

The first article provides valuable information on archives, finding aids, and electronic inventories, while other essays raise important questions concerning the methodology and ethics of working with women's private papers.

Carole Gerson begins her essay, "Locating Female Subjects in the Archives," by reminding us that the archive is not a "neutral zone." Because of the low value placed on women's activities in a patriarchal society, women's papers have seldom been considered worth preserving, or if preserved they are often housed in the archive of a male relative or correspondent. My own experience in researching *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* illustrates this situation. Although these painters enjoyed successful careers, few of their personal papers have survived.

Gerson goes on to acknowledge some of the fine work that has been done in locating and cataloguing women's private papers in the last 30 years. Recognizing that many institutions are now putting their finding aids on the internet, she provides a list of useful web sites. She concludes her essay with some examples of archival material that reveal how women's published texts have been shaped by literary markets and the intervention of editors and publishers.

The contributors all show an awareness of the ethical and ideological issues involved in dealing with women's private papers. In her essay, "Constructing Female Subjects in the Archive," Helen Buss demonstrates the difficulty of reconstructing the subjectivity of a woman who lived many years ago, and whose ethnicity, culture, and class differed from that of her biographers. Buss studies three accounts of the courtship and marriage of Marie Rose Smith (1861-1960), a Métis woman, who lived in western Canada. By comparing Marie Rose's own narrative (Glenbow Archives) to a version that appeared in the *Canadian Cattleman* magazine (1948-49), and a

"novelistic biography" by Marie Rose's granddaughter (1977), Buss uncovers many of the unacknowledged assumptions about gender, race, and class underlying the three narratives. Her sensitive discussion includes an acknowledgement that the researcher must be careful not to distort her subject by reading "from above"—that is from the class position of a late twentieth-century academic feminist.

In her essay on working with the Marian Engel archive, Christl Verduyn discusses questions of privacy involved in reading the personal papers of a writer who has died recently. While alert to the dangers of voyeurism in dealing with such material, Verduyn argues that research into a writer's private papers, like Engel's *cabiers*, often illuminates her published fiction, besides providing valuable insights into the writer's creative process and the socio-historic context in which she wrote.

Mary Rubio's anecdotal account of editing the L.M. Montgomery Journals reveals the problems she and her coeditor faced in getting these journals published. These difficulties included convincing SSHRC jurors and publishers that the journals were important documents, and finding ways to cut the text to fit the publisher's format without deforming the narrative. Publication of the later volumes offended many people, including some of Montgomery's former acquaintances who felt they were unjustly treated in the journals, and some readers who were disillusioned to learn that the supposedly sunny-natured Montgomery had her shadow, "the woman who was embittered, defeated and judgemental."

In "Researching Eighteenth-Century Maritime Women Writers," Gwendolyn Davies gives us a fascinating account of the detective work she undertook to recover the life and letters of Deborah How Cottnam (1728-1806). Davies's research extended beyond written documents to include archaeological material that illuminated the lifestyle and

environment of Cottnam's early years.

Rosalind Kerr's essay "Reading My Grandmother's Life from her Letters" is an interesting example of an "overreading" of the text. Kerr's strategies reveal her grandmother's gendered position within a particular socio-historical context and her small acts of defiance.

In the last article, "An Epistolary Constellation," Marlene Kadar discusses a grouping of letters by Leon Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, and Earl Birney. Kadar uses this "constellation" in probing questions such as the status of the letter as text and the moral responsibility of the feminist archival researcher.

This useful collection of essays illustrates the importance of archival research to the feminist project of reclaiming women's lives and writings from the "anonymity of history."

TEXTURA: L'ARTISTE ÉCRIVANT/ THE ARTIST WRITING

La Centrale/ Powerhouse,
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**BY CINDY
STELMACKOWICH**

In celebration of La Centrale's 25th anniversary, *Textura: L'artiste écrivain/ the artist writing*, was produced. The focus of this publication, which includes artist's projects and a 1990-1999 chronology, is on theorizing feminist art production and special anniversary curatorial exhibitions recently exhibited at La Centrale.

As Canada's respected women-only gallery, La Centrale, has contin-

ued over the years to situate itself within the complex debates over female authorship. It is interesting to examine this publication in relation to recent theories on the performativity of knowledge and gendered meaning—especially considering the occasional ambivalence expressed over feminism's adoption of theory. In this regard, and in response to the debate over whether theory can be art, or art can be theory, *Textura* challenges the boundaries set by traditional art criticism by insisting upon an interactive, yet fluid relationship between feminist art and its textualization.

To continue with the performative idiom, the strength of this publication lies in its exploration and inter-textual questioning of the relationship between feminist theory and feminist practice. It is rare that there is a Canadian feminist art or academic publication which actively engages with the intersections and transactions between theory and practice. Insisting that feminist art intervenes in cultural meaning through a form of resistance and creation, the authors (many whom are artists) set out to understand how the interactive acts of writing, curating and producing visual art can be re-contextualized within art discourse. Both visual art practices and the writing of interpretative texts therefore become critical sites for engaging with the mutual permeation of feminist practices and theories.

Monique Régimbald-Zeiber's essay examines the possibility of writing in relation to visual practice in a piece which is described as fiction-theory. Utilizing a visual/textual presentation of words and philosophy, her contribution introduces many of the themes which are explored throughout the publication; the presence of absences, theorizing the space of the other within the text, and the performative notions of transformation within the histories of art, language, identity and women's lives.

Lorraine Simms's essay and curatorial project with Christine Major

at La Centrale, "Moments entrelacés," addresses the historically fraught relationship between the act of painting and female experience. Insisting that female painters are including personal iconographies within the vocabulary of abstraction, she describes how the brush marks left through the painting process are constantly interwoven through negotiation and chance, thereby describing paint as a medium which simultaneously describes and becomes space, plane, surface. Memories, personal experiences, or the history of painting itself, combine in the women's works from the exhibition to negotiate a provisional state Simms sees as a process of becoming for both feminism and painting.

Addressing another hierarchy within the arts, Francine Dagenais' essay and curatorial project "Ordinatrices /Computers," discusses women's role in the development of the computer and technology-based work. The artist's work in the exhibition addresses this history, while integrating biographical and technological concerns to contest and intervene upon the attitude that technology is a male domain. As a necessary response to advanced technologies of communication, this theoretical and artistic work has been mobilized to perform particular feminist subjects in new ways in visual practice.

In regards to the production of critical spaces of meaning for feminism, Gail Bourgeois acknowledges the possibility of liminal spaces in the process of artmaking in her essay and set of curated exhibitions which explored the production of two generations of feminist artists in "amour-horreur / love-horror." Suggesting that works included in the exhibitions symbolized an embodied speaking subject, Bourgeois examines how acts of humour evident in the work displace the threat of the abject and the loss of female subjecthood, representing instead creative acts of transformation and healing.

Two essays which discuss the pos-

sibilities of theorizing about the power of fantasy for the feminine subject are included in the publication in response to the double exhibition *Sexe-Limite*. Valérie Lamontagne's essay on the video installation of Lynne Marsh focuses on how a self-reflexive Marsh casts herself as both viewer and viewed, resulting in an auto-eroticization of the subject through fantasy and role playing. Josephine Mill's essay on the work of Sandra Haar focuses on the role of fantasy and the performance of sexuality in the contradictory markers of lesbian fantasy that Haar's work demonstrates—addressing the imbrication of the imagined and the performed.

Most of the contributors to *Textura* work through and across visual production, curating, and writing. The effort to bridge inter-textual relations between theory and practice therefore are parts of their own personal production, even existence as feminist producers. This dynamic and contingent process and state of being can be compared to a process of engagement wherein meaning never dwells in any one place or practice. Interpretations, critical texts, are, it can be argued, a kind of performance of the artistic practices, while the artistic practice is a mode of textual inscription. Through close examination of the ways in which feminist art practices perform the subject, *Textura* leads to a reassessment of traditional art criticism, and allows for a rethinking of the theory/practice relation which art criticism usually allows.