafts by the Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association. These women felt strongly that Canadians must be knowledgeable about their art and their handicrafts traditions in order to achieve a morally elevated

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[63]For more information on William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement see Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991) and E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1977). For information on the influence of the Movement in Canada and of Morris' influence here see Katharine A. Lochnan, Douglas E. Schoenherr and Carole Silver, *The Earthly Paradise: Arts and Crafts by William Morris and His Circle from Canadian Collections* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993).

[64]Dignam, "The Development of National Art Feeling in Canada," p. 231.

cultural identity. As Mary Phillips, one of the founders of the Handicrafts Guild, stated in the Guild's 1902 annual exhibition catalogue:

> The Association recognizes that from a generally diffused love of colour, form and design arises that thing we call National Art. ... With knowledge, patience and skill surely such efforts must bring about a growth of artistic feeling among Canadians.[65]

The reform movement, however, centred, in part, on the maintenance of a "pure" Canadian race. This incentive was so strong among varied groups that Carol Lee Bacchi believes that it was the key element in creating a unified movement: "Most of the reforms in some way aimed at strengthening and preserving this [Anglo-Saxon] kin-group against internal weaknesses and external threats."[66] Increased immigration and the decline in the birth rate were two of these primary threats. In addition to Anglo-Saxon decline in birth rates, "[t]he larger families, non-Protestant backgrounds, and higher birth rates of the newcomers encouraged xenophobia, as did immigrants' supposedly lenient attitudes toward alcohol and prostitution."[67] Thus, in order to ensure that the birth rate of Anglo-Saxons increased, the government condemned abortion and all forms of birth control.[68]

Two possible explanations for the deterioration of the Anglo-Saxon race emerged: environmentalism and eugenics. As Carol Lee Bacchi has explained them,

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[65]Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association, *Exhibition of Arts and Handicrafts, 1902* Catalogue. Canadian Guild of Handicrafts archives, Montreal.

[66]Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Speaking Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 104.

[67]Prentice et al, p. 218.

[68]Ibid., p. 178.

environmentalists believed that women were being affected by the poor conditions in which they lived and subsequently passing this effect on to the younger generations, whereas proponents of eugenics advanced the belief that it was nature - genetic composition - that was causing racial degeneration.[69] Eugenics lay the blame predominantly on women, who were either not procreating enough, or, by refusing to stay at home and care for their families, were causing the deterioration of their genes.[70]

Not surprisingly, most reform women aligned themselves with environmentalist thinking which allowed them to stay active and involved. By improving the condition of society, improved racial make-up would follow. Within this school of thought they could uphold the idea that by educating themselves they would in fact pass on improved genes to their children. Even within this more open explanation, Bacchi points out that it still only helped the situation of a small group of women: "It justified the pursuits of the female reformers, but they constituted a small elite within the general female population."[71] Roxana Ng observes that, "[r]eviewing the historical development of Canadian society, we find that family and kinship, perceived or real, are means people deploy to exert their domination or overcome their subordination."[72] Both of these

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[69]Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Speaking Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, p. 106.

[70]Ibid., p. 109.

[71]Ibid., p. 110.

[72]Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism, & Nation Building in Canada," in McCarthy, Cameron & Warren Crichlow, *Race, Identity & Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 51.

reasons seem to reflect, consciously or not, the activities of white, middle-class women's groups. Consequently, one of the results of this group movement during Canada's struggle to establish itself as a modern nation-state was the ideological construction, or reinforcement, of race and ethnicity as fundamental divisions in society.

A further division within these women's groups was between French- and English-speaking women. As Veronica Strong-Boag has explained, part of the difference between these two groups was that the French-Canadian Catholics did not experience the same decline in birth rate as in English Canada. Also, francophone women in Quebec were still not obtaining higher education in the numbers that English-Canadian women were.[73] Consequently, the main reform activities in Quebec took place through the predominantly English-speaking Montreal branch of the National Council of Women. It was not until 1907 that the francophone community formed its own group, the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste.[74]

Even within the National Council itself, there was division between Catholics and Protestants. Lady Aberdeen had strongly supported the formation of a non-denominational organization, but differences between these groups always seemed to emerge. One of the main controversies between these two groups arose around Lady Aberdeen's promotion of silent rather than oral prayer at meetings in 1895.[75] Aberdeen's

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[73]Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 38-39.

[74]Collectif Clio, *L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Les Quinze, 1982), pp. 325-329.

[75]For a more complete discussion of this controversy see Thorpe, pp. 63-78.

motivation for such a movement stemmed from a desire not to offend any members. In Ontario, however, heated debate ensued. This debate ended with a vote supporting silent prayer, a decision that was seen as a victory for non-partisanship. Despite the outcome of this conflict, the existence of such tensions among the different groups within the NCW questions how members could hope to serve the varied interests of all women.

Following the thinking of racial purification, the National Council of Women made immigration and the care of "fallen women" two of their main concerns. In a paper entitled, "Woman's Work for Woman" of 1897, Mrs. Arthur Murphy explained that there existed two classes of women, "exalted women" and "fallen women." "The stability of society," she wrote, "is threatened by the forces of perverted womanhood."[76] If the members of the Council were to succeed in their mission to impose female morality upon Canadian society, they needed to raise these fallen women. In the same speech, Mrs. Murphy proposed that these so-called "fallen women" had little choice but "to sacrifice their chastity to serve their race or children."[77] The National Council of Women, then, would act as a block in this path. Thus, it turned its attention to immigrant women. Its members would intervene before these women fell into an immoral life due to the economic realities they would otherwise encounter. In 1897 the NCW passed a resolution to create a committee on immigration, which would consist of stations in different cities throughout the country. These stations would ensure shelter and work for

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[76]Mrs. Arthur Murphy, "Woman's Work for Woman," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook* (Kingston: British Whig, 1897), p. 183.

[77]Ibid.

these women.

Although ostensibly established to help less fortunate women, the committee's beliefs reflected the strategy of reform through racial purity. This racism is indicated in statements like this one by a member of the Council, when seconding the resolution for the committee's formation:

> Many of the women and children sent out here are very undesirable immigrants, and with such a scheme as this there would be little difficulty in regulating this. ...This scheme will not only protect the communities to which these immigrants are introduced, but it will also protect the immigrants themselves, because we will have in each distributing centre a home to which they can go temporarily when out of work and where they can be protected from all the troubles incidental to immigrants.[78]

The members wanted to help other women but clearly they wanted to do so while maintaining their distinction from and superiority over these less fortunate women. In fact, these immigrant, single, working-class women were central in filling the growing need for domestic servants in Canada.[79]

This position of superiority was also demonstrated by members of the Women's Art Association. With Lady Aberdeen as its figurehead and run by an executive committee of a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, the hierarchy within this women's organization echoed the class pyramid within Canada in general.[80] This organization was accessible only to women who had both educational opportunities and

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[78]Ibid., p. 157.

[79]Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Nation Building in Canada," p. 55.

[80]Women's Art Association of Canada *Annual Reports* between 1892-1924. Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

leisure time; furthermore, membership costs also determined what class of woman could join. The annual fee for full, residential members was ten dollars.[81] Even the fee for a membership at the National Council of Women was only two dollars a year for affiliated national societies like the WAAC and five dollars for local councils.[82] A ten-dollar fee for an individual, then, seems quite high. Also in relation to some wages at the time,[83] the cost of this membership signalled that in order to be a member of the WAAC, an individual had to have economic security. Despite Dignam's claims that art need not be expensive and was not exclusive to one class, then, the WAAC seemed to demonstrate that indeed it was.

Further racist tendencies are evident in the Association's treatment of handicrafts. The WAAC, in light of the handicrafts revival in other countries, took an interest in different ethnic handicrafts traditions, but when comparing the treatment of fine art by its white, middle-class, English-speaking members with the treatment of crafts by immigrant, French habitante, and native women, a colonial attitude is apparent. Exhibitions of paintings and sculptures by white women were displayed in traditional museum fashion with the name of the artist clearly indicated near the painting and in the exhibition brochure. Native objects, however, were identified by tribe only and were

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[81]Thompson, p. 64.

[82]Thorpe, p. 50.

[83]In *Canadian Women: A History*, the authors state that in 1889 the average annual earnings for women workers without dependents was $216.71 with average annual costs being $214.28. Prentice et al., p. 133.

usually listed in the program with the name of the owner.[84]

In addition, although the women of the WAAC "were largely responsible for creating a revival in craft-making in Canada,"[85] they also tended to uphold the hierarchy of the visual arts, with painting at the top. This pyramid is clear not only in the treatment of works at exhibitions but also in the way members talked about the different art forms. In one of her speeches Dignam clearly defined, "three divisions in which women work": primitive arts, art of needlework, and painting, sculpture and design.[86]

With an emphasis by the WAAC being placed on the "high art" forms by its active members, the lower, "primitive arts" of immigrant women were becoming artifacts of dying cultures. As Florence Deeks in her "Historical Sketch" of the WAAC explained:

> The co-operation of Canadian women with the new settlers also became a consideration, and as a help to the Doukhobor and Russian women in the pursuance of their artistic needle work, the Association took over the work which the National Council had organized for philanthropic reasons - that of sending out to them well-selected material and designs for working.[87]

Following the philosophy of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Association even succeeded in convincing craftworkers to give up more modern materials, often used to simplify the work, to return to older, more traditional ones. With

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[84]See the *Exhibition of Arts and Handicrafts* catalogues from 1900 to 1905. Canadian Guild of Handicrafts archives, Montreal.

[85]Maria Tippett, *Making Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 104.

[86]Mary Ella Dignam, "Value or Organization," in National Council of Women of Canada, *Reoirt of the 11th Annual Meeting* (London: C.P. Heal & Co., 1904), p. 17.

[87]Florence Deeks, p. 6.

Quebec rug-making, for example, they encouraged the artists to stop using aniline dyes and return to using vegetable dyes.[88] In her description of the Arts and Crafts movement in Canada, Mrs. John Paterson writes about the inferior effects of aniline dyes:

> [T]heir discovery ... has terribly injured the art of dyeing and for the general public has nearly destroyed it as an art. ... Anyone wanting to produce dyed textiles with any artistic quality in them must forego the modern and commercial methods in favour of those which are at least as old as Pliny, who speaks of them as being old in his time.[89]

This example indicates that these white, middle-class women felt they knew how these traditional ethnic crafts should be produced better than the artists themselves.

A division in class and culture is clear even with regards to Québécois handicrafts. Organizers and promoters of the handicrafts exhibitions distanced themselves from the activities of the women making the work. For instance, in a 1900 brochure proposing an "Exhibition of Arts and Handicrafts," Mrs. Cole of the Montreal branch of the Association wrote: "Among the Indians and French Canadians, where we must look for primitive and characteristic national work, weaving, basket work, dyeing, porcupine quill embroidery, the manipulation of leather, are fast passing into the realm of tradition; indeed some recipes are already lost."[90] Although the WAAC was clearly not an advocacy organization for eugenics in Canada, there is also little doubt that there was

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[88]By the mid-1870s Morris had begun reviving the use of vegetable dyes in order to avoid the deterioration of colour that resulted from the use of aniline dyes. E. P. Thompson, p. 101.

[89]Mrs. John A. Paterson, "The Revival of the Arts and Crafts," in the National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 13th Annual Meeting* (Toronto: W.S. Johnston & Coy, 1907), p. 142.

[90]Mrs. F. Minden Cole, "Exhibition of Arts and Handicrafts," 1900. Women's Art Association of Canada archives, Toronto.

such a movement in Canada during the first half of this century and that it helped to maintain, or even increase, the division between the protestants of English-speaking Canada and the Catholics of Quebec.[91] Recognizing the influence this philosophy held at the time, it is possible to look at the WAAC's treatment of traditional Québécois handicrafts as an ethnographic exercise. English-speaking women were to be active participants in the future; whereas, French-speaking women, along with native communities, were only part of Canada's past. This division between English and French Canada again suggests that although the WAAC represented women artists, the term "women" had specific limitations.

The Association's attitude towards native handicrafts was particularly condescending. The division in class and race between these two groups is highlighted by the fact that when dealing with native crafts, the women of the WAAC did not focus solely on women artists. In this case differences of class and race seemed to outweigh the WAAC's focus on gender. This reflects Carol Bacchi's observation that, "[a]lthough these women managed to cooperate for several female-oriented goals, ultimately they identified with their class rather than with their gender."[92] The members' attitude towards native work was based on a romanticized colonial view, which constructs the native as "other." Consequently, native women artists not only suffered as women in a male-

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[91]For a detailed study of this movement and its impact on the relationship between English- and French-speaking Canada see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

[92]Carol Lee Bacchi, "Divided Allegiance: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage," in Linda Kealey (ed), *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 106-107.

dominated art world, but even within separate spaces created specifically to serve women artists they were seen primarily as native and thus as secondary to white women artists.

It should be noted here that although women of colour and non-Christian women were not usually included in the women's groups I have described in this chapter, they too came together for support, usually on a small, local level. Although the NCW, under Lady Aberdeen's leadership, was predominantly a Protestant organization, it did have some locals in different parts of the country with memberships made up mostly of Jewish or Catholic women. For instance, there were seven urban Jewish centres affiliated with the NCW in Hamilton, Montreal, and Toronto by the end of the nineteenth century. In total, however, they only made up three percent of the locals' membership.[93] As the sole carriers of their race, Jewish women played the key role in the continuation of Judaism in Canada.[94] Mothering, then, was seen also by the Jewish religion as women's most important responsibility. Their mothering skills soon extended beyond the home and women adopted a role of mothering within their community. The creation of the National Council of Jewish Women is the most obvious example of this activity. In addition, Jewish women in Toronto formed the Hebrew Ladies Sewing Circle in 1906, motivated largely by recent missionary activity among Protestant evangelics to convert Jewish youth.[95]

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[93]Prentice et al, p. 201.

[94]Debra Forman, "The Montreal Section of the National Council of Jewish Women: The Paradox of Being a Mother," (M.A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1980), pp. 3-5.

[95]Prentice et al, p. 218.

As early as the 1880s, black women, filling similar traditional "female" roles, were also coming together to provide services for their community. Examples of these groups are the Victoria Benevolent Society in Chatham, Ontario, the Vancouver Island Committee of Coloured Ladies, and the Black Women's Home Missionary Society in Amherstburg, Ontario in 1882.[96] Montreal's first known organization of black women emerged in 1900. Initially an informal gathering of women, this group soon established the Coloured Women's Club of Montreal in 1902. This club provided services to women immigrants from the West Indies, providing them with clothing and a community, echoing some of the activities of white women's groups.[97]

The Women's Art Association remained very active during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Allison Thompson's thesis gives a more detailed account of their activities but a few examples will demonstrate its increasing participation in and influence on the Canadian art scene.[98] The Toronto branch of the Association had its largest membership of 700 in the early 1920s.[99] As the Canadian art focus shifted to modernism, so too did the WAAC. At the forefront of this movement in Canada was the Group of Seven. Although made up exclusively of men, this group of artists exhibited

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[96]Ibid., p. 209.

[97]Ibid., p. 219. Following bell hooks' comments on American black women's groups of this time, it is interesting to notice that these women clearly identified their groups by their race, often leading historians to assume that these women were more interested in issues relating to black people than in those of the women's movement. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism*, p. 163.

[98]see Thompson, pp. 134-171.

[99]Ibid., p. 136.

throughout a period between 1923 and 1931 with nineteen women, fifteen of whom were affiliated with the WAAC.[100]

Within Canada, the modernist painting movement seemed to be dominated by men, but women, many of whom were members of the WAAC, were at the forefront of modernist sculpture. Four such women were Frances Loring, Florence Wyle, Katherine Wallis and Winnifred Kingsford. In 1914 the WAAC included sculpture for the first time in its exhibition program and this same year it held a separate show devoted to the work of these four sculptors.[101] The WAAC's commitment to promoting the role of women artists to Canadian modernism is also clear in its 1924 exhibition, the "Montreal Women Painters." This exhibition displayed the work of five women painters, Emily Coonan, Lilias Torrance Newton, Mabel May, Sarah Robertson and Anne Savage, who had all been part of the Beaver Hall Hill Group in Montreal. This was the first of several such exhibitions which took place at the WAAC between 1924 and 1940.[102] In addition, the WAAC took a particular interest in the work of painter Emily Carr. In fact, in 1935 Emily Carr held her first solo exhibition outside of British Columbia at the WAAC.[103]

In 1933 the Canadian Group of Painters formed with nine of its 29 members being

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[100]Emily Carr, Emily Coonan, Prudence Heward, Bess Housser, Mabel Lockerby, Isabel McLaughlin, Mabel May, Lilias Torrance Newton, Sarah Robertson and Anne Savage were WAAC members; Kathleen Daly, Yvonne McKague, Kathleen Munn and Pegi Nicol had each exhibited at WAAC; and Rody Kenny Courtice was an art instructor at WAAC during the 1930s. See Thompson, p. 138.

[101]Thompson, p. 140.

[102]Ibid., p. 149.

[103]Ibid., p. 155.

women, a clear indication of the breakthroughs achieved by women artists in Canada. It is also important to note that of those nine painters, eight were active members in the WAAC.[104] Further evidence of progress is the RCA's election of Marion Long as full member in 1933. Long was only the second woman artist in Canada to receive this position, the first being Charlotte Schreiber in 1880.

However, the poor economic state of the country in the 1930s, in addition to these notable successes by women artists led to a steep decline in the WAAC's membership to only 180.[105] With this low membership and with the continually decreasing interest in its activities by younger women artists, the WAAC's importance dwindled. Believing that they had achieved their main goal of equal opportunity in the Canadian art world, members of the WAAC changed the mandate of the organization in the 1950s. Once an active participant in the creation and development of Canadian art, the WAAC has since taken a more passive role as philanthropist.[106]

In retrospect, it is possible to see that without the strong push of an organization like the WAAC, the situation for women artists in Canada developed slowly after the 1930s. Many of the achievements of the Association and its members were forgotten and by the late 1960s women once again felt excluded and discriminated against. This is not unlike what happened to the women's movement in general. After achieving the vote,

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[104]Ibid., p. 158. Emily Carr, Prudence Heward, Bess Housser, Isabel McLaughlin, Mabel May, Lilias Torrance Newton, Sarah Robertson and Anne Savage were all members of the WAAC.

[105]Ibid., p. 157.

[106]Ibid., p. 174.

women's activities tapered off. Charlotte Whitton, vocal suffragist, voiced her frustration at the apathy of Canadian women: in an article by Whitton in a 1946 issue of *Saturday Night*, she wrote, "[T]he women of Canada report a sorry stewardship to the surviving of those who purchased their electoral freedom."[107]

It seems impossible to study the creation and early activities of the WAAC without placing it within the construction of what is now commonly known as first-wave feminism. Characterized specifically by the suffrage movement, this wave appears to have a defined life, finishing soon after the achievement of the vote by Canadians. However, I believe this view of history is misleading, especially when looking at an organization like the Women's Art Association of Canada. The activities of this group did not stop at a certain moment. Rather, the focus shifted due to the perpetually changing environment in Canada. The notion of a "first" and "second-wave" feminism, on the other hand, suggests that there was a clear break, generally accepted to begin in the 1920s and ending in the 1960s, during which time women were inactive. Naomi Black in her examination of the beginnings of second-wave feminism in Canada, explained: "After enfranchisement, organized women were engaged in fewer concentrated campaigns, had less publicity and less success, but their activity never stopped."[108]

For women artists this constructed period of inactivity initially seems accurate.

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[107]Charlotte Whitton, "Is the Canadian Woman a Flop in Politics?" as reproduced in Cook and Mitchinson (eds), p. 328.

[108]Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Burt, Code and Dorney (eds), p. 154.

Nonetheless, women artists were not inactive during these decades. Certainly, the pressure to stay at home continued and caused some women to hesitate before taking on a profession like that of an artist. But perhaps it is more relevant to recognize that after the successes of members of the WAAC, women artists were striving to be treated as equals to men in the established systems. Naomi Black explained that from the end of World War II until the 1960s, the situation for Canadian women seemed to be improving: "In prosperous postwar Canada, women seemed to be doing well in both economic and political terms; their remaining problems looked like temporary disadvantages."[109] Women had proven themselves able to exhibit with and succeed alongside men artists. There no longer seemed the need for an alternative, separate space. However, the lack of documentation of the activities of WAAC and its members, in addition to a timely case of amnesia, would virtually erase this history.

The dominant text books of Canadian art, with their narrow patriarchal vision, have allowed the activities and achievements of the Women's Art Association to fall into the shadows of Canadian art history. Without a knowledge of their history, contemporary women artists are doomed to repeat the struggles of their ancestors. This amnesia has certainly caused a repetitive cycle in women artists' groups in Canada.

The WAAC was founded out of a need for women artists to improve their opportunities as artists in Canada. Frustration and isolation brought these women together and through their activities, women artists between the 1880s and the 1930s

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[109]Ibid., p. 151.

began to receive recognition and respect for their work. Nevertheless, made up of middle- and upper-class women, the WAAC also reflected the class hierarchy of Canadian society in general. As a result, although their primary focus was on helping and promoting the work of women artists, in many cases these women felt more of a connection with other members of their class and culture than with other women.

"Second-wave" feminism recycled many of these same experiences, including the discrimination and the isolation felt by women artists, as well as the limitations of inclusion within women's groups. The importance of the history of WAAC in light of its view of women and of women artists, then, is necessary in order to understand the achievements and failures of women artists' groups in Canada. A study of this history also highlights the amnesia of the Canadian art world regarding these early groups and reveals the consequent repetitious characteristics of "second-wave" groups.

CHAPTER TWO

AMNESIA VERSUS HISTORY

The efforts of the members of women artists' organizations like the WAAC raised the status of Canadian women artists during the first half of this century. The increase in the number of acquisitions of works by Canadian women artists by public institutions like the National Gallery of Canada is indicative of women's improved position. By 1910 the National Gallery had acquired only eleven works by Canadian women, but the decade starting in 1910 witnessed a dramatic increase with the purchase of another 78 pieces. Between 1920 and 1960, however, acquisitions remained quite low, with the late-1940s being the exception.[1] From the 1960s on, the numbers rose slowly, climaxing in the 1980s, dropping significantly since then (see Appendix A).

By 1950 the women artists who made up the membership of the WAAC felt that there was no longer a need for such an organization to provide them with exhibition and

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[1]These numbers were obtained by a search performed by archivists at the National Gallery of Canada through the Canadian Heritage Information Network (C.H.I.N). Although the NGC as yet has not administered an examination of their collection of Canadian women artists, it is interesting to note the similarities between these preliminary numbers of the NGC with the results of an intense study performed by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, England executed by Jane Sellars in 1988. In her analysis of the gallery's collection of works by women artists Sellars concludes that between 1900 and 1920 the gallery acquired a growing number of works by women and that the 1930s "were the kindest towards women artists," but that the 1940s represent another lull. Sellars shows that between 1960 and 1980 there was a steady increase in such acquisitions, but that between 1980 and 1988 these acquisitions, "slump[ed] so dishearteningly." Jane Sellars, *Women's Works: Paintings, Drawings, Prints and Sculpture by Women Artists in the Permanent Collection.* (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1988), p. 15. It is also important to note the significant increase in acquisitions by the NGC between 1946 and 1950. Between 1941 and 1945 the gallery acquired 12 works by Canadian women, whereas in the following five years it acquired 78 works.

training opportunities as they had succeeded in achieving access to the formerly male-dominated, if not male-exclusive, national organizations. The large number of acquisitions of work by Canadian women by the National Gallery during the 1940s, some 90 in number, may be an example of the kind of evidence which suggested to women a growing gender equality in the art world. Despite their conviction, the reality of the 1950s and early 1960s indicates a revival of, or continuation of, sexual discrimination: women artists were once again limited to the margins of Canadian art history. The reaction of women artists during the late 1960s and early 1970s is a clear indication of their renewed feelings of isolation and discrimination. By this time however, the WAAC had become privatized and as such was out of touch with the larger art community in Canada, serving only a select group of older women artists.[2]

Their dissatisfaction is reflected in part through women's re-establishment of separate spaces. Iris Marion Young has explained that this desire for a community was common among groups of women because it provided a supportive network which lay in opposition to the "alternative and individualism we find hegemonic in capitalist patriarchal society."[3] Part of both the growing women's liberation movement and a North American artist movement towards alternative art spaces, these women artists' groups emerged in the form of schools, galleries, clubs, magazines and collectives throughout the

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[2]Allison Thompson, "A Worthy Place in the Art of Our Country: The Women's Art Association of Canada, 1887-1987" (M.A. Thesis. Carleton University, 1989), p. 177.

[3]Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of community and the politics of Difference," in Linda J. Nicholson (ed), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 300.

continent. In Canada, three different organizations formed. The first was Powerhouse Gallery, incorporated in Montreal in 1974, followed that same year by Women in Focus in Vancouver, and in 1977 by Womanspirit in London, Ontario. These three groups were by no means the only women artists' groups in the country, but because of their prominence and due to their range in geographic locations, I will concentrate on these three as case-studies of early "second-wave" spaces. These groups often reflected the radical feminist view of the time, celebrating women's difference from men. Segregation was viewed as a strategic way to protect this difference. By the mid-1980s, however, some new groups that emerged were more in line with recent theoretical ideas of multiplicity and inclusion. I have chosen to look at the Women's Art Resource Centre in Toronto, founded in 1984, as an example of such a later group. It has been selected for analysis because of its relative success with such goals and because of its national focus. Before looking specifically at the situation for women artists in the 1960s, however, I first will present brief examinations of the "second-wave" women's movement in Canada, and, also, look at the general counter-institutional movement of Canadian artists at the time. Women artists' spaces both influenced and were influenced by these two movements.

There is no question that women experienced many changes in Canadian society throughout the twentieth century, in particular in relation to their participation in the work force. As Lynne Teather has pointed out, however, many of the obstacles the suffragists were fighting at the turn of the century remained in place for women by the 1960s. Furthermore, the women's organizations that were still active were working locally in

isolation from one another.[4] Although women's participation in the work force had increased drastically since the beginning of the century,[5] the debate as to whether women, particularly mothers, should work outside the home still raged on and women's role as mothers continued to be seen as their primary function. Consequently, women who did work outside the home continued to be the primary domestic worker and so their workload doubled.[6]

Naomi Black has suggested that it is sensible to acknowledge 1960 as the beginning of "second-wave" feminism as it was during this year that Canada saw the emergence of new women's organizations.[7] On July 28, 1960, the Voice of Women formed "to unite women in concern for the future of the world and to provide a means for women to exercise responsibility for the family of humankind."[8] 1966 marks the year the

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[4]L. Teather, "The Feminist Mosaic," in Gwen Matheson (ed). *Women in the Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1976), p. 313.

[5]Alice James states that in 1901 the female participation rate in the labour force for persons 14 years of age and over was 16.1%, whereas in 1967, this number had grown to 33.8%. Alice James, "Poverty: Canada's Legacy to Women," *Women Unite!* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), p. 126.

[6]Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 37.

[7]This is not to suggest that no national women's groups existed in 1960. In *Feminist Organizing for Change* the authors point out that in 1965 there were still few women's organizations including no women's bookstores and no women's studies courses. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, p. 5. However, in *Canadian Women: A History*, the authors point out the importance of the activities of separate women's organizations for laying the basis for the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s. These included the volunteer work of the women at the National Council of Women, the YWCA and the National Council of Jewish Women among others. Prentice et al., pp. 331-333.

[8]Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, p. 39.

Féderation des femmes du Québec was created, and in 1967 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established.[9] The Commission's report came out in 1970, and in 1972 a national women's organization, The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), was formed to ensure that the government implemented the report's recommendations.[10]

Initially these national organizations, not unlike their "first-wave" predecessors, were made up predominantly of white, middle-class women. However other women were also forming groups. The Negro Women's Association, for example, had been active in Toronto and Montreal since the 1950s,[11] and in 1973 it put together the first Conference of Black Women. This resulted seven years later in the Canadian Congress of Black Women.[12] In 1986 a group of women formed the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women within which black women were an active force.[13] Native women, also experiencing double discrimination, formed organizations to fight for their rights. In 1968, some Mohawk women formed Indian Rights for Indian Women and four years later, in 1972, informal gatherings of native women grew into the

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[9]Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Burt, Code & Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), p. 155.

[10]Ibid., p. 157.

[11]Prentice et al, p. 341.

[12]Ibid., p. 405.

[13]Noga A. Gayle, "Black Women's Reality and Feminism: An Exploration of Race and Gender," in D. Currie and V. Raoul (eds), *Anatomy of Gender: Women's Struggle for the Body* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), p. 237.

Ontario Native Women's Association. Native women across the country formed similar associations from Nova Scotia to British Columbia.[14] As a South Asian Woman in Canada, Himani Bannerji has written about her experiences faced with double discrimination. She stated that as a consequence of these two identities, she is "segmented into different social moments, made a victim of discrete determinations."[15] Because race and sex have been constructed as separate identities, women of colour have had to make the impossible choice between aligning with other women or with other members of their race.

The Canadian women's movement was influenced, as were the "first-wave" feminists, by the movement in the United States. A primary way in which women learned of the movement in the States was through printed sources. In 1963 Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was published and it had a significant impact upon the anglophone feminist community in Canada: "[a]lthough written from an American perspective, the 'problem without a name' spoke to the experience of many Canadian women, and was the first widely read liberal-feminist analysis of women's oppression."[16] This American influence continued into the 1970s with pivotal works such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).[17] Both

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[14]Prentice et al, p. 397.

[15]Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1995), p. 48.

[16]Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, p. 41.

[17]Both of these important feminist books were translated into French in 1971. Le Collectif Clio, *L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Les Quinze, 1982), pp.

of these authors visited Montreal - Greer in 1971 and Millett in 1973.[18]

Another way in which the movement in Canada was influenced by that of the Americans was through the example of their establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women in December 1961. This Commission acted as a "catalyst which precipitated the demand by women's rights groups for a similar commission in Canada."[19] Lynne Teather in her analysis of the Canadian "second-wave" feminist movement also pointed out that leaders of the movement initially met with members of the American National Organization of Women to discuss their strategies and actions.[20]

In addition, the North American women's movement was motivated by the peace movement and the Civil Rights movement. These movements originated, for the most part, with the mobilization of university students first in France, then in the United States and finally in Canada. Within this educated group, women were becoming a growing force. They began taking a more active part in these social movements, realizing that even "within the framework of these groups they were being exploited."[21] Naomi Black explained the relationship among these movements: "[The women's movement] was part

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488-489.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Teather, p. 314.

[20]Ibid., p. 315. Although their discussion about what was being done by American women influenced some of their activities back in Canada, Canadian women later concentrated more specifically on problems facing Canadian women.

[21]Linda Briskin, "The Women's Movement: Where is it Going?" *Our Generation*. Vol. 10 no. 3 (Fall 1974), p. 24.

of a student movement radicalized by racism and imperialism: women were to be 'liberated,' like minorities and colonial dependencies."[22]

Despite their efforts, many women felt that their voices continued to be unheard in these socialist movements based within patriarchal structures and thus the need for a separate women's movement became obvious.[23] Women of colour experienced heightened exclusion because they did not fit nicely into any movement. Trinh Minh-ha has explained this dilemma in her 1989 book, *Woman, Native, Other*:

> ...The same holds true for the choice many women of color feel obliged to make between ethnicity and womanhood: how can they? You never have/are one without the other. The idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), again, partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics.[24]

Difference continued to act as a violent force which maintained the exclusion of these women.

At this time, artists in North America started questioning the institutionalized role of the artist in society. Many artists began challenging the exclusionary practices of established art galleries and the traditional isolated position of artists in North American society. They sought out their own communities where they provided support for one

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[22]Black, p. 151.

[23]bell hooks describes how men dominated these movements, giving specific reference to the experiences of black women within the Civil Rights movement. She suggests that women leaders were not given the respect or recognition that the men leaders received, and furthermore that black men activists fought to gain acceptance in American culture without questioning "the rightness of patriarchy." bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 4-5, and 177-178.

[24]Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 104.

another and a space to experiment with new art forms and media. Artists were not alone in their new collective identity. Throughout North America in the 1960s and 1970s, co-ops, collectives and communes were common tools used by minority and marginalized groups.[25] This counter-institutional ideology was the motivating force behind many forms of grass-roots organizations in such fields as education, day care, the environment, and law. A fundamental objective of these groups was to give power and autonomy back to individuals. For artists, this translated into a gain of control over their own careers.[26]

In Canada, artist-run centres emerged soon after their birth in the United States. Their formation arose out of a deep dissatisfaction with both public and private museums and galleries on behalf of local artists. According to the artists involved, these institutions only paid attention to already established, and therefore safe, artists. Participants believed that unlike established galleries, parallel galleries, "[were] not interested in safety, any more than they [were] interested in compromising ideals for money."[27] As Phil Patton explained in his essay on the rise of these new art groups, "alternative spaces were aimed at giving new or less established artists a chance at recognition by critics and peers, if not by the buying public."[28] Kay Larson reiterated this

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[25]See John Case & Rosemary C. R. Taylor, *Co-ops, Communes and Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 70s*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979) for more information on this counter-institutional ideology and organizations.

[26]Diana Nemiroff, "Par-al-lel," *Parallelogramme*. Vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 1983), p. 18.

[27]Ann Thurlow, "The Parallel Galleries: Portraits from the First & Second Generations," *Artmagazine* (Aug/Sept 1977), p. 7.

[28]Phil Patton, "Rooms with a point of view," *Art in America* Vol. 65 (July/August 1977), p. 80.

description in her article "Rooms with a point of view": "[Alternative spaces] are not designed to mimic museums; their purpose is to thrive in the gap between what museums can afford (or are willing) to do for contemporary art, and what the artists need."[29] New media, such as performance art, site specific installations, and video art, being used by a growing number of artists, often could not be exhibited in established galleries either because they did not conform to the traditional hierarchy of art forms, or because many spaces did not even have the equipment or facilities to accommodate the new media.[30]

The first alternative art group to receive funding from the Canadian federal government was Vancouver's Intermedia in 1967. This grant, however, was not recognized as money for an artist-run centre but for multimedia workshops. In 1969, the group 20/20 in London received the same kind of funding.[31] In 1973, however, the Canadian government established the Local Initiatives Program which for the first time officially provided money for artist-run spaces. Throughout the following years many groups received their start-up funds from this program. The first to receive such funding were A Space in Toronto and Véhicule in Montreal.[32]

Despite these centres' intentions to be more inclusive and tolerant, both of new art forms and of new perspectives, members soon started expressing frustration that certain

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[29]Kay Larson, "Rooms with a point of view," *ARTnews*. Vol. 79, no. 8 (October 1977), p. 33.

[30]Glenn Lewis, "The Value of Parallel Galleries," *Parallelogramme*. Vol. 3, no. 2 (February 1978), p. 3.

[31]Diana Nemiroff, "Par-al-lel," p. 17.

[32]Ibid.

kinds of artists continued to be favoured. There were complaints, for example, that they were not offering equal exposure to women artists, gay artists and artists of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. As a result artists not served by these alternative centres formed their own organizations where, as marginalized groups, they could find support as artists.[33]

One such group, of course, was women artists. Women's art exhibitions and women-only gallery spaces were forming in the United States by 1970. The need for validation of art by women was the catalyst for the creation of the American group Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R.) in 1969.[34] Other women-only activities in the American art world included artist collectives like A.I.R. (initially standing for Artist-in-residence) (1972), school programs like the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State College (1970), the Women's Interart Center (1970) and Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation, projects like Womanhouse (1972), as well as feminist art publications like the *Feminist Art Journal* (1972).[35]

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[33]An example of an organization that formed in light of this discrimination is ChromaZone. Created in 1981, this group was founded by women, gays, Jews and recent immigrants. The members positioned themselves in opposition to established artist-run centres, planning to exist as a short term project, "guided by the fear that lasting too long invited an inevitable creeping stagnation and ossification." Its members clearly not part of the "heterosexual WASP mainstream of Toronto's art world," ChromaZone's cards and street signs were in English and Chinese, "acknowledging the rapidly changing demographics of the traditionally Jewish and bohemian Spadina Avenue neighbourhood." Andy Fabo, "The Way of the Maverick: Artist collectives in Toronto since 1980," *Parallelogramme*. Vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 1994), p. 30.

[34]Sandy Nairne, "The Institutionalization of Dissent", in Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne (eds), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 390.

[35]Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 69, no. 3 (September 1987), pp. 329-330.

One of the main objectives of these organizations was to free women artists from their isolation. By 1974 groups like the Women's Art Group and the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union were strong forces in the United States.[36] There is little doubt that groups like these and the strong feminist art emerging from the States had an inspirational influence on the women's art movement in Canada.

In 1976 in Canada, parallel galleries across the country joined together to form the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres (ANNPAC) to act as a network through which the different organizations could communicate. In 1982 ANNPAC undertook a study on the status of women in the arts in Canada. The results of this study indicated "that women artists are under-represented in all areas of public and publicly-acknowledged creative undertakings."[37] In a paper presented to ANNPAC's general meeting in May 1983, Yvonne Klein concluded that although the arts traditionally claim to work outside the structure of the dominant culture in Canada, "[they] in fact replicate the situation of women in that society."[38] At the end of her paper Klein put forward this proposal:

> Every effort should be made to avoid a tokenizing or ghettoizing response: the call is not for "women's month" or a "woman's show", or a single woman representative of a board. Rather what is required is that those involved in the management of member-spaces have a consciousness of the particular situation of

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[36]Parker & Pollock (eds), *Framing Feminism* (London & New York: Pandora, 1987), pp.16-17.

[37]Yvonne Klein, "A Position Paper in Support of a Sexual-Equality Clause in ANNPAC/RACA's Membership Criteria," *Parallelogramme*. Vol. 8, no. 5 (June/July/Aug 1983), pp. 20-21.

[38]Ibid.

> the woman artist and a commitment to seeking out women as exhibitors, including those of distinctly feminist vision.[39]

The late date of this study, however, did not help the situation of women in alternative centres in the 1970s.

Combined with the inspiring influence of American examples and the celebratory energy of women's pride during this period, the formation of several women-only groups in Canada during the intervening years is further evidence of their dissatisfaction and frustration. Members of these new centres felt that women in the art world needed a room of their own. As women artists, they often felt like "the other" within "the other." Michelle Wolstencraft, a photographer and art critic in Vancouver, explained:

> The basic need for a women's alternative centre arises from the view that women are a colonized people ... Women's art spaces provide a forum for the experimentation and development of art that expresses the total range of women's experiences, and most specifically feminist art. They validate women's experiences in the world by exhibiting art work reflective of it.[40]

The result was the emergence of several separate spaces for women artists.

For the most part these women's spaces followed the same counter-institutional ideology of the other parallel galleries. In particular, the non-hierarchical structure of parallel galleries was very much in line with the overall feminist philosophy at the time.

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[39]Ibid., p. 21.

[40]Michelle Wolstencraft, in Michelle Nickel, "Some Perspectives on Women's Alternative Art Centres," *Parallelogramme*. Vol. 7, no. 5 (June/July 1982), p. 10. The comparison of women's oppression to that of "colonized people" is one that has since been criticized by post-colonial theorists (see for example, bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism*, p. 8). I agree with post-colonial theorists who suggest that this comparison takes agency away from colonized groups and who explain that the comparison is not even accurate. However, it was a tool used by many feminists in this time period and presents one of the ways in which women at the time felt about the discrimination they experienced.

As Linda Briskin explained, "Women were determined to create new ways of behaving politically. They were disinterested in the power structure in men's groups which led to both a denial of the 'personal,' and to the creation of god-like leaders. In reaction the women opted firstly for a philosophy of anti-elitism, anti-Leadership."[41] This philosophy is apparent in women artists' groups in Canada. For example, Nell Tenhaaf, one of the founding members of Powerhouse, later explained that the group decided to create a women-only art group "because consciousness-raising in a group context was the feminist sociopolitical model, and a proven strategy for formulating and possibly finding answers to fundamental questions."[42] These women artists' groups, then, although primarily interested in women's art careers, could be separated neither from the overall political women's movement, nor the counter-institutional philosophy of alternative galleries.

In doing this research on "second-wave" women art groups, it quickly became apparent that few written histories are publicly available.[43] As a result, the following information has been pulled together from archival material of the respective organizations but by no means represents a complete history of each group. My primary interest in these spaces is not to provide a detailed history of their yearly activities and developments, but rather to present a cartography of their origins. The motivation experienced by the women who founded the spaces and the services they felt were

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[41]Briskin, 1974, p. 25.

[42]Nell Tenhaaf, "A History or a Way of Knowing," *Matriart*. Vol. 4, no. 1 (1993), p. 6.

[43]See above, pp. 5-7.

lacking for women will provide clues in understanding the need for women-only spaces, their progression and, possibly, their future demise.

The first women-only art space to arise during the alternative art centre movement in Canada was Powerhouse Gallery in Montreal in 1973.[44] Powerhouse Gallery evolved from a collective art store, The Flaming Apron, formed in the early-1970s by a group of eight women artists. This group met to discuss ways to balance their responsibility to their art and their families and to develop strategies to overcome the lack of studio space, credibility, and exhibition opportunities for women artists.[45] The women were frustrated by the Canadian art world's continual discrimination towards women artists, and set up this gallery space as a cooperative to "offer exhibition space to women whose work was considered a poor commercial risk by established galleries."[46]

Demonstrating some radical feminist philosophies in their promotional flyers,[47] The Flaming Apron wanted to display the beauty of art made by women: "The Flaming Apron exists to show and tell this woman's work -- conceived and run by women who believe there exists a special value in work done by women <u>because</u> it is done by

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[44]Powerhouse Gallery changed its name to La Centrale in 1990.

[45]Beaudet, p. 46.

[46]ANNPAC, *Parallelogramme Retrospective 1976-77.* (Montreal: ANNPAC, 1977), p. 58.

[47]Lorraine Code defines radical feminists as feminists who, "contend that the oppression of women by men is the root cause of all oppressions (radical = at the root)." (L. Code, "Feminist Theory," in Burt, Code & Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, p. 41)

women."[48] By selling different kinds of art, they hoped to display work done by professional women artists alongside "traditional" art by women done "quietly at home." In addition to uncovering this hidden art, the members also wanted to provide these women with a source of income of their own. The Flaming Apron hoped to improve women's access to the Canadian art world and simultaneously take part in the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement: "From the very beginning we have imagined [The Flaming Apron] as a modest but definite step toward the further liberation of women."[49]

Powerhouse was incorporated as a gallery in 1974, receiving a $15,000 Local Initiatives Program grant; it was the first women-only centre to receive such a grant. From this money the founders were able to hire three staff members.[50] The gallery was initially situated on Greene Avenue in Montreal, but soon moved to St. Dominique Street which also provided the group temporarily with a studio downstairs to be used for performances.[51] Originally, men artists were included in exhibitions but membership was exclusively female. The members attempted to provide a space where women, while not denying their gender, could do away with the pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes

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[48]The Flaming Apron's publications espoused a belief that there exists a difference between art by women and art by men and that art by women reflects the innate beauty inherent only in women. The Flaming Apron flyer, 1973. Canadian Women's Movement Archives Collection, University of Ottawa.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Beaudet, p. 48.

[51]ANNPAC, 1977, p. 58. The performance space was soon closed down by the fire department.

associated with female artists.[52]

Throughout the 1970s, the gallery consisted of two exhibition spaces. The large gallery was used for exhibitions chosen by active members, while the smaller space was used primarily for experimenting with new ideas and media. The artist had the freedom to do what she wanted with the space and in return received feedback from the members and the audience. Before long it became clear that a documentation area was needed in order to fulfill the gallery's mandate to provide information to the public on contemporary art and to document the work of Canadian women artists. Thus in the 1978-79 season of the gallery, a documentation centre was installed, consisting of a resource centre and a slide registry. At the beginning of its life, Powerhouse also put out a newsletter five times a year. This helped establish a larger community and could reach women who could not frequent the gallery regularly.[53]

Initially Powerhouse was a predominantly anglophone group. In her look at feminism and art in Quebec since the 1960s, Rose Marie Arbour described Powerhouse Gallery as being the centre of activity for anglophone women artists in Montreal.[54] Attempting to understand the unilingual dimension of Powerhouse, one member explained that it was difficult for French-speaking women to be comfortable in a group that was based on a different culture. She further said, "French women, at this point, are

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[52]ANNPAC, 1977, p. 58.

[53]*Powerhouse*. Montreal: Powerhouse Gallery, 1979.

[54]Rose Marie Arbour, "Art et féminisme," in Musée d'art contemporain, *Art et féminisme* (Montréal: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1982), p. 5.

concerned with nationalism."[55] This statement suggests, not only a gap between the two cultures, but also a perception among English-speaking women that Québécois women could not be part of both the women's movement and the separatist movement in Quebec.[56] The split between the English and French cultures in Montreal has been a continual struggle for Powerhouse Gallery, but by the late 1980s, the membership of Powerhouse had transformed into a predominantly francophone group. The decision to change the name in 1990 to La Centrale reflects this movement.[57]

Vancouver had a particularly strong artist-run movement in the 1960s and 1970s, with a particular focus on new media and technologies. Intermedia catered to collaborative art practices and to artists working in different media and technologies, Video Inn concentrated solely on video art, and the Western Front offered a space to a wider variety of artistic disciplines.[58] Initially named Reelfeelings Women's Collective in 1973, Women in Focus was officially established in 1974. Its objective was to serve

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[55]Pat Leslie, "Powerhouse Art Gallery celebrating third birthday," *The Other Woman*. Vol. 4, no. 3 (1976), p. 3.

[56]In her article, "A History, or a Way of Knowing," Powerhouse member Nell Tenhaaf states, "Conditions at Galerie Powerhouse were further complicated by its roots in anglophone North-American feminist ideals within the context of a majority francophone culture engaged in its own complex identity issues." Nell Tenhaaf, "A History, or a Way of Knowing," p. 81.

[57]There is not the space in this essay to analyze this aspect of Powerhouse Gallery/La Centrale, but it is an important part of the organization's history that has yet to be examined. Within this essay, it is important because it demonstrates the exclusions that are made even within an organization that intended to serve all women artists.

[58]Stan Douglas, (ed),*Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), pp. 27-29.

women working in video and film, acting as a production and distribution centre.[59]

Women in Focus members felt that women working specifically in this medium needed an alternative centre to serve them in particular: "Because so few women do gain recognition the collective believes it is essential to expand our distribution library with the works of other feminist artists, thus increasing their exposure as women producers, and at the same time providing an alternative to what the public is currently aware of."[60] Members believed that traditional images of women had in fact replaced women with a fabrication, one often created by "a male-defined society" and tainted with violence: "[T]he iconography of representation, the use of myth and symbols, has in fact removed her very face."[61] Women in Focus established itself immediately as a consciously feminist organization: "[W]e are using the word "feminist" to explore what it is to be female, not male; other than, different from the way in which we have been represented and imaged by men."[62] In reaction to these male-created stereotypes, participants of

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[59]As I was unable to visit the archives of Women in Focus in Vancouver, the information I have gathered stems largely from newspaper and magazine articles and a few brochures that I found in the archives of other groups. Of all four "second-wave" groups that I am including in this chapter, it was most difficult to find information on Women in Focus due to a lack of printed material. It is difficult to determine whether this lack is due to the geographic distance between Montreal and Vancouver or whether it is because there has been little material published by and about Women in Focus.

[60]ANNPAC, *Retrospective Parallelogramme 3: Spaces By Artists* (Toronto: ANNPAC, 1979), p. 343.

[61]Gillean Chase as quoted in Sheila Munro, "Women in Focus,"*Canadian Forum* (January 1984), p. 30.

[62]Gillean Chase, "Introduction," *Women in Focus: Video and Film Catalogue* (Vancouver: Ultra Litho, 1984).

Women in Focus were dedicated to the presentation of images produced, directed, and created by women on women.

In its 1978-79 season, the organization began sponsoring the Vancouver Women's Video and Film Festival and subsequently opened the Women's Art Gallery. Arguing that "most, if not all, art galleries do not consider much of women's art as art," Women in Focus opened a space where "women-defined art" could be shown under the control of women artists.[63] The members of this Gallery took a strong feminist stand on the art that should be exhibited there, outlining that the material "be non-sexist and not contrary to feminist theory". Also they specifically stated that, if included in their work, men should "be portrayed in a non-traditional, non-oppressive way or appear as part of a feminist political statement."[64]

Activities at Women in Focus over its life-time included the production and distribution primarily of feminist videotapes and film, the documentation of feminist events in the Vancouver community through video and photography, workshops on women's issues, and a gallery.[65] The films listed in their production and distribution catalogues included work focussed on women artists but also those produced by women artists dealing with issues of Canadian feminism, like the suffrage movement and lesbianism in Canada, to lives of Canadian women, like traditional Canadian folk and

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[63]ANNPAC, *Retrospective Parallelogramme 3: Space By Artists*, p. 344.

[64]Ibid., p. 346.

[65]"Women in Focus," promotional flyer. Womanspirit archives, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London.

blues singers.[66]

One of the main concentrations of this organization was on media images of women and how these images perpetuate, not only stereotypes of women, but also violence against women. Video work by members like artist Marion Barling helped to expose "the prevalence of violence towards women in our so-called liberated world."[67] The existence of Women in Focus enabled such work to be produced and distributed. In her work Barling proposes the need for a "feminist media aesthetic," which would address the works and priorities of women artists. In order for such an aesthetic to exist, however, Barling recognized that women had to learn the technology. Here again Women in Focus was able to accommodate this need.

Women in Focus died in 1996 due predominantly to lack of funding.[68] Many women artists believe that women now have access to, as well as the technical knowledge to participate in, other organizations, like Western Front in Vancouver, where they can experiment with and show their video work. However, the discriminatory structures still remain. Until there is a shift in the writing and understanding of Canadian art history, discrimination against women artists will always exists.[69] The documentation of

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[66]*Women in Focus: Production and Distribution Catalogue* (Vancouver: Women in Focus, 1977).

[67]Gillean Chase, "Introduction," *Women in Focus: Video and Film Catalogue*

[68]Information received from the archivist at the Women in Focus archives at the University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections.

[69]As Linda Alcoff points out in her essay, "Feminist Theory and Social Science: New knowledges, new epistemologies," feminist theory and theories of sexual difference are inescapably located within a greater discipline dominated by patriarchal ideologies. Similarly,

organizations like Women in Focus, then, is fundamental in order that Canada remember its activities and not again experience amnesia as it did towards "first-wave" women artists' groups. Perhaps Vancouver will yet again see the creation of such groups in another few decades and the knowledge of this history will help avoid repetition and provide strategic strength.

Similar to the other groups, Womanspirit in London, Ontario started as a consciousness-raising group of women artists. The core group of women started meeting in 1977 at Sasha McInnes-Hayman's studio to discuss issues regarding the status of women artists in Canada.[70] Incorporated in 1978 as the Womanspirit Art Research and Resource Centre, the group suffered from financial instability for the next several years. The organization was supported predominantly by women artists and art supporters in the London region, largely from the University of Western Ontario community.

Initially Womanspirit focussed on two main issues. One was to establish a history of Canadian women artists and the other was to document contemporary artists to ensure that the current history not be lost. McInnes-Hayman, director of the space until 1983, "saw the importance of encouraging women artists to share their experiences with one another and of making the creations of women, both historical and contemporary more

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the production of art by women in Canada is trapped within a patriarchal context. The framework and the assumptions within must change in order for women artist to gain equality. Linda Alcoff, "Feminist Theory and Social Science: New knowledges, new epistemologies," in Nancy Duncan (ed), *BodySpace* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 13-27.

[70]"A Brief History of Womanspirit," Womanspirit archives, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

accessible."[71] As a weaver, McInnes-Hayman had exhibited across Canada and had connections with other women artists throughout the country. She started the centre's activities by conducting surveys with women artists asking questions regarding their experiences, and requesting slides to include in Womanspirit's documentation centre. The response was one of generous support.[72] McInnes-Hayman subsequently compiled a summary of the responses from over 300 surveys conducted with women artists across the country.[73] The slide registry reached 4,000 slides of works by Canadian women artists throughout history.[74]

Canadian art historian Kalene Nix organized a history of women artists in Canada from 1900 to 1945 and planned an exhibition of work by these artists to be held at the London Regional Art Gallery in 1983. Although the research was completed, the show was never mounted. Other special projects included the Native Women's Project in 1980 which sent out questionnaires to Native women artists in an attempt to include their needs within the organization, however, the archives now only contain six responses to this questionnaire.[75] In the early 1980s, members undertook a study of Canadian Women

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[71]Janet Rogers, "Where the Spirit of Women is Gathered," *Scrapbook*, Womanspirit archives, D. B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario.

[72]Interview with Nancy Kendall, original Board Member of Womanspirit, June 3, 1997, London, Ontario.

[73]Sasha McInnes-Hayman, "Contemporary Canadian women artists: a survey," 1980.

[74]After Womanspirit's demise, the slides were transferred to the Visual Arts Slide Library at the University of Western Ontario.

[75]"Research on Native women artists: preliminary report," file, Womanspirit archives, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario,

Photographers from 1841 to 1941 which resulted in an exhibition at the London Regional Art Gallery.[76]

Despite the success of the resource centre, McInnes-Hayman continued to be told by women artists that what they really needed was a space to show their work. In 1980, then, Womanspirit received some funding and opened a gallery space. The following year members began producing a journal entitled *Spirale: A Woman's Art & Culture Quarterly*. Reaching women artists across the country, this journal announced events and exhibitions, included essays on historical and contemporary artists and raised issues about women artists' status in Canada.

One of the main emphases of Womanspirit, undoubtedly motivated by the interests of McInnes-Hayman, was in documenting the discrimination against women artists in Canadian art institution and in countering this discriminatory practices by documenting a different history, that of Canadian women artists. McInnes-Hayman, on behalf of Womanspirit, produced several studies which exposed the under-representation of women in organizations like the Ontario Arts Council as well as in the main Canadian art history texts used at universities.[77] A significant accomplishment on behalf of the members of Womanspirit was an intense uncovering of Canadian women artists working

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[76]"History of Organization," Womanspirit archives, D. B. Weldon Library, London, Ontario. The catalogue for this show is Laura Jones, *Rediscovery: Canadian Women Photographers, 1841-1941* (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1983).

[77]Sasha McInnes-Hayman with Kalene Nix and Julie Guard, "Women and the Ontario Arts Council: A Study," *Spirale* (Autumn 1981), pp. 19-23; Sasha McInnes-Hayman, "Representation of female and male artists in Canadian art history texts used in the Visual Arts Department, University of Western Ontario, 1980-1981: a report," unpublished. Womanspirit archives, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London.

prior to 1930. Hunting through archives throughout the country, members were able to compile a list of close to 600 women, with full biographical information on 100, but only able to find partial or minimal information on the others.[78] Discovering the difficulty in locating material on historical Canadian women artists, organizers of Womanspirit placed renewed emphasis on documenting contemporary artists to ensure that history did not repeat itself.

The main problems Womanspirit faced, in the end causing its closure in 1986, seemed to lie with financial strains, resulting in internal conflict. After an initial powerful start due to the energy of the founding members, a second generation of younger artists entered and felt excluded from the tight group of older women who had formed the organization. According to Nancy Kendall, one of the original Board members, this handing over from one generation to another was extremely painful and, in her opinion, typical of feminist organization, ending with the loss and resentment of the older generation and consequently, the loss of history. Kendall believes that the closing of Womanspirit did not reflect a lack of interest or a lack of activities by the group. It was due, she insists, entirely to funding cuts and internal conflicts.[79]

This problem of exclusion reflects a trend within the North American women's

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[78]Rogers, "Where the Spirit of Women is Gathered."

[79]Interview with Nancy Kendall, June 3, 1977, London, Ontario. To Kendall, the relation between internal conflicts and financial problems is not coincidental. It is possible that, although not causing the problems, funding cuts heighten internal conflicts by straining the space and staff allowed to organizations like Womanspirit. Without the space and staff needed to share the knowledge and train younger and interested women, the possibility for survival and continued interest decreases.

movement. After its initial impact, the women's movement was criticized for its essentialism. This belief in a true essence of woman was appealing because it provided women with an identity of their own, one that existed outside the patriarchal order.[80] Many feminists clung to this view of woman because it suggested the possibility of, perhaps even a natural intuition towards, a solidarity among women. It crossed over all differences among women and united them under the experience of shared oppression.

This "sisterhood" was believed to be the only way to create a unified and effective movement. Linda Briskin has suggested that this solidarity was so desired that it blinded members to its obvious discriminations:

> Sisterhood implied that women had varying problems, but a basic commonality of experience which united them in practical struggle. Energy was expended in maintaining the delusion. Lack of understanding of the limitations of this perspective made women look for the failure of their strategy elsewhere. In fact, this sisterhood was a myth.[81]

Essentialist tendencies appeared in the work of women artists through the glorification of women's biology, through representations of her body. In Canada women artists using this kind of imagery included Lisa Steele, Joyce Wieland and Gathie Falk. This "essentialist" position enabled women "to give meanings of their own to themselves and their culture."[82] Nevertheless, it reinforced the notion of a universal experience of woman. It soon became clear that this unity, this "shared oppression," simply re-

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[80]Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

[81]Briskin, p. 26.

[82]Rozsika Parker & Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 136.

established the dominance of white, heterosexual, middle-class experience.[83] For women artists' spaces this new awareness of a hierarchy of oppression within women groups left two options: either they would have to begin to address these problems and make conscious attempts to include women with different backgrounds and experiences, or fail to meet their mandates.

bell hooks has pointed out that the failure of the women's movement to end sexist oppression is based on white women's reluctance to relinquish their "hegemonic dominance."[84] Despite the fact that these groups may have reached out to women of different classes, cultures and races, the groups were formed by white, middle-class women and consequently, the issues they addressed reflected the experiences of those women. Although many participants of "second-wave" groups have distanced themselves from the activities of "first-wave" feminism because of its racist philosophies, hooks has shown that this desire to maintain racial superiority remained a central tool during "second-wave" feminism.

While women's groups faced these internal problems, women artists continued to be discriminated against in Canada well into the 1980s. That a group of women artists in Toronto was motivated to create the Women's Art Resource Centre in 1984 demonstrates that even by this late date (twenty years after the accepted emergence of "second-wave feminism") women artists still felt that their needs were not being met. The founders

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[83]Parker and Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, p. 64.

[84]bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 53.

were inspired by the publication of *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* by the Toronto Women's Press, which includes an essay on art and feminism in Canada.[85] The organization was initially funded through a Canada Council Explorations Grant. Intended to fund research to determine the need for a women's art resource, members instead quickly took that money to create the centre.[86] The mandate behind this organization, then, is slightly different from the previously mentioned groups, in that it has focussed on the need for a documentation centre for Canadian women artists. An important function of this centre is to provide research and records about the activities and work of women artists, not only to artists but to the Canadian public, thus supplying a much needed educational tool. Another objective of the centre is to evaluate the status of women artists in Canada.

One of WARC's vital contributions to the history of women artists is the publication of the quarterly magazine *Matriart*. Begun in 1990, *Matriart* is the only contemporary national periodical dedicated solely to the work of women artists. Articles in *Matriart* range from profiles of individual artists and exhibitions to current events to the status of women in the arts in Canada. In a further attempt to respond proactively to the evolving needs of Canadian women artists, in 1992 it created *The Walls of WARC* which serves as a small exhibition space. Usually exhibiting one work at a time, this

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[85]Daphne Read, "But is it Feminist Art?" in Fitzgerald, Guberman & Wolfe (eds), *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1982), pp. 287-299.

[86]Conversation with Linda Abrahams of the Women's Art Resource Centre, February 4, 1997. The Canada Council's Annual Report for 1985-86 is the first report to record funding for a "Women's Information Centre." It was granted $10,000. *The Canada Council 29th Annual Report Supplement* (Ottawa: Canada Council, 1987), p. 73.

space has exhibited both one-woman installations, varying in media from fibres to video, and collaborative work, including the *Quilt Project* of 1994 in which women from across Canada participated.

The Women's Art Resource Centre has taken several steps to try to overcome the white, middle-class nature of so many of the separate women's groups. It has made a conscious effort to include women of different backgrounds. Consequently, its membership now includes women of different ages, of different cultures, and working with a range of media and techniques. Issues of *Matriart* have covered a variety of issues, trying to touch on the many different perspectives of Canadian women artists. Subject issues include such topics as, "Lesbian Artists," "Women Artists of the First Nations," "Women, Art and Age," "Body/Self Image," "Women and Technology," and "Art/Craft Hierarchy."[87]

In addition, WARC is unique in that its mandate is to serve women artists across the country. In fact, this national interest is an important aspect of the organization, at once separating it from its contemporary groups and linking it to the early activities of the Women's Art Association of Canada. WARC differentiates itself from this earlier group, however, because it fosters a feminist politics which it does not recognize in the WAAC's activities. With its national scope and with its acknowledgement of women's differences,

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[87]"Lesbian Artists," *Matriart* Vol. 1, no. 2, 1990; "Women Artists of the First Nations," *Matriart* Vol. 2, no. 1, 1991; "Women Against Violence," *Matriart* Vol. 2, no. 2, 1991; "Women, Art and Age," *Matriart* Vol. 2., no. 4, 1992; "Body/Self Image," *Matriart* Vol. 3, no. 3, 1993; "Women and Technology," *Matriart* Vol. 4, no. 3, 1994; "Art/Craft Hierarchy," *Matriart* Vol. 4, no. 4, 1994.

the Women's Art Resource Centre is trying to provide a place where women artists of all backgrounds can come together to share and to grow as a united, but diverse, group. The success of WARC's efforts would appear to be demonstrated not only by its continued existence and indeed growth, membership now exceeding 3,000, but also by the positive reaction and support of so many Canadian women artists for its efforts. Shirley Bear, a prominent native women artist and a member of WARC, feels that WARC's activities are important for women artists because it has provided a place of refuge for them: "I find it a safe-art-house for me."[88]

One of WARC's most influential contributions to the Canadian art world thus far has been its studies of the status of women artists in Canada. By examining the large public art collections in cities throughout Canada, its members have produced numerous studies published in *Matriart*, showing time and again the under-representation of women artists in Canadian art collections (see Appendix B).[89] The motivation behind these studies was, in part, to determine whether the general public's perception, that women artists had achieved equal representation in both public and commercial galleries, was accurate. However, the results of their studies clearly show that women artists in Canada continue to be shockingly under-represented and therefore that the need for alternative

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[88]Shirley Bear, "Closing Statements," *The Status of Women in the Arts*. Video. WARC, 1994.

[89]"Statistics on the National Gallery of Canada," *Matriart* (Vol. 5, no. 1, 1994), pp. 6-14; "Statistics on the Vancouver Art Gallery," *Matriart* (Vol. 5, no. 2, 1995), pp. 26-31; "Statistics on the Art Gallery of Ontario," *Matriart* (Vol. 5, no. 3, 1995), pp. 24-26; "Statistics on the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts," *Matriart* (Vol. 5, no. 4, 1995), pp. 16-19; "Statistics on the Beaverbrook Art Gallery," *Matriart* (Vol. 6, no. 1, 1996), pp. 18-19. WARC's study of the National Gallery of Canada is reproduced in Appendix B.

spaces has not disappeared.[90]

As recently as 1989 Dawn Dale, an artist in Aylmer, Quebec, described her conflicts and frustrations in trying to balance her responsibilities as a mother and as an artist. Despite the progress made for women in Canada, this centuries-old problem continues to plague her and results in her isolation:

> My duties as primary care-giver to our child and responsibilities for the major domestic chores ensure my basic subsistence for the moment. But traditional roles are an uneasy reality in the economics of this household considering that artists can rarely make a living wage and domestic workers are, all too often, not taken seriously as artists. Until recently, I had a great sense of isolation....[91]

At the end of her discussion, Dale expressed renewed hope based on the fact that her community was starting a women artists' group. She saw a possible end to her isolation not only as an artist but as a feminist through working with other women artists.

The women involved in these "second-wave" artist groups demonstrate continued feelings of isolation and discrimination. Unlike the "first-wave" groups, however, those since the 1970s often aligned themselves consciously and closely to the politics of the women's liberation movement. In addition to providing a space in which women artists can work and exhibit, members of these later groups also recognized the importance of documenting the work and activities of women artists and, thus, in most cases established a documentation centre. Although women of the WAAC have provided us with historical

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[90]Linda Abrahams, "Who Counts and Who's Counting?" *Matriart*. Vol. 5 no. 1 (1994), pp. 6-18.

[91]Dawn Dale, "Personal Choices, Public Spaces," *Locations: Feminism, Art, Racism, Religion* (Toronto: WARC, 1989), p. 21.

information through talks and essays printed in both their annual reports and in the National Council of Women's *Yearbooks,* their main concern was not ensuring that their members' activities be recorded in Canadian art history. In fact, much of the very early information about the creation of WAAC is lost because meetings were informal and unrecorded.[92] "Second-wave" groups often focussed on this aspect of their organization, offering educational tools both to artists and the general Canadian public regarding the history of women artists.

Now, over twenty years later, statistics show that women continue to be under-represented in Canadian art collections, and their histories are still largely unknown. Although the women artists' groups of the "second-wave" have once again raised Canadians' awareness of women artists, the risk of losing this knowledge is real. How can this cycle be stopped? In what sort of art world do these dangers disappear?

The future I see women artists' spaces working towards is not one that merely adds women artists to the established male-dominated art institutions and histories. The framework itself must be disrupted, destabilized and continually questioned. In her study of the representation of women artists in Canadian commercial galleries, Judith Baldwin often heard collectors explain that they did not collect as many works by women artists because "women's art just was not as good as men's art."[93] Through her frustration Baldwin concludes that we must "conceive of even more ways to give women their voice

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[92]Lynn Cumine, President WAAC, 1997.

[93]Judith Baldwin, "Gender Representation in Canadian Commercial Galleries," *Matriart.* Vol. 4, no. 1 (1993), p. 18.

within the art world - even if this means creating a new world in which to look at and create art."[94]

For me this new world would not involve judging art as good or bad, for such judgement demands fixed criteria which undoubtedly exclude certain kinds of media, cultures, subject-matters and styles. This utopia would allow artists, no matter what their gender, race, class or history, to achieve self-recognition as artists, to grow, develop, and innovate with confidence. History would not be constructed as one line; there would be only histories which were as much horizontal as vertical. These histories would be based upon personal experiences, and individual and collective memory as much as on written documentation.

It seems to me, that until such a time, separate spaces remain one of the few strategies open to women artists to survive as a vocal force. In order that these spaces continue to exist, then, it is important to acknowledge their internal structural problems and to address the external arguments which have been mounted against them.

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[94]Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICS OF LOCATION: PERSONAL AND PUBLIC

In her 1994 essay "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," Caren Kaplan pointed out that "a concern with location and space, with rooms of one's own, with expanding 'home' from the domestic to the public sphere, has been one of the hallmarks of Western feminist practice."[1] The need for, and creation of, women artists' spaces in Canada seem clear illustrations of this concern. Location, both metaphorically and physically, has become a prime issue for these spaces. Rising out of the discriminatory practices of the Canadian art world, these spaces have served as sites of education, support, opportunity and consciousness-raising. Simultaneously, however, they have also mirrored the racist and classist social structures of the larger, dominant culture. In relation to women artists' spaces, location takes on complex and plural meanings. It has acted initially as a physical source of refuge and change, but has also adopted the political position of an identifiable group of Canadians working in the margins but nevertheless within the dominant discourse. Location, then, with its multiple meanings, is a key factor in analyzing the history of the cycle of these gendered spaces.

In examining these women artists' spaces as a continuous history in twentieth-century Canada, it is possible to decipher a developing and potentially never-ending cycle. Members of the Women's Art Association of Canada created their organization in

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[1]Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice", in Grewal & Kaplan (eds), *Scattered Hegemonies: postmodernity and transnational feminist practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 137.

order to satisfy unmet needs of women artists. These artists were often excluded from the professional world due to their gender and thus established a separate space where they could train and receive opportunities comparable to those open to men artists. Once they perceived this need had been met, and that indeed they had not only succeeded in achieving these opportunities but had gained entrance into this formerly gender-exclusive world, the mandate of the organization was believed to be redundant. After a period of assumed equality, however, the discriminatory practices of the Canadian art world once again overpowered the activities of women artists and thus the demand for alternative organizations was re-established. In reaction to this need women artists founded new spaces in which to fulfill many of the same goals as their predecessors.

Currently, many Canadian women artists have once again perceived that equality has been gained and several alternative spaces, like Women in Focus and Womanspirit, at least in part because they too are now assumed to be unnecessary. This perception of equality, however, is debatable. The risk that history will repeat itself is real. Consequently, an examination of the history of women artists' spaces and an analysis of its causes, its activities and its effects are imperative if this cycle is to be understood and interrupted.

In this chapter I will look at the organizations of the "first" and "second-wave" feminisms together in order to understand their activities as parts of a continuous and growing cycle of women artists' spaces in Canada. I will look at how these organizations have changed throughout the century, particularly in terms of structural philosophy, but also at their similarities. Most importantly, however, I will approach this history from

my current position, which is within a precarious environment of threatened post-feminism, and a return in Canada to the political right. My emphasis, then, within this historical analysis is on the need for a documented history but simultaneously, on the need for theoretical analysis of feminist activity in Canada.

There are several factors among both the "first-wave" and "second-wave" groups that link them. Primarily these similarities lie with the motivation for the creation of such spaces. Members of both generations voiced frustration and isolation in trying to succeed as women artists. The limited opportunities open to them as (white) women artists, in addition to their responsibilities as wives and mothers, made a career as artists not only a difficult path but also a lonely one. As a result, they created separate spaces in order to improve their access to the art world and to provide a supportive community.

The philosophy behind the structures of the organizations of either generation, however, is distinct. In part these differences reflect the specific goals of each period's organizations, but they are also influenced by the differences between "first" and "second-wave" feminisms. The primary motivation behind the Women's Art Association, for example, was for women artists to gain entrance into the established (male) art world. In order to achieve this goal, then, women artists had to prove themselves equal to men and able to compete on the same terms. On the other hand, many of the spaces of the 1970s initially celebrated women's difference from men and hoped to establish an alternative art world where media and subject-matter assumed to be "feminine" would be highlighted.

Carol Lee Bacchi, a Canadian feminist historian, has looked at the division between the "sameness" and "difference" camps within feminism. She suggested that

although the debate surrounding the effectiveness of either strategy has been a focus of much feminist analysis, in fact this division is not an accurate description of the history of the movement.[2] Rosi Braidotti reiterated this point, writing, "Far from separating the struggle for equality from the affirmation of difference, I see them as complementary and part of a continuous historical evolution."[3] These arguments seem well-illustrated in the history of women artists' spaces, because the women involved cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group who all either supported a strategy of sameness or that of difference. Nevertheless, it does seem possible to discern from the organizations of each time period different strategic philosophies.

Internal structures of these organizations also differ. The WAAC reproduced the traditional hierarchy of male-dominated organizations. In addition, its affiliation with the National Council of Women, under the leadership of Lady Aberdeen, was highly concerned with valorization of the organization by prominent members of society. As Heather Haskins has stated, this need for outside approval is evident in the invitation of members of the male associations to events and exhibitions.[4]

All the organizations discussed in Chapter Two, however, were run by collective management, a structure found in many of the alternative spaces in the 1970s. This

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[2]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Same Difference: Feminism and Sexual Difference* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990).

[3]Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 161.

[4]Heather Haskins, "Bending the rules: The Montreal Branch of the Women's Art Association of Canada, 1894-1900" (M.A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995), p. 63.

model was also believed to be more reflective of a feminist ideology. The white, middle-class women's movement at the time, of which these women artists' groups were a part, generally upheld these counter-institutional beliefs. This kind of structure was believed to be more inclusive, less discriminatory and therefore more feminist than hierarchical.

Despite these women's desire to found real alternatives with different structures and different foci, they catered nonetheless to limited groups of women. In this manner, they are not dissimilar from earlier groups like the WAAC. Furthermore, because many of the issues that the WAAC faced had still not been resolved by the 1970s, much of their motivation and indeed many of their goals were alike. They concentrated on proving women's abilities as professional artists and struggled against the perpetual perception of women's proper place as being the home. As previously mentioned, Iris Marion Young has pointed out the desire among women to form separate communities as a way to challenge the isolation and alienation women often feel in patriarchal societies.[5] In creating such communities, however, Young also points out that there is a tendency for members to "suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify."[6] Such a result is evident in women artists' groups as the women included and considered tended to be white and middle-class. The belief, then, in addressing the oppression of all women, and the drive towards a sisterhood among all women was contained within a discriminatory vision.

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[5]Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," in Linda J. Nicholson (eds), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 300.

[6]Ibid.

This new feminist consciousness was clearly "shaped by the structures of White male hegemony."[7]

Both waves of feminism have often been criticized for their white-middle-classness. What is less common, however, is a questioning of why these women would have recreated patriarchy's racist and classist ideals while trying to defeat it. The best-known example of this questioning is to be found in Audre Lorde's 1983 statement that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[8] Noga Gayle explored this idea by looking at the history of Black women's experiences in Canada. She concluded that these women have a long history of resistance movements, often in the form of religious, social, and political organizations, yet the leaders of the feminist movement never turned to these hidden examples.[9] In striving to obtain equality with men, white, middle-class women thus sought to be part of a system that oppressed other women. Himani Bannerji explained, "Far from being our 'sisters,' these middle-class women are complicit in our domination."[10]

This racism and classism, then, is another way in which the two generations of

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[7]Noga A. Gayle, "Black Women's Reality and Feminism: An Exploration of Race and Gender," in D. Currie & V. Raoul (eds), *Anatomy of Gender: Women's Struggle for the Body* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), p.233.

[8]Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in C. Moraga & G. Anzaldua (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), pp. 98-101.

[9]Gayle, pp. 233- 234.

[10]Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1995), p. 52.

organizations are similar.[11] Undoubtedly this repetition is due in part to the lack of knowledge on the part of the "second-wave" feminist organizations of their "first-wave" ancestors. The writers of the book *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* explained that at the beginning of "second-wave" feminism in the 1960s, "we had no sense of a history of women organizing for change."[12] As a result, women made an effort to learn their history and discovered that they were in fact part of a long tradition of women reformers.

Despite this claim, from the information available it is not clear that women artists of the 1970s were familiar with the activities of organizations like the Women's Art Association. It is possible to suggest reasons for this lack of knowledge and lack of desire to discover the knowledge. Women artists' groups, while influenced by the feminist movement, were for the most part more closely associated with the contemporary movement of alternative, artist-run centres. Perhaps the push by the feminist movement to discover women's histories, then, was less urgent for these women than their need to be part of a growing and exciting movement of Canadian artists. In addition, the mandate of the WAAC, having changed in the 1950s, was concerned almost

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[11]Roxana Ng has explained that because categories like gender and race/ethnicity are constructed and not fixed entities that it follows that what constitutes them changes over time. In relation to this study, it is perhaps fair to say that the racism that these organizations have demonstrated over the last century has changed, it nonetheless has played an important role in the construction all these women's groups regardless of time period. Roxana Ng, "Sexism, Racism, and Canadian Nationalism", in J. Vorst et al (eds), *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds & Barriers* (Toronto: Between the Lines with the Society for Socialist Studies, 1989), p. 18.

[12]Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 27.

exclusively with philanthropic activities. This mandate was so different from those of the contemporary women groups that the relationship between the WAAC and contemporary groups was obscured and the need to research its history may have appeared irrelevant.

Furthermore, because the history of women artists in Canada at the start of the "second-wave" was so scarce, only the history of successful white women artists was readily available. This limited history was common to other fields as well and thus women's history, disguised as being that of all women, really meant the history, in general, of white, middle-class women. Participants in "second-wave" groups wanted to disassociate themselves from this elitist family, believing that they had progressed beyond this narrow view. It is now clear, however, they were in fact closely related to these early roots.

In addition to the "discovery" of women's history, consciousness-raising became an important part of the new feminism. This activity was meant to show women that they were not alone and that their oppression was one they shared with all women. Once again, the experiences of this "sisterhood" were based on the lives of the dominant group, leaving out any other experiences, like those lived by native women, women of colour, immigrant women and working-class women. First Nations artist Loretta Todd expressed her frustration at her exclusion in an essay she wrote in 1992: "Borders have been defined between the baptized and the unwashed, the same and the different - borders that maintain power even as they offer help."[13]

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[13]Loretta Todd, "Cultural Order," in Max Wyman (ed), *Vancouver Forum I: Old Powers, New Forces* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992), p. 59.

Women artists' groups, because of their segregation and their celebration of their identities as women, have also been caught in the essentialist trap. Many opponents of women-only spaces believe that such groups ghettoize art by women, marginalize the work and perpetuate patriarchy's control. Others believe that separate spaces only further the division between men and women. These women oppose strategies that divide men and women because they merely "produce the sexual difference [they] sought to eliminate."[14] Advocates of women-only groups, however, feel the re-establishment of sexual difference is a needed step towards ending it.

The main controversy behind the existence and usefulness of women artists' groups, however, lies in the definition of the category "women." As the focus of these groups, the definition of "women" is integral. Whether such a definition exists and, if it does, who it includes, are questions continually asked. This controversy, which divides feminists, is found in the activities of women groups, as well as in the feminist theory that has risen over the last few decades. The dilemma feminists face, according to Linda Alcoff "is that our very self-definition is grounded in a concept that we must deconstruct and de-essentialize in all of its aspects."[15]

As Lorraine Code explained, another function of consciousness-raising has been the creation of feminist theory:

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[14]Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists & the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 3.

[15]Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs*. Vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring 1988), p. 406.

> The starting point of feminist theory, then, is in women's lives: in the varied experiences of women; and in the concrete situations where they live and are differently marginalized and disadvantaged. Theoretical analysis is integral to feminism, because women's experiences do not speak for themselves. For this reason, consciousness-raising was crucially important in the early years of the current women's movement.[16]

However, like the activities of women's groups, this initial theory was exclusive and discriminatory. As Jane Flax pointed out, feminist desire to define a feminist viewpoint required the suppression of diverse women's experiences for they threatened the "authority"of the dominant view.[17] Iris Marion Young takes this idea further suggesting that the desire for such a community "relies on the same desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism."[18]

The subject of these communities is, of course, women. The category "women" is the starting point and the focus of feminism, but it has also been the source of the main problem, stemming from the need to deconstruct the very concept of woman. Julia Kristeva is largely responsible for initiating this deconstruction by suggesting in 1974 that "a woman cannot 'be'," and thus challenging the very notion of "woman."[19] In this same essay, Kristeva also wrote that, although feminists must question the construction of

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[16]Lorraine Code, "Feminist Theory," in Burt, Code & Dorney (eds), *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*. 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), p. 20.

[17]Jane Flax, "Postmodern and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," *Signs*. Vol. 12, no. 4 (Summer 1987), p. 633.

[18]Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," p. 302.

[19]Julia Kristeva, "Woman Can Never Be Defined," in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 137.

the category "woman," it is, nevertheless, still integral to maintain it in order for the women's movement to proceed.[20]

Linda Alcoff has identified two ways in which feminist theorists have dealt with this issue since the 1970s: cultural feminism and post-structuralist feminism.[21] By her definition, cultural feminism posits a female essence and returns the focus back to the female. On the other hand, feminism influenced by post-structuralism puts forward the theory that woman as a category is a social construction. As Alcoff has suggested, both of these theories, though very different, seem to take away any agency from women. The first states that women are defined by their biology and the second that we are created by our social environment.

Diana Fuss, in her 1989 book *Essentially Speaking*, has defined two traditional feminist positions: essentialist and constructionist. In her introduction, she submitts that essentialism, the belief in a "pure or original femininity," has been posited in opposition to constructionism, which "insists that essence is itself a historical construction."[22] In opposition to this established binarism, Fuss suggests that the two positions are in fact both distinct and interdependent. This feminist debate has persisted since the early 1980s and, Fuss proposes, has brought feminist theory to an impasse, creating at once a "deadlock" and a "certain paranoia." In her writings, then, Fuss submerges herself within

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[20]Ibid., p. 138.

[21]Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," pp. 405-436.

[22]Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

this debate in order to find a way out for feminist theorists.[23]

Nevertheless, many contemporary constructionists, or anti-essentialists, continue to use these arguments to criticize essentialist organizations and it is important to consider their arguments when looking at women-only groups. For example, Denise Riley has become known for her criticism of essentialist strategies. In her book *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of 'Women'*, Riley puts forward her anti-essentialist ideas, pointing out the dangers of a generic definition of women.[24] She criticizes essentialist positions for ignoring the complexities among this category and their neglect of historical and cultural specificities. Similarly, bell hooks exposes in her writings the women's movement's racist notion of sisterhood and its inaccurate advocation of common oppression among all women.[25] She does not, however, give up on a solidarity among women, but insists that this unity must respect and embrace the many differences within the complex category of women. A further example is found in the writings of Teresa de Lauretis. In her book on the creation of women as subjects in film, *Alice Doesn't,* de Lauretis examines how the fictional constructions of women differ from the historical realities, but also struggles with contemporary theory to try to find a place for feminist theory and in particular feminist subjectivity.[26]

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[23]Ibid., p.1.

[24]Denise Riley, *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of 'Women'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988).

[25]bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984)

[26]Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Many feminist writers have embraced post-structuralist theories because they help to provide a space where women can be diverse, "it seems to hold out the promise of an increased freedom for women, the 'freeplay' of a plurality of differences unhampered by any predetermined gender identity as formulated by either patriarchy or cultural feminism."[27] Such decentring and destabilizing theories, however, eliminate the possibility of a solution or answer. Consequently, as Jane Flax suggests, while offering new spaces for theorizing, these ideas also convince some people to return to old models where notions of right and wrong are clear.[28]

Tania Modleski, among other feminists, sees another threat within these post-structuralist theories. Her caution in using these theories stems from a discomfort with the belief that woman as a category is purely a construction and thus fictional. Although aware of the dangers of essentialism, she is wary of losing the category of woman altogether:

> I worry that the position of female anti-essentialism as it is being theorized by some feminists today is a luxury open only to the most privileged women. I worry about the consonance of this position with the ones being advanced by certain white male poststructuralist intellectuals who have proclaimed the death of the subject.[29]

She goes on to explain that it is perhaps only those women who have had the advantage of holding a certain amount of power as women who can flirt with idea of abandoning the

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[27]Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism," p. 418.

[28]Flax, p. 628.

[29]Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a `Postfeminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 22.

category.

I would suggest that in relation to women artists' groups, it is often those women artists who have gained acceptance in the art world who do not acknowledge the needs these spaces address. Angela Lee, the Canada Council's current Equity Officer, sees one of the main problems for women artists as one of perception. The public and many women believe that women have achieved equality in the Canadian art world. Her question, then, is "how do we keep perception in line with reality?"[30]

Perhaps part of the answer to this question is to ask who is creating this perception and who is receiving it. The Women's Art Resource Centre's report on the representation of women artists in Canadian art galleries suggests that this perception is extremely inaccurate. It seems plausible to suggest, then, that those who have created and believed this perception are those for whom this equality is real. Esmeralda Thornhill warns white women who have succeeded in gaining power of the danger of their position, "You, White Sisters, who already share a certain amount of power and are finding yourselves with increasing frequency in positions of relative influence, must struggle to avoid becoming a new oppressor emerging from the ranks of the oppressed."[31]

Consequently, until the perception of women artists' equality in Canada is in line with their real position, it seems important that women continue to have spaces of their

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[30]Angela Lee, Equity Office, Canada Council, in *The Status of Canadian Women in the Arts*. Video. Women's Art Resource Centre, 1994.

[31]Esmeralda Thornhill, "Focus on Black Women," in J. Vorst et al (eds), *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds & Barriers* (Toronto: Between the Lines with the Society for Socialist Studies, 1989), p. 32.

own in which to train, exhibit and find support. In order for these organizations to endure, however, the category women must be maintained but perhaps redefined and restructured.

Even those theorists who have spoken out against essentialism and demonstrated the need for deconstructing women have often also expressed the importance of maintaining the category. Denise Riley, for example, known predominantly as an anti-essentialist, stated in a 1992 essay, "[A]n aspect of any feminism in formation *is* that collective self-consciousness of 'being women', and to deny the force of that elective identification would be mistaken, as mistaken as the supposition of its necessary fixity."[32] bell hooks has also stressed the importance of maintaining a unified collective identity of "women" in order for feminist goals to be achieved. She wrote, "There can be no mass-based feminist movement to end sexist oppression without a united front - women must take the initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity."[33]

Both of these women, however, acknowledge the attractive trap of universalism and therefore work cautiously with the term "women." There is no denying that women as a category has been used to advance the situation of a deliberate and limited group of women, excluding all others. Women must find a way to negotiate, ideally against but unavoidably within, the Canadian societal structure of patriarchy within which it is imbricated. As Linda Alcoff explained, critics of Western, predominantly white, feminist

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[32]Denise Riley, "A Short History of Some Preoccupations," in Butler and Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 122.

[33]hooks, p. 44.

theory, "are not calling for Western feminism to disappear but for it to develop a greater self-consciousness about the dangers of its own institutional and cultural location."[34]

Furthermore, perhaps as a category, "women" can be used as the only available tool if it is used as one that is continually being defined and redefined, constructed and reconstructed, and one in which the members include diverse individuals. In order to do so, however, there exists the inevitability of some essentialist thinking. As Gayatri Spivak writes, "The critique of essentialism [needs to be] understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others', but as an acknowledgement of the dangerousness of what one must use."[35] Similarly, Diana Fuss concludes that maybe the time has come to "risk essence."

For women artists, the courage to take this risk and continue to offer separate spaces continues to be a necessary strategy for for the creation of a space in which all women can work openly and confidently as artists. In her 1996 essay "Spatializing Feminism," Linda McDowell discussed the importance of geographic space to the gendered subject and how a politics of location challenges traditional male/female binarisms.[36] Due to the fragility of this position, McDowell concluded that there are still many reasons to create and support women-only spaces, "based on arguments about

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[34]Linda Alcoff, "Feminist Theory and Social Science: New knowledges, new epistemologies," in Nancy Duncan (ed), *Bodyspace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 26.

[35]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with Ellen Rooney, "In a Word. Interview," in Schor and Weed (eds), *The essential difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 157.

[36]Linda McDowell, "Spatializing Feminism: Geographic Perspectives," in Nancy Duncan (ed), *Bodyspace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, pp. 28-44.

solidarity, comfort and safety."[37] The problem now is to restructure these communities in such a way that differences are the foundation bricks.

Rosi Braidotti offers possible strategies in her writings on sexual difference in which she expressed the need to reclaim the category "woman." In 1994 she wrote, "I think that before feminists relinquish the signifier *woman* we need to repossess it and revisit its multifaceted complexities, because these complexities define the one identity we share - as female feminists."[38] Nevertheless, Braidotti also emphasizes that despite the need for a bond of commonality as "the starting point for feminist consciousness,"[39] women are not all the same, echoing Adrienne Rich: "We who are not the same. We who are many and do not want to be the same."[40]

It is from this stand that Braidotti reconfirms the importance of a politics of location. This need to situate ourselves attempts to oppose universalizing tendencies and to provide space within feminism for all women's voices. Struggling with this concept in the early 1980s, Adrienne Rich wrote of the fear it initially imposed upon her as a speaking subject, but also of the responsibility this position forced her to embrace:

> Recognizing our location, having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted - there is a confusion between our claims to the white and Western eye and the woman-seeing eye, fear of losing the centrality of the one even as we claim the other....It was in the writings but also the actions

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[37]Ibid., p. 44.

[38]Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, p. 170.

[39]Ibid, p. 163.

[40]Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, p. 225.

> and speeches and sermons of Black United States citizens that I began to experience the meaning of my whiteness as a point of location for which I needed to take responsibility.[41]

For Rosi Braidotti, writing a decade later, the responsibility is the same, but the idea has solidified, "[T]he sense of location, for me, has to do with countermemory, or the development of alternative genealogies. It means that it does make a difference to have the historical memory of oppression or exclusion, as women, rather than being the empirical referent for a dominant group, like men."[42] Similarly, it is important, in addition to this history of oppression, to document the simultaneous history of agency, the histories of women, both individuals and collectives, who resisted this discrimination and worked to create alternatives.

The positioning of the subject, this politics of location, is now imperative for all feminist activity and writing, and as such seems to have particular significance for organizations like women artists' groups. Here the responsibility is even more important because not only are these groups made of individual subjects but they are physical spaces in which women artists come together. The ideas of Canadian feminist philosopher Lorraine Code may help in explaining this responsibility and the theoretical analysis needed to support it.

Code is concerned with the way in which one individual can, or perhaps more accurately, cannot know another. Working in the field of philosophy, Code's struggle to

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[41]Ibid., p. 219.

[42]Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 164.

find a rhetorical space from which women can speak is not unlike those experienced by members of women artists' groups. Of her own work, Code writes that her objective is "to deflect the focus of philosophical analysis away from single and presumably self-contained propositional utterances pronounced by no one in particular and as though into a neutral space; and to move it into textured locations where it matters who is speaking and where and why...."[43] This objective reflects the politics of location put forward by Braidotti and Rich.

Within this philosophical mindframe, Code also wrestles with how we as individual subjects construct ourselves and each other. She suggests that it is an activity of intersubjectivity.[44] This intersubjectivity implies a continually changing subject, but one that is placed firmly in reality as opposed to what Code sees as the traditional epistemological subject, who is abstract and faceless. In addressing issues of subjectivity and construction of knowledge, Code is distancing herself from the male-dominated tradition of Western philosophy. Her ideas are useful to feminist activities because she explains the need we all have for mutual co-operation in our construction of knowledge. Accordingly, she sees a collective movement as a positive step towards this construction: "It is in the possibilities it generates for communal responsibilities and resistance that I see the greatest single strength of the women's movement."[45] It seems to me that this

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[43]Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), p. x.

[44]Ibid., p. xiv.

[45]Ibid., p. 22.

innovative model offers an ideal example for a new space in which to define "women" and from which women artists' groups could position themselves.

Earlier in this chapter, I cited Lorraine Code's explanation of the importance of consciousness-raising groups to the development of second-wave feminism. Having explored the category women and the notion of a politics of location, it is important now to return to Code to see how she couches her explanation. Code ascertains that theory and consciousness-raising continue to be as important to a women's movement now as they were in the 1960s, but their assumptions must be revisited and revised:

> It can no longer be assumed that there is a single, essential 'women's experience' out of which universal analytic categories can be developed. Differences of race, class, and sexual practices are just a few of the differences that have become primary focal points of theoretical discussion. Contemporary feminist theorists face the task of accounting for differences among women's experiences and, simultaneously, of discerning common threads and themes that make these experiences specific to women.[46]

The interdependent relationship between theory and practice implies that this kind of work is also needed in practical activities.[47]

The situation for women artists' groups now is precarious. Accusations of essentialism, ghettoization and marginalization, in addition to the faulty perception of women's equality in the Canadian art world, threaten the existence of these strategic spaces. Members and participants of these groups must be made aware of these

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[46]Code, "Feminist Theory," p. 21.

[47]Several contemporary feminist writers advocate a clear connection between theory and practice and a need for both. Of the women I have consulted in this chapter, examples include, Lorraine Code, "Feminist Theory," p. 19; Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," p. 623; and Lynne Teather, "The Feminist Mosaic," p. 345.

theoretical questions and consider them in relation to the structure and activities of their organizations. Marlee Kline explains how such ideas must be translated into practice: "Acknowledgement of the complexity of women's experience ... means that we as white feminists cannot merely invite women of colour to join already established agendas. Rather we must relinquish the power to define what feminism means."[48]

In order to understand the sexism inherent in Canadian art history, racism and classism must also be examined.[49] Similarly, it is important to look at women's histories, and subsequently, women artists' histories as continuous and part of a growing history, rather than examining one period at a time. Women artists' groups that have adopted these kind of policies and that have attempted to link their activities with theoretical ideas, like WARC, are succeeding in building awareness and thus slowly bringing about change.[50] If these examples could be followed then perhaps the cycle women artists' groups have experienced throughout the twentieth century can be stopped.

Similarly, as a feminist art historian, I do not want to assume that I have written a

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[48]Marlee Kline, "Women's Oppression and Racism: A Critique of the 'Feminist Standpoint'," in J. Vorst et al (eds), *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds & Barriers* (Toronto: Between the Lines with the Society for Socialist Studies, 1989), p. 49.

[49]Roxana Ng has posited that in looking at the history of Canada, it is impossible to understand class without looking also at gender and race. She wrote, "[Race, gender, and class] must be understood as fluid, constantly changing, interactive, and dialectical." Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism, Nation Building," p. 57.

[50]Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA) in Winnipeg, although not discussed in this thesis has also been successful in encouraging women artists, building their confidence and creating a supportive network of women artists. Through their mentoring program a senior women artist is paired up with a younger artist and the two women work together for one year. By working together, the younger artist learns of the experiences of her mentor and consequently a history is passed on.

history of Canadian women artists' groups in this thesis. Such a declaration would be misleading, if not wrong. By no means have I looked at every women artists' group in the country nor have I been able to discuss all the issues that such groups raise. My intention was to begin to trace the genealogy of this family. Rosi Braidotti has suggested this concept in her 1991 book *Patterns of Dissonance.* In it she suggests that "all theorizing is a genealogical rereading of the premises and assumptions that make one's discourse possible."[51] By sketching out this genealogy of women artists' groups in Canada, I hope to join together the scattered moments of their resistance, thus eliminating the fragmentation patriarchy's power depends upon for survival.[52]

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[51]Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A study of women in contemporary philosophy.* Trans. Elizabeth Guild (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 151.

[52]Ibid., p. 149.

CONCLUSION

In discussing the writing of art history, Griselda Pollock argued that "all history writing is formed in the present," and that "the present is historically shaped."[1] The significance of the relationship between the present and the past in the formation and development of the writing and understanding of art history is obvious. Studying the history of women artists' groups in Canada has forced me to reconsider this relationship and to embrace new ways of approaching and understanding it. I would agree that it is of course in the present that history is constructed. Furthermore, what is fundamental to this construction are its criteria and influences. For women artists' spaces, the lack of a continuous documented history results in a disadvantaged starting point. Without the knowledge of history, how can the past be written and how can the present be shaped?

The consequences of this position include a repetition of past endeavours and the inability to obtain the final goal. Unaware of the experiences of past women artists' spaces, current groups have been unable to draw on and build upon this background. The cyclical nature of these groups also causes the failure to address the underlying roots of this discrimination. In large part addressing these issues would require the acknowledgement of this cycle and the recognition that fragmentation is a tool used by hegemonic forces to maintain the status quo. Memory, then, is an integral tool in bringing about change.

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[1]Griselda Pollock, "The politics of theory," *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 12.

In this period of perceived post-feminism in Canada, the renewed trend towards the political Right threatens to re-establish amnesia.[2] The recent success of the Reform Party, obtaining the status of Opposition Party in Canada's 1997 federal elections, evidence of a return to Conservative policies by many provincial governments, and the recent cuts in the Women's Art Resource Centre's Canada Council annual grant, are all examples of this menacing trend. Already it has contributed to the deaths of Womanspirit and Women in Focus.

Women artists' groups, then, are once again on the cusp of extinction. They must overcome internal problems and document their activities in order to maintain their physical and rhetorical spaces. Establishing public and personal politics of location and adopting a definition of women that depends on difference are two possible strategies towards this end.

For my part, I offer this thesis as a twig in a possible genealogy of women artists' groups in Canada. Within this study, I have attempted to provide a feminist intervention into the canonical writing of Canadian art history, and participate in a new writing which "represent[s] the past not as a flow or development, but as conflict, politics, struggles on the battlefield of representation for power in the structural relations we call class, gender and race."[3] Women artists' histories are distinct from men's; they do exist and they need

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[2]For recent texts on this political move to the Right in Canada see David Frum, *What's Right: The New Conservatism and What It Means for Canada* (Toronto: Random House, 1996) and Angus Reid, *Shakedown: How the New Economy is Changing Our Lives* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1996).

[3]Griselda Pollock, "The politics of theory," p. 12.

to be communicated and remembered. Physical spaces are central players in these histories, providing refuge, support and resistance. Perhaps this story is only a twig in this genealogy but the roots are strong and the tree is growing.

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Interviews

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APPENDIX A

Number of Acquisitions of Works by Canadian Artists by the National Gallery of Canada (including both gifts and purchases)[1]

Years	# by Women Artists	# by Men Artists	Percentage of Works by Women
1880-1885	1	34	2.8
1886-1890	0	24	0
1891-1895	2	23	8.0
1896-1900	0	12	0
1901-1905	0	15	0
1906-1910	8	86	8.5
1911-1915	36	238	13.1
1916-1920	42	239	14.9
1921-1925	22	314	6.5
1926-1930	29	173	14.4
1931-1935	21	86	19.6

[1]These numbers were received through a search on the Canadian Heritage Information Network (C.H.I.N.) and are as of July, 1997. Of course these numbers on their own do not tell the whole story. In the decades that indicate the most acquisitions, many of the works included are of historical and not contemporary work. Also, they do not distinguish between gifts and purchases, nor do they indicate changes in acquisition policies. Examples of policies which influenced acquisitions, include the elimination of a grant for purchases in 1940-1941 as a measure of war economy, and a special grant to purchase works after a fire in the Gallery in 1916 in order to loan works to galleries across the country. *National Gallery of Canada Annual Report 1940-1941* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1941), pp. 10-11; R. H. Hubbard, *The Early Years of the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: The Royal Society of Canada, 1965), p. 126. Also, in general the National Gallery's collecting policies have focussed on specific media, often ignoring handicrafts. It would take close scrutiny of these numbers to achieve an accurate conclusion of their meaning, however, even on their own they do tell a story of discrimination.

Years	# by Women Artists	# by Men Artists	Percentage of Works by Women Artists
1936-1940	12	118	9.2
1941-1945	12	252	7.3
1946-1950	78	179	30.4
1951-1955	25	300	7.7
1956-1960	29	333	8.0
1961-1965	90	555	14.0
1966-1970	67	1 471	4.4
1971-1975	108	2 175	4.7
1976-1980	140	3 145	4.3
1981-1985	211	1 034	17.0
1986-1990	537	1 131	32.2
1991-1995	165	1 036	13.7
1996-1997	51	166	23.5
Unknown	82	103	44.3

APPENDIX B

SURVEY ON THE STATUS OF CANADIAN WOMEN IN THE ARTS

STATISTICS ON THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA
by
Women's Art Resource Centre

Section 1.

REPRESENTATION IN THE CANADIAN, INTERNATIONAL AND PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

Permanent (number of works of art)

a) Number of women artists represented in the Permanent Collection:

1970: 810 1993: 2,432

b) Number of male artists represented in the Permanent Collection:

1970: 10,355 1993: 24,443

c) Number of Canadian women artists represented in the Permanent Collection:

1970: 472 [155 artists] 1993: 1,548 [416 artists]

d) Number of Canadian male artists represented in the Permanent Collection:

1970: 4,096 [701 artists] 1993: 10,978 [1,881 artists]

Canadian (number of works of art)

e) Number of living women artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: 150 1993: 880

f) Number of living male artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: 937 1993: 2,641

g) Number of women artists of colour represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

h) Number of male artists of colour represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

i) Number of First Nations women artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970:	Native:	0	1993:	Native:	2
	Inuit:	15		Inuit:	357

j) Number of First Nations male artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970:	Native:	0	1993:	Native:	20
	Inuit:	21		Inuit:	704

k) Number of Francophone women artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

l) Number of Francophone male artists represented in the Canadian Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

<u>International (numbers of works of art)</u>

m) Number of living women artists represented in the International Collection:

1970: 93 1993: 211

n) Number of living men artists represented in the International Collection:

1970: 1,261 1993: 2,239

o) Number of women artists of colour represented in the International Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

p) Number of male artists of colour represented in the International Collection:

1970: N/A 1993: N/A

Section 2.

ACQUISITION OF WORKS

a) Total amount spent for the acquisition of works by:

		1970:	1993:
1.	women artists	4,513	432,758
2.	men artists	602,945	3,407,060
3.	Canadian women artists	4,385	154,620
4.	Canadian men artists	53,100	825,308

			1970:	1993:
5.	women artists of colour		N/A	N/A
6.	Canadian women artists of colour		N/A	N/A
7.	men artists of colour		N/A	N/A
8.	Canadian men artists of colour		N/A	N/A
9.	First Nations women artists	Native: Inuit:	0 0	12,022 0
10.	First Nations men artists	Native: Inuit:	0 0	49,400 18,480
11.	Francophone women artists		N/A	N/A
12.	Francophone men artists		N/A	N/A

b) From the Gallery's inception to 1993 /Highest amount spent for the acquisition of a work by a:

1.	female artist Name of artist	251,680 Nancy Spero
2.	Canadian female artist Name of the artist	150,000 Emily Carr
3.	male artist Name of artist	3,456,900 Guido Reni
4.	Canadian male artist Name of artist	410,000 Lawren S. Harris

c) Highest amount spent in 1970 for the acquisition of a work by a:

1.	female artist Name of artist	2,140 Joyce Wieland
2.	Canadian female artist Name of artist	2,140 Joyce Wieland
3.	male artist Name of artist	258,672 Piet Mondrian
4.	Canadian male artist Name of artist	8,000 Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté

d) Highest amount spent in 1993 for the acquisition of a work by a:

1.	female artist	251,680
	Name of artist	Nancy Spero
2.	Canadian female	35,000
	Name of artist	Spring Hurlbut
3.	male artist	1,966,450
	Name of artist	Mark Rothko
4.	Canadian male artist	85,500
	Name of artist	John Greer

Section 3.

REPRESENTATION IN PERMANENT EXHIBITS

Total number of works on permanent display in the NGC:

1985: 875 1993: 1,511

a) <u>Canadian Galleries</u>

			1985: # of artists	# of works	1993: # of artists	# of works
1.	women artists		10	16	18	38
2.	men artists		146	359	195	574
3.	women artists of colour		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4.	men artists of colour		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5.	First Nations women artists	Native: 0	0	0	see (e)	see (e)
		Inuit: 0		0	see (e)	see (e)
6.	First Nations men artists	Native: 0	0	0	see (e)	see (e)
		Inuit: 2		2	see (e)	see (e)
7.	Francophone women artists		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8.	Francophone men artists		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

b) Contemporary Art Galleries

		1970: # of artists	# of works	1993: # of artists	# of works
1.	women artists	10	12	32	42
2.	Canadian women artists	9	11	23	31
3.	men artists	31	38	44	72
4.	Canadian men artists	20	27	27	49
5.	women artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6.	Canadian women artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7.	men artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8.	Canadian men artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9.	First Nations women artists	Native: 0 Inuit: 0	0 0	see (e) see (e)	see (e) see (e)
10.	First Nations men artists	Native: 0 Inuit: 1	0 1	see (e) see (e)	see (e) see (e)
11.	Francophone women artists	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12.	Francophone men artists	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

c) European and American Galleries

		1985: # of artists	# of works	1993: # of artists	# of works
1.	women artists	3	3	3	3
2.	men artists	190	225	254	333
3.	women artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(European and American Galleries, Cont'd)

		1970: # of artists	# of works	1993: # of artists	# of works
4.	men artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

d) Prints, Drawings and Photographs Galleries

		1985: # of artists	# of works	1993: # of artists	# of works
1.	women artists	2	2	10	42
2.	Canadian women artists	2	2	2	4
3.	men artists artists	29	172	74	216
4.	Canadian men	8	9	8	13
5.	women artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6.	Canadian women artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7.	men artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8.	Canadian men artists of colour	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9.	First Nations women artists	Native: 0 Inuit: 0	0 0	see (e) see (e)	see (e) see (e)
10.	First Nations men artists	Native: 0 Inuit: 0	0 0	see (e) see (e)	see (e) see (e)
11.	Francophone women artists	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12.	Francophone men artists	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Representation in Permanent Exhibits, Cont'd)

e) Inuit Art Galleries (gallery created in 1988)

		1993: # of artists	1993: # of works
1.	women artists	13	34
2.	men artists	32	38

Compiled October 1994
Source: The National Gallery of Canada