

“At Home” at the Woman’s Building (But Who Gets A Room of Her Own?): Women of Color and Community¹

Michelle Moravec and Sondra Hale,²

Join us in the creation of the community of learned women Virginia Woolf believed was possible. Not the daughters of educated men, but the education women themselves controlling their private and professional lives according to their values, sensibility and womanity.³

Introduction—Feminism and Community⁴

The Woman’s Building of Los Angeles emerged in an era characterized by many homogeneous and somewhat essentializing themes about a need to build and maintain *community*—a women’s or woman’s community, a feminist community. However, the manifestos, mission statements and reiterated slogans that characterized the identity politics of the era of “second-wave feminism” were both vague and specific about the nature and type of community envisioned. Some statements expounded on a need for women to invent and build spaces and institutions that were uniquely tailored to women’s needs, spirit, and creativity. Whether or not these were actual edifices, they were to be “safe houses,” places where *all* women felt “at home.”

The concept of “community” remained an elusive one in most of the early feminist literature. Other terms implied community (e.g. “collective”), and essentialist terms abounded (e.g. “woman’s world,” and “women’s culture”), but few ventured into an actual definition of “community.” So much was “understood.” Even most of the Woman’s Building official statements skirted the terminology while occasionally citing members who used the term.

For example, the publication issued to celebrate the tenth anniversary reproduced a mission statement that uses such terms as “collective identity” and “environment” but not “community.” At the same time, one of the founders, Arlene Raven, is quoted as saying,

“We are the Woman’s Community; we live and grow in the Woman’s Building.” Active member Deena Metzger asserts, “the Woman’s Building is the room of our own, the private space where community begins.”⁵

Some early feminist institutions clearly aimed to create community or considered themselves to be one. Sagaris, referred to as “an independent feminist institute,” emerged in 1975 as one of the first organizations to deal with feminist education, in the broadest sense.⁶ Although not defined as a “community,” the questions of “what builds women’s sense of self and sense of community” was considered in discussing cultural goals.⁷ Susan Sherman, however, frames the group that broke away from the larger gathering of Sagaris as an “alternative community,” a term that was very common in the 1970s and 1980s. Sherman argues that, “[w]ith the birth of the August 7th Survival Community, the crucial step had been made from an educational institution run by a collective of eight women to the formation of an alternative educational community run collectively by all the members of the community.”⁸

Following in the footsteps of Sagaris was a West Coast institution that chose to use the word “community” in its title. Marilyn Murphy remarked about Califia Community,

We call our organization Community to express our commitment to the development of an informed community spirit among Califia women which recognizes and affirms our differences as we celebrate our sisterhood. Califia Community is committed to the development of a multicultural community of the spirit of women through feminist education.⁹

A legacy of this “spirit of community” undergirds a recent book on feminist artists. *Expanding Circles: Women, Art & Community*, edited by Betty Ann Brown, explores community in its diversity:

People must be given images of different kinds of communities, of communities that are neither patriarchal nor hierarchical, neither authoritarian nor demeaning. Communities that honor the authority of lived experience. Communities that give voice to those often silenced . . . We write about alternative definitions and identifications of community, about using art and art processes to build community. . . . We write about community as any group of two or more people who live and/or work together. . . .¹⁰

Most feminist concepts of community stressed the inclusiveness while trying to pay at least lip service to diversity. However, the question of just how all-inclusive the various feminist movements and institutions of the 20th century were dominated much of late 20th century feminist writings. Although subject positions have changed as situations

change, it is safe to say that any number of self-defined groups have claimed to have been marginalized by “the women’s movements”: lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered peoples, working-class women, mothers, older women and the disabled. One such segment of women that has been highly vocal on this matter is the congeries of the various groups that constitute the totalized category “women of color.”

One of the problems of feminism and race was the raised expectation based on feminists’ *claims* of inclusivity, egalitarianism and the openness and tolerance of “difference” within the moral community.¹¹ These claims were made despite that fact that schisms of race, class, ethnicity, religion, culture, sexuality, abilities and age permeated the larger society out of which the women’s movements had emerged. The ideals of inclusivity were more like wishful thinking, without a clear analysis of what actions might be required to make the vision a reality, or a full understanding of the conditions that created those divisions. With hindsight one is struck by the impossibility of that goal of all-inclusiveness.

Like many feminist institutions of its day, the pioneer members of the Woman’s Building of Los Angeles stressed a spirit of community, social relations among members based on ethics and values related to perceived feminist principles. The Woman’s Building co-founder Arlene Raven expressed it this way:

The purpose of feminist education is to create and participate in cultural revolution. Towards that end, feminist creative activity takes place in the context of a community in which women can support on another, validate individual and common experience, create from that experience, and share their work with the public . . . When women are primarily in a feminist support community, their work reflects female/female support and the different sense of identity which one has in that situation. This is a new and different kind of art, reflecting a new social structure—feminist community structure.¹²

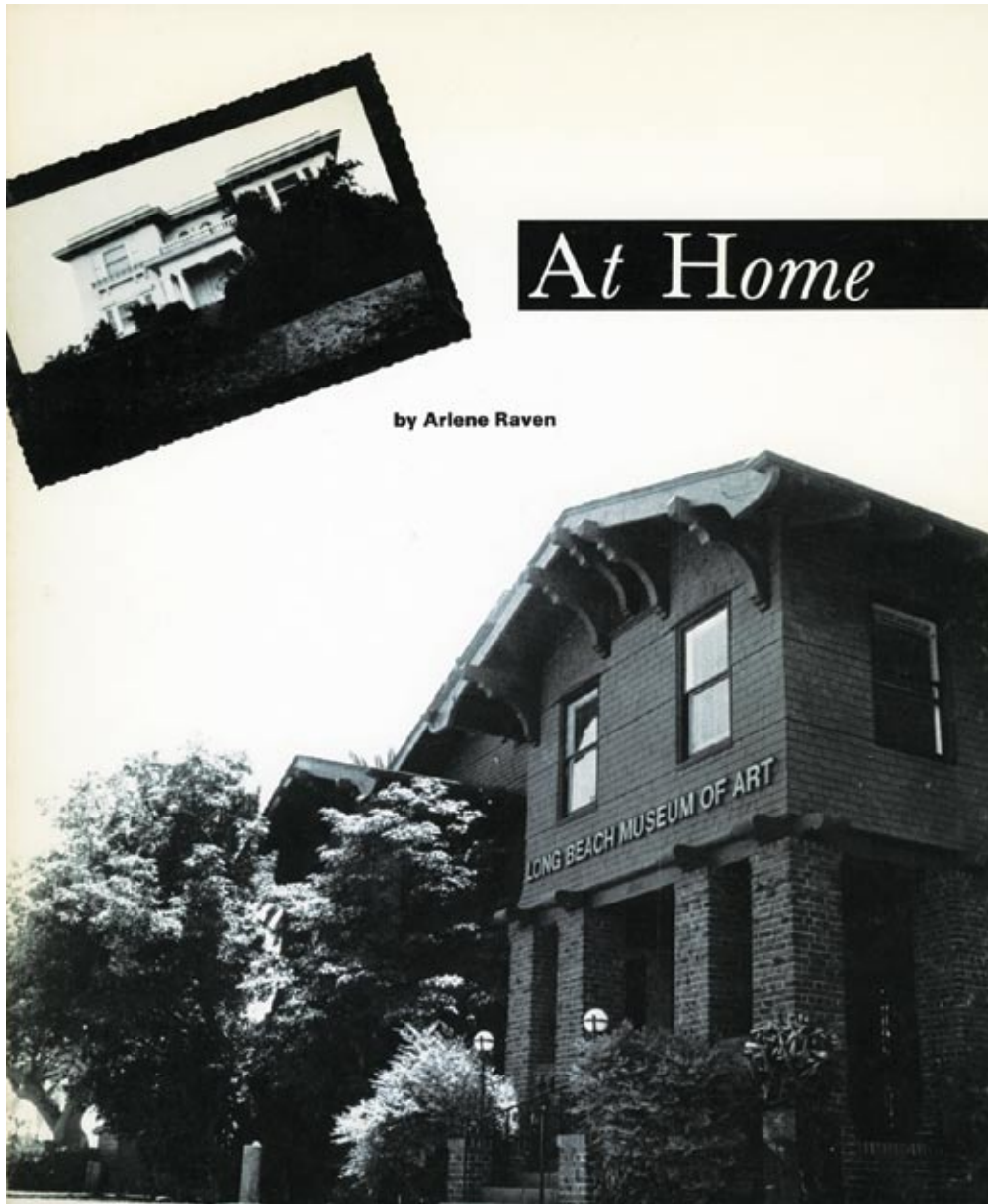
Is Anyone at Home?

In 1983 Arlene Raven curated a show at the Long Beach Museum of Art that celebrated the tenth anniversary of *Womanhouse*, the first of the large 1970s feminist art exhibitions/installations/performances.¹³ Raven titled the exhibition *At Home*, an ironic reference to the ambivalent embracing of the “home/house” icon and theme by many 1970s feminists.¹⁴ An ironic reading by both the *At Home* show and *Womanhouse* of a decade earlier of the “at home” metaphor questions the safety of the home. Was it a refuge for everyone who dwelled there?

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Cover of the At Home catalogue of the exhibition curated by Arlene Raven; catalogue design by Judith Lausten. (Personal archive of Terry Wolverton.)

For the purposes of this essay the ironic reading of “home/house” begs the question of who experienced the Woman’s Building and any number of feminist safe spaces as hospitable. Did all feminists and women feel “at home?”

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The Woman's Building in Los Angeles took its name from the Woman's Building of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹⁵ Both projects explored women as "artists," a role that had been historically gendered male in Western society. The Los Angeles institution, founded by Judy Chicago, Sheila de Bretteville and Arlene Raven to "expand women's ability to express themselves individually and collectively and to communicate their experience through art," served for eighteen years as one of the nation's primary centers for feminist art movements and the main one in southern California.¹⁶

While always struggling for funding and hardly a prosperous arts institution, the Woman's Building was, nonetheless, better endowed than a number of even more fledgling institutions, especially those organized by women artists of color. It was especially difficult, then, for feminist artists of color to ignore or avoid the Woman's Building. Yet, the claims of "community" expounded by Woman's Building founders, staff and denizens set forth a tension that was to plague the house.

The concept of "community" permeated the doctrine and many of the practices of the Woman's Building. Co-founder Judy Chicago envisioned the Woman's Building as a supportive community that would nurture women's development as artists and provide an appreciative audience for an art that explores women's experiences.¹⁷ Some feminist artists even moved from other cities to take part in the enterprise.¹⁸

Therefore, establishing a site and supporting women artists were not the only goals. The founders and early participants held a loftier and more elusive ideal: the establishment of a very special "community."¹⁹ Perhaps no one concept was as important to the Woman's Building founders and initial denizens as "community." In this sense the Woman's Building reflected one of the cluster of goals of "second-wave" feminism: e.g. to build a moral community of women; to maintain the connection between academy and community; to build and expand community through coalitions; to develop a non-hierarchical community; and to mobilize the community toward change.

The problem was (and still is, to a large extent) the totalizing of the concept of "community," as if it were monolithic (or should be), and the cultural hegemony that held sway. Who had the authority to *name* the community, to decide what a community was, to categorize it, and to decide how it should be structured and who was part of it?

Within the context of Los Angeles feminists, the Woman's Building itself was often referred to as a "community." Yet "community" as a concept was only partially defined, and beyond the idealistic expressions in the early years, was under-theorized.

Actually the Woman's Building consisted of several "communities," some of which overlapped. These included founders, faculty, administrators and staff, Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) students, Extension Program students, specific program/projects/collaborative groups (e.g. Lesbian Art Project, Women's Graphic Center, Women's Video Center, Feminist Art Workers/Sisters Of Survival), the Board of Directors and regular audience members. These "communities" defined a series of concentric circles, with those who spent the most time on the premises or took responsibility for its operations serving as "insiders," while those who attended more occasionally often felt more like "outsiders."

Cross-cutting and overlapping with the above were also communities based on ideologies, fragments of which affected community-building at the Woman's Building. After all, this was 1970s feminism—with its splits between and among liberal, radical and socialist feminists (and divisions within these); the "lesbian-straight" split; class divisions; and Jewish/non-Jewish. Within Los Angeles there was even a historical regional division between eastsiders (e.g. Echo Park and Silver Lake areas) and westsiders (e.g. Santa Monica and Venice), the former considered more political and leftist; the latter, more cultural. The Woman's Building was on the eastside and drew from an array of eastside feminists. Yet, its constituency, contrary to the conventional local wisdom at the time, was considered more "cultural feminist" than leftist feminist. Such were the contradictions of the feminisms of the times.

It goes without saying that the essentialized and totalized category of "women of color" had its own divisions, not only ethnic/race, but also class, sexuality and generation. Furthermore, there existed strong differences about the degree of cooperation and participation with white/Anglo women that would be deemed appropriate or strategically sound. Therefore, while some women of color insisted on inclusion in an institution like the Woman's Building, others favored forming their own communities and institutions. One of the problems, as indicated above, was that the separatist institutions had an even more difficult time with funding and often ended up as "poor sisters" to the ostensibly better endowed institutions dominated by white women.

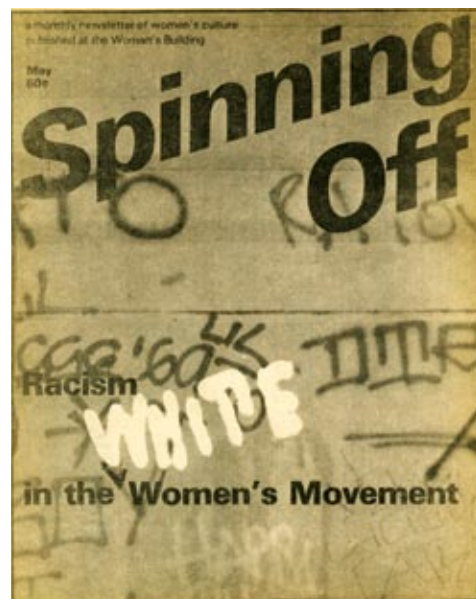
If the extent of compensatory or corrective programming was any measure of the disaffection or dislocation that many women of color felt about their association with the

Woman's Building, then the problem was great. Through the years the Woman's Building staff, Board of Directors, Program Committee and participating artists worked on issues of racism in their programming.²⁰ It was highly unlikely, however, that an organization like the Woman's Building could resolve a series of problems that the movement(s) as a whole were unable to resolve, or even to address adequately. In the end, only those women of color who shared a similar perspective on feminism as the predominantly white Woman's Building members became heavily involved in the organization.

Were Women of Color at Home?

Although feelings about racism were an undercurrent at the Woman's Building in the late 1970s, as in a number of feminist organizations throughout the country, it was not until the Woman's Building began receiving funds under the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA), that racism surfaced as an issue.²¹ Many of the women eligible for employment under this program in Los Angeles were women of color. Although CETA funds provided the Woman's Building with the ability to hire support staff, many of the women of color who were hired were not in positions of authority. This situation ultimately led to charges of racism against one white staff member in particular. Ironically, members of the Woman's Building had sought CETA funding not only to increase their budget, but also because they wanted to draw more women of color to the Woman's Building. They further hoped that the new staff members' friends and families would become involved in the Building. Even when women of color were hired in "executive" positions, the integration of newcomers was difficult and conflicts ensued.

Unexpectedly, the CETA program transformed the issue of racism at the Woman's Building from an abstract discussion to a concrete and more visible situation. The Woman's Building member Annette Hunt points out that prior to the CETA programs, the Woman's Building dealt with the



Spinning Off, the newsletter of the Woman's Building, issue on "Racism in the Women's Movement," 1980. (Personal archive of Terry Wolverton.)

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issue of racism as a “rhetorical question—we could all sit around [and] wonder why don’t we have more black women here? How are we going to reach more black women, Hispanic women, Asian women?”²²

The introduction of women of color to the organization grew increasingly tense. Under the auspices of the CETA program, Meg Henson-Flores, an African-American woman, joined the Woman’s Building as the Managing Editor of *Spinning Off*, the monthly publication of the Woman’s Building.

Henson-Flores ultimately filed a grievance against Sue Maberry, a long-time member of the Woman’s Building who had attended the FSW and served in various administrative capacities over the years. The grievance stemmed from an incident in which Henson-Flores was complaining to a colleague about “the usurping of [her] authority as managing editor.” She claimed that Maberry, overhearing the conversation, “wheeled around in her chair and loudly, abusively and disrespectfully demanded that [Henson-Flores] leave ‘her’ office and ‘shut up!’”²³ Henson-Flores accused Maberry of repeatedly “being wholly offensive, accusative, and disrespectful” to the increasing number of black women in the organization.²⁴ In a written grievance to the Woman’s Building Board of Directors, Henson-Flores described the racial climate of the Woman’s Building as “abhorrent.”²⁵ In the same document she suggested the establishment of guidelines and disciplinary procedures “to control the mad actions on the part of those abusive women.”²⁶

Maurine Renville, then Executive Director of the Woman’s Building, responded to Henson-Flores’s grievance by conducting an evaluation of Maberry in which it was concluded that Maberry “needs to work on developing tolerance and other ways of communicating with people new to the Woman’s Building who do not maintain the same level of commitment and working styles.”²⁷ While acknowledging need for improvement, this “criticism,” nonetheless, was an implicit validation of Maberry’s unswerving commitment to the Woman’s Building. The Board “resolved” the problem by lessening Maberry’s involvement with *Spinning Off*—and hence Henson-Flores—and relocating Maberry’s office to a more remote location. The administrators “communicated to Meg that these actions were taken to remove responsibility from Sue, easing pressure and stress that resulted in her response to the overheard conversation.”²⁸ Nothing was mentioned about racism, despite Henson-Flores’s accusations.

Henson-Flores continued to press the members of the Woman's Building to address racism. In a letter to the executive director, she requested that a forum be held about racism at the Woman's Building. She requested also that minutes from that forum become part of the permanent archive of the Building.²⁹

Therefore, despite Henson-Flores's insistence on a greater problem of racism at the Woman's Building, the people in authority recast the problem as a difficulty between a newcomer and a long-time member of the Woman's Building. This was a fairly common rationale in feminist organizations of the 1970s and 1980s.

According to personnel records, Henson-Flores continued to arrive late for work and ultimately was fired in 1980.³⁰ She reported the Woman's Building to the California Department of Fair Employment for sub-standard working conditions. Ironically, by that time, Suzanne Shelton, a woman of color, had become Executive Director and had to respond to Henson-Flores's accusations.³¹

Because of conflicting stories, it is difficult to ascertain what actually happened in the conflict between Henson-Flores and Maberry and what the motivations were behind it. There is no way to know for sure whether Henson-Flores's firing resulted from racism, poor performance or retaliation for her complaints.

Clearly, perceptions of racism were a problem at the Woman's Building. However, conflicts between newcomers to the Woman's Building and long-time members occurred frequently, even among white women. It is likely that the issues of racism exacerbated an already existing tension at the Building between "insiders" and "outsiders." A case in point was the situation that developed after Valerie Angers, a white woman, became part of the Woman's Building "community" in 1977 as Building Manager. Angers joined the Woman's Building as part of a group of women who founded the magazine *Chrysalis*.³²

As an "outsider," Angers faced considerable challenges as Building Manager, and eventually her tenure at the Woman's Building did not work out. In her letter of resignation Angers argued that the existence of a closed community within the Woman's Building impeded effective management and that the "coziness" often translated into hostility toward those who did not have a long history with the Woman's Building. Because of her relatively short history with the Woman's Building, more long-time members attributed her criticisms to her inability to understand the organization.³³

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Renville, too, although an “insider,” had conflicts with long-time members of the Woman's Building when she constituted a new Board of Directors. Long-time members of the Woman's Building saw the new Board members as “corporate women.”³⁴ Sharon Sidell-Selick quotes one of the Woman's Building founders:

What we got [with the appointment of a new Board] was a Board who . . . did not understand the Building, did not like the Building, had a vision of trying to push the Building more into the mainstream scene in order to be acceptable.”³⁵

In 1980 the Woman's Building hired Suzanne Shelton, an African-American woman, as Executive Director.³⁶ The Board of Directors hired Shelton because they hoped she would bring more women of color into the organization. Such high expectations only compounded the difficulties Shelton experienced as an “outsider” at the Woman's Building. Even Sheila de Bretteville, the most outspoken advocate of making the Building accessible to outsiders, “always believed it would never work to have somebody be the executive director who wasn't someone who had been through the Building experience, because they couldn't understand what it was they were directing.”³⁷



Suzanne Shelton. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)

From the beginning Shelton, like all the other administrators, had little autonomy, despite her title of executive director. For example, she hired Terry Wolverton as her administrative assistant, but under pressure from other Woman's Building staff.³⁸ These conflicts over the autonomy of the executive director prevailed throughout Shelton's tenure at the Woman's Building. Shelton also experienced difficulties meeting the higher expectations many of the staff members had that was partially based on her being paid more than anyone else; she earned \$18,000 a year as compared to their \$6 an hour salaries.³⁹ Long-time members of the staff behaved as though Shelton worked for them, which in a sense she did. Despite her official position of authority, many of those who had participated in the decision to hire her had more influence than she did.

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Shelton saw her mission as clearly defined. In an article written five weeks after she assumed the position of Executive Director, Shelton outlined her three major goals: to create a secure financial base, to increase the visibility of the Woman's Building and to involve a more diverse group of women.⁴⁰ Five months later, at a Board retreat, Shelton had lost much of her enthusiasm. She outlined twelve major problems, many of which had been voiced by previous administrators; these included the lack of leadership by the Board, an inability of the Board and staff to work together and a distrust of the executive director by the staff.⁴¹ Further exacerbating the situation, financial difficulties persisted, which perpetuated a crisis mentality.

Some of the issues Shelton raised demonstrated her ideological differences with the founding vision of the Woman's Building. For example, she saw the original description of the Woman's Building—"a public center for women's culture," which served as the unofficial motto for the organization—as "vague and passive." She suggested re-casting the statement of purpose in more active terms, to say what they hoped to "change, alter, affect." She also suggested a shift in programming from an emphasis on process to product, which contravened the very notion of feminist art that the Woman's Building pioneered.⁴²

While Shelton may have been correct that the message was not selling any more, her suggestions were anathema to long-time supporters of the Woman's Building. In her literal inability to speak the language of the Woman's Building, she interpreted the emphasis on consensus as a euphemism for the stifling of disagreement, individuality and initiative, and she heard "accountability" as a mistrust of outsiders.⁴³ The Woman's Building was predicated on a shared experience and similar values, which Shelton had not had and did not hold.

No matter how hard she worked, Shelton could not integrate into the organization. As her assistant, Terry Wolverton saw a tension between Shelton setting new goals, and the Board members and other staff—women with long-standing connections to the Building—trying to preserve the status quo. In retrospect, Wolverton, a long time Woman's Building member and administrator, realized that "what they really wanted was a woman of color to come in and really just be a part of the spirit and the vision of the building as it existed. But the trouble was that this particular woman of color—and probably any woman of color—would have had a slightly different version and a different agenda of what the building would, could or should be."⁴⁴ Sidell-Selick quotes an unnamed Femi-

nist Studio Workshop staff member who was commenting on the Woman's Building's attempt to integrate a black director into a white institution:

A very disastrous dynamic got started. The staff, not operating out of malicious or deliberate but a very unconscious racism, was unable to see that she [Executive Director] was working in the best interests of the Building . . . We couldn't figure out how to bring in women from different backgrounds and welcome them to the Building. We didn't know how to listen from a different perspective. There has been a lot of lip service about being open to all women but that really isn't true. The Building has a definite cultural personality that defines who can be in it. . . .⁴⁵

Although on the surface it would appear that efforts to remedy racism at the Woman's Building by simply hiring more women of color failed, that is, no doubt, too facile. The conflicts that ensued must have served to raise the consciousness of the Woman's Building staffers and Board, perhaps imperceptibly altering the goals and practices of denizens. Nonetheless, armed with the best of intentions, most of the members of the Woman's Building did not understand or refused to acknowledge that bringing women of color into the organization would necessitate a change in the mission of the Woman's Building.

Tensions over racism continually exacerbated the already-existing difficulties anyone new to the Woman's Building experienced in trying to gain acceptance. As Cherrie Moraga points out in *This Bridge Called My Back*, "there is seldom any analysis of how the very nature and structure of the group itself may be founded on racist or classist assumptions."⁴⁶ Without such an analysis, the women of color recruited into the organization could only function as token figureheads. Failing to consider the racism implicit in the mission and structure of the Woman's Building contributed to its inability to serve as a home for all women.

Anti-Racism Work at the Woman's Building

It was not the recruitment of women of color into the staff of the Woman's Building that was to draw attention to the issue of racism at the Woman's Building. Ironically, it was through criticism of a show dedicated to lesbian art that the issue of racism finally received concerted attention.

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In December, 1979, members of the Woman's Building began organizing *The Great American Lesbian Art Show (GALAS)*. From its inception GALAS made a particular effort to recruit lesbians of color. In the initial letter about GALAS, the organizers explained that "we recognize that for women of color, the difficulties of identifying both as 'artist' and 'lesbian' are significantly greater."⁴⁷ In February, 1980 the GALAS Collective sent a press release announcing that two spots in the GALAS Invitational would be reserved for Black and Latina lesbians. The organizers of GALAS also worked with a local Los Angeles group, Lesbians of Color, to recruit art by women of color. Despite these efforts, the organizers of GALAS still received considerable criticism of their show as racist.⁴⁸

In 1980, spurred by the criticisms of GALAS and by her own recognition that "it was impossible to live in this culture and not be racist," Terry Wolverton began focusing on white women's anti-racism work.

Wolverton approached the issue of racism as she had the topic of homophobia: she turned to her feminist background for techniques to address these issues. She had discovered an article that provoked "a classic women's movement experience: reading just the right articulation of theory at just the time I needed to move to a new level of consciousness and action."⁴⁹ Wolverton had decided to create a white women's consciousness-raising group devoted to anti-racism. She chose to form a group for white women only so that she could "do [her] homework" rather than relying on women of color to raise consciousness for her. Seven women responded to the initial announcement that she placed in *Spinning Off*.⁵⁰

The White Women's Anti-Racism Consciousness-Raising Group formed in the fall of 1980.⁵¹ During the consciousness-raising sessions the women examined their emotions when addressing racism and discussed how feelings of guilt or embarrassment ham-



"Armour," Gloria Longval, color pencil on paper. Exhibited in the GALAS Invitational, the Woman's Building, 1980. (GALAS Archives.)

pered their efforts to combat it. Exploring the ways that children learn racism, they analyzed their own early experiences with racism. They also discussed the ways language reflects hierarchical relationships between different races. Several sessions were devoted to evaluating their personal relationships with people of color.

Gradually the group moved beyond consciousness-raising to problem-solving and action. Some concentrated on incorporating more women of color into the Woman's Building, developing an affirmative action program for staff, board, and artists represented in the institution. The members of the action group also attempted to increase staff members' consciousness about racism. They asked the staff to work collectively to compile lists of (1) the ways racism limited them, (2) the benefits that would result in having more women of color working at the Women's Graphic Center, (3) the ways they might achieve greater representation by women of color, (4) the difficulties in reaching their goal of including more women of color, and (5) the ways they each might contribute to this effort.

Efforts to raise consciousness about racism at the Woman's Building had a positive impact. Sue Maberry recalled that prior to the work on anti-racism at the Woman's Building, "There wasn't any way you could talk about your own racist feelings or what it meant to be racist or what was racism and what wasn't."⁵²

Other Strategies

Although consciousness-raising may be a necessary condition for altering race dynamics within an organization, it is not a sufficient condition for transformation. While it is true that white women within the organization had come to a greater understanding of their own racism, the Woman's Building, as an organization, retained the same structure, and only broadened its goals to include more women of color. Ultimately, this limited change meant that the Woman's Building would never successfully attract large numbers of women of color.

As early as 1977, there had been a recognition that lack of financial resources might impede the participation of women of color; organizers sought grant funding for scholarships. The Woman's Building received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to increase the participation of women over fifty, disabled women and women of color. The New Moves Program offered scholarships to women wishing to participate in

various Woman's Building programs. A woman of color who participated in the 1980 Summer Art Program reported:

[A]fter seven weeks, I had come to view my own and other women's feelings and thoughts as sources of power—a power that could transform the way we looked at ourselves and related to our environments. As a result of the photography and video experience I gained, I made an important career transition and I'm now studying cinema at [Los Angeles] City College.⁵³

Advertising for the New Moves Program stressed that the women's movement was for *all* women. In an effort to recruit a more diverse constituency, the Woman's Building offered programming and activities which reflected the needs and interests of women of color. During the 1980-1981 academic year, the education programs primarily sought to reach populations not previously served by the Woman's Building, while also creating relationships with organizations that served communities of color.

In addressing the Asian American community, Woman's Building planners, working with the Asian American Studies Program at UCLA, developed contacts with the Asian American press, and received good coverage of Woman's Building events. The Woman's Building offered an Asian women's history course, poetry readings and writing workshops for Asian-American women. A performance by Unbound Feet, an Asian American performance group, drew 200 people to the Woman's Building.⁵⁴

Coincident with a greater emphasis within the Woman's Building of the need to answer the charge of racism and exclusion, the political times had changed. During the 1980s members of the Woman's Building struggled to adapt the concept of women's culture and women's community to an increasingly conservative political context. The leaders of the Woman's Building began to emphasize its function as an arts organization for women rather than as a feminist organization. Tragically, in the early 1980s, the Reagan Administration gutted funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, along with the CETA IV employment program, and made it next to impossible to provide the kind of financial support or employment opportunities to encourage participation by women of color. Increasingly in the 1980s programs at the Woman's Building focused on generating income. This focus on financial survival of the Woman's Building above all else severely hampered efforts to address the issue of racism and to create a climate that was more hospitable to groups of women. Instead of concentrating on building a community,

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the Woman's Building began to create a more mainstream image in order to pursue more traditional funding sources.

This shift in the mission of the Woman's Building was deeply troubling to some members. Aleida Rodríguez, a Cuban émigré who served on the Board of Directors from 1981-1983, denounced this trend in her acceptance speech upon receiving a Vesta Award in 1984.

Rodríguez ultimately left the Woman's Building over the change in emphasis and perceived mainstreaming.⁵⁵

In the mid-to-late 1980s, the Woman's Building became more financially stable and renewed its charge to expand the diversity of the organization. In 1986, the Woman's Building hosted *Textiles as Text*, an exhibit of art by Hmong refugees, accompanied by a cultural festival, and in 1987, exhibits by African-American artist Faith Ringgold and *Viva La Vida*, works in homage to artist Frida Kahlo.

In 1990, the Woman's Building conducted a survey of ten Latino cultural organizations to explore the needs of Latina artists. This included conducting informational interviews at each of the ten organizations to obtain programming information and to offer the Woman's Building as a resource for Latina artists. In October of 1990 the Woman's Building produced *El Día de Los Muertos*, an exhibition of the works of four Latina artists—



Artist demonstrating batik in *Textiles as Text* Hmong textiles exhibit Dec. 1986. Curated by Amy Catlin. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)



100-Pound Weight Loss Story Quilt by Faith Ringgold. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)

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Installation piece by Su-Chen Hung in Viva la Vida: An Homage to Frida Kahlo exhibition, 1987. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)

Laura Aguilar, Barbara Carrasco, Diane Gamboa and Rose Portillo—along with a videotape of the same title, produced by two Latinas. In addition, the Woman's Building hosted a fiesta complete with three-piece *Norteño* band, a Mexican banquet, and altars where the audience could participate by offering a memorial to their loved ones. Approximately 300 people attended the opening, and some 1000 viewed the exhibition during its six-week run. Although the group had hoped to produce bilingual brochures and a videotape,



Diana Gamboa, artist in the Cross Pollination poster project which was exhibited at Bridge Gallery, L.A. City Hall, with Daniel Martinez. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)

instead in March of 1991 the Woman's Building sponsored *Espejo Voz*, a bilingual reading of the works of fifteen Latina writers. Ninety-five people attended this event.

Despite these outreach and programming efforts, the Woman's Building was still never able to recruit large numbers of women of color. While the notion of "outreach" to women of color represented an impulse to integrate organizations, some women of color found the concept and practice patronizing. As Cherrie Moraga points out: "We have had it with the word 'outreach' referring to our joining racist white women's organizations. The question keeps coming up—where exactly then, is in?"⁵⁶ How included could women of color be in the mission of groups if such "outreach" proved necessary? Furthermore, the idea of outreach focused on bringing women of color into the organization as currently constituted, seemingly without consideration for a need for transformation partially brought about by the new needs, goals, and ideologies of women of color.

During its last years Woman's Building programmers took a number of opportunities to develop programming that would speak to the needs, tastes, or politics of women of color. These endeavors became increasingly sophisticated. Sometimes the Program Committee capitalized on a controversy, trying to turn a negative event into a positive exploration of racism, diversity, multiculturalism. Such a controversy surrounded Kate Braverman's Woman's Building reading from her novel *Palm Latitudes*. Braverman, a white woman, spoke from the vantage point of her protagonist, a Chicana. Women of color connected with the Woman's Building challenged the appropriation of a Chicana's voice, and the matter generated heated and healthy discussion about whether or not artists and writers must speak only from their own voices and positionality in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, age, region, class, sexuality. The discussions, formal and informal, led to a three-part symposium (May 11, 18, and 25, 1989) on "In Whose Voice, In Whose Vision: Culture and Representation." The symposium participants were highly diverse, as was the audience.

Some Women of Color at Home

As discussed above, while many new members of the Woman's Building struggled to find a place within the existing organization, because the Woman's Building was founded by white women, it seemed inevitable that the mission of the institution would more closely fulfill the needs of white women. However, like all such generalizations, things were not so simple. In

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matters related to social movements and organizational activities, there is often a contrast between what transpires in public forums and organizational disputes and people's individual experiences. Therefore, despite controversy about racism and exclusion, some women of color found the Woman's Building a hospitable place for their art and a supportive environment for them personally.

However, in analyzing the Woman's Building Oral History Project material to explain why some women of color found a community at the Woman's Building, one can see a pattern. I would argue that the women of color who felt most at home and a part of the Woman's Building community all shared the predominant vision of feminist art held by members of the Woman's Building. An exploration of the ideas of some of the women of color who became involved in the Woman's Building supports this argument.

Linda Nishio, a Japanese American artist, began participating in the Woman's Building in the late 1970s after working as artist for a number of years. She had had formal art education and held a Master of Fine Arts degree. After attending a performance at the Woman's Building, Nishio recalled that she initiated contact with Vanalyne Green, whose performance she had admired. The women became friends, and Green, a white woman, championed Nishio's work. The support led to the inclusion of Nishio's art in several shows.

Nishio also found the design work produced by the Women's Graphic Center (WGC) intriguing and, even though the WGC had no job openings, convinced the staff to hire her. Nishio worked at the WGC for the next seven years.

Several factors contributed to the ease with which Nishio entered the Woman's Building. Because the friendship network was the most powerful structure within the Woman's Building, Nishio gained access to influential members when she made friends with Green. Nishio felt comfortable enough with her identity as an artist to contact a white member of the Woman's Building about her art. She also possessed the self-confidence to aggressively pursue employment at the Woman's Building, the fastest track to the "in" group in this organiza-



Artist Linda Nishio at the opening of the Cross Pollination poster project exhibition at Bridge Gallery, L.A. City Hall. (Photo from the Woman's Building Image Bank.)

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tion. It is interesting to note that Nishio did not arrive at the Woman's Building as a result of any outreach program, but came because she found the Woman's Building attractive to her interests.

Nishio's work also resonated well with the other art produced by members of the Woman's Building. Nishio recalled identifying with the work performed at the Woman's Building because much of her work dealt with personal exploration, so that she felt "some camaraderie of support among the people there."⁵⁷ However, an analysis of Nishio's art during this period illustrates her struggle to address issues of inclusiveness of the woman's movement. Through her art Nishio seemed to search for her "place in the world." In "Ghost in the Machine," a short film, Nishio appeared with a cardboard house on top of her head. The house kept trying to locate itself in different neighborhoods, but it never quite fit in, an experience paralleled by many women of color in the women's movement.

However, the metaphor of the house or room was also an apt symbol for many of the white women at the Woman's Building. When Linda Nishio entered the Woman's Building milieu she was well-educated, already had a strong art background, and was experimenting with avant-garde art herself. Despite being a woman of color, she was "like" the women at the Woman's Building in her approach to art. Although her work addressed the "exclusiveness" of the women's movement, she made art that spoke intelligibly to members of the Woman's Building. When asked about her attraction to the Woman's Building, Nishio repeatedly expressed a sense of identification with the subject matter dealt with by artists at the Woman's Building. For example, when I asked her what appealed to her about the Woman's Building, she responded:

It was the performance that on a personal level that I felt very much akin to, because a lot of my work was about personal exploration, text and projected film. . . I think it was just the identification with the kind of work being done that really drew me to the group. . . .⁵⁸

Even though she was one of the few women of color involved in the Woman's Building at that point, Nishio was accustomed to that situation. As she explained "for me that was the way the world has been." When I asked her how her involvement in the Woman's Building influenced her work, she commented that,

I think what I gained more than contextually . . . it was a sense of pride about the work, more internal stuff, confidence, self-confidence, the camaraderie among people and I think the self-confidence. . . . [just] to continue to make art.

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As for a sense of community, although Nishio did not use that term, she did describe the Woman's Building as a supportive environment for more than her art:

Actually, I should also say to you that back in '82 my first husband died, and when I was at the Woman's Building it was a really an incredible place for me to be at the time, a lot of support and a lot of growth [happened when I was working there] for me during that time.

While Nishio came to the Woman's Building an accomplished artist, Rosalie Ortega was involved with Woman's Building first as support staff and only many years later as an artist. She came from a Mexican American family who raised her with little acknowledgment of Mexican or Mexican American cultural traditions. Her mother pushed her children to assimilate by speaking English only, moving them to a white suburb of Los Angeles, and teaching them nothing of their cultural heritage. Ortega recalled that her childhood experiences were most similar to those of a suburban housewife since after her parents divorced (when she was twelve), and her mother began working outside the home, Ortega assumed responsibility for running the household. She remembered reading *The Feminine Mystique* and relating to the complaints of middle-aged, white, suburban housewives, despite the fact that she was sixteen years old.



Marginal Confessions, installation by artist Rosalie Ortega, 1993. [(Photo published in Expanding Circles: Women, Art & Community, edited by Betty Ann Brown, Midmarch Arts Press, New York, 1996) p 103.]

Although Ortega did not become involved in any political movements during high school, she read Eldridge Cleaver and Malcolm X and

was intrigued by their ideas; she had no knowledge of the Chicano movement. In fact, until Ortega attended an interview for a merit-based scholarship at UCLA, and the interviewer suggested she apply for funds available to Chicanos, Ortega had “[never] really heard that word in relationship to myself.”⁵⁹

While attending UCLA, Ortega worked in the child care center where she met a member of the Woman's Building who introduced Ortega to the organization. Ortega attended a

women's music concert at the Woman's Building and then started providing child care for Woman's Building events. Although Ortega remembers finding the programs offered at the Woman's Building intriguing, she only felt comfortable participating as a child care provider.

Ortega also became involved in Califia, initially through her child care work, but eventually she became a collective member. She believes, in retrospect, that Califia offered her membership in the collective as part of their effort to increase representation of women of color.

Ironically, it was within the women's movement that Ortega first felt the disparities between her upbringing and the expectations feminists had for a "woman of color," an identity Ortega did not feel described herself. Ortega felt she had "no place to belong" because she did not share the cultural experiences of the other Latinas. She recalled a Califia retreat for women of color in San Diego where she felt quite uncomfortable:"

I had no idea about their [women of color's] anger and their experience and was just so confused, and knew deep in my heart that I wasn't a part of them and they wanted me to be, but I wasn't comfortable there. I was more comfortable with the white women, yet I wasn't supposed to be a part of that group.

When a member of Califia accused Ortega of "not knowing who [she] was" in terms of her cultural heritage, Ortega felt so attacked she ceased involvement with the women's movement for several years. During this time, she completed her education and became an artist. Ortega then entered into a second phase of involvement with the Woman's Building, this time as an artist rather than as support staff. She continued to receive information from the Woman's Building and felt drawn to events, but felt "there was something really holding [her] back . . ." Her fear of rejection within the women's movement remained strong, but was overcome by her curiosity about a seminar on women's spirituality.

The curiosity resulted in Ortega attending a presentation by Circle of Aradia, a feminist Wicca coven. She enjoyed the presentation so much that she enrolled in a series of workshops that the Circle of Aradia offered. Within the Circle of Aradia, Ortega finally found the acceptance she had sought. She felt that the Circle of Aradia provided her with a place to heal from her negative experiences with feminism. She joined a coven where she was, "a usual in these groups," the only person of color, but in this situation dealt with it in a different way. As she described the transformative experience "I think that what I gained

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from that was a sense of myself as an artist, as a woman with my own spirituality, as a leader.” She felt she belonged:

What I loved about their group was that you could be a lot of different things. You could be lesbian, you could be straight. You could be a person of color. You could be whatever it was and it really was okay . . . it was really a great place for me . . . It really helped me grow a lot . . .

Ortega began working as an artist and was invited to serve on the Board of Directors of the Woman's Building in the late 1980s. She recalls that initially some of the other Board members were uncomfortable with her “touchy feely women's spirituality.” Unlike her experience with Califia, this time Ortega felt strong enough to resist opposition to her viewpoint and continued to voice her feelings.

For someone like Ortega, the Woman's Building existed first as a symbol, as a place where women could explore feminism. As she grew as an artist, the Woman's Building gradually came to provide a second function in her life, this time as an arena where she could make her own unique contribution to feminism, without having to apologize for her perspective as a woman of color or as a witch. She commented on the spiritual meaning of the Woman's Building for her:

I've had very indirect involvement with the . . . physical Building [itself], yet it has . . . done some incredible things for me in my life. And I think that, maybe that is how some institutions should be. That they are not just about the physicalness and going in there and doing things, but some things they can have impact that goes beyond that. And I suspect it impacted a lot of other women's lives . . . Just knowing that it is there may have helped.

Unlike Rosalie Ortega, who learned about the Woman's Building while in college, Gloria Alvarez remembers being “really amazed to find the Woman's Building.”⁶⁰ Although unversed in feminist art, Alvarez did come from a political family. She had helped organize a *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* chapter at her high school and was involved in student and community groups in college. She considered herself a participant in the Chicano movement and wanted “to take an active role in doing something for my community.” While in college she participated in *Comision Femenil Mexica*, a Chicana feminist organization and after college went to work in social work, focusing on domestic and child abuse.

Alvarez heard about the Woman's Building from a friend. When she first visited the Woman's Building she encountered Yolanda Alanis, a Chicana who worked as a receptionist.

Alvarez learned about the scholarships available at the Woman's Building, applied for and received several. She attended Mitsuye Yamada's poetry workshop and became involved with a video project headed by Jerri Allyn that produced public service announcements to raise awareness about forced sterilization, a topic with which Alvarez was already involved.

While Alvarez enjoyed the Woman's Building, as a full-time student and single mother, it was difficult for her to become very involved. Also, she felt real class differences existed at the Woman's Building. While she recognized some women at the Woman's Building really wanted to reach out to Latinas and working class women, she felt this was a somewhat limited group. She remembered having discussions with members of the Woman's Building about the different experiences women of color had with feminism. Alvarez was involved with a group, Lesbians of Color, who worked with the Woman's Building on racism. In part, Alvarez wanted to become involved with the Woman's Building in order to bring a Latina presence to the Woman's Building.



Poet Gloria Alvarez. (Source: www.ncrr-la.org/news/1_19_06/Gloria-Alvarez.jpg)

Alvarez, although not actively involved with the Woman's Building, maintained a membership so she would continue to receive information about activities. She searched for Latina names in the materials and when she read that Aleida Rodríguez was offering a writing workshop, she signed up for that group. She also occasionally received calls from members of the Woman's Building about participating in specific projects, usually centering around the video center. She remained friendly with several women from the Woman's Building and in 1989 approached Terry Wolverton, then executive director, about the possibility of conducting a series of workshops on Central American and Mexican immigrant women at the Woman's Building. Alvarez had conducted a few workshops in the community, but thought the Woman's Building was the perfect location for them.

She felt unsure about the reaction of members of the Woman's Building to hosting her workshop, but found, to her surprise, that the women not only wanted to group to use the Woman's Building, but that Wolverton would help her apply for grant funding. Alvarez became an artist-in-residence at the Woman's Building from 1989-1991. In addition to her workshops, she organized a Latina poetry festival and participated in a project to make the Woman's Building more responsive to the needs of Latinas. Although Alvarez found a warm reception at the Woman's Building, problems arose when her students telephoned the Woman's Building and no one could provide information in Spanish. Publicity materials were also printed in English only. Alvarez recalled that her students who did attend the Woman's Building "felt good that this was a place specifically for women." Alvarez believed that had the Woman's Building survived it would have become a more multicultural organization. However, she felt conflicted about the separatist aspects of the Woman's Building. While Alvarez recognized the value of women working with women only, she felt that, ultimately, women should also be working with men.

Although Alvarez was critical of some aspects of the Woman's Building and ambivalent about others, she, like so many women of color, was saddened by the closing. When asked her about how she felt about the closing of the Woman's Building, she responded:

Shocked. In a way I kind of took it personally . . . I kind of felt homeless. But I was really shocked because I felt like the Building was a place that was established and despite whatever problems I may have had with maybe people who were there on staff, still . . . I thought this . . . can't happen . . . it was real hard to accept it . . . this was the only place specifically for women.

Conclusion

While the anti-racism policies at the Woman's Building and the diversity programming made a difference in the organization, women of color remained reluctant to join the organization in large numbers. Despite early remedial efforts and later more profound and creative efforts, the middle and late history of the Woman's Building is similar to many feminist institutions during "second-wave feminism." Many women of color saw themselves as an afterthought, as add-ons, pawns in the process of tokenism.

Part of the problem at the Woman's Building stemmed from its origins in the mostly white, middle-class feminist movement. As Minnie Bruce Pratt points out, when a feminist organization "gets started by a non-diverse group; if the diversity is not in the planning sessions, a shift later, in how and what decisions are made, is exceedingly difficult."⁶¹

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The repercussions of the Woman's Building having emerged from a mainly white movement and having been founded by all white women were only compounded by the identity of the Woman's Building as an arts organization, since art is often seen as the domain of the elite in our society. Other feminist organizations that provided more basic services perhaps drew more women of color in need of them. Art, whether mistakenly or not, was seen as a luxury for many people and most of the poor. As a consequence, it was often the last concern of women of color. Barbara Smith has pointed out some of the problems in integrating identity politics into a concept of women's culture. She argues that women's culture explores and celebrates women's identity, and in that regard, tends to privilege gender over other aspects of identity. This approach privileges a universal oppression, either as lesbians or as women, that does not allow for the differing *loci* of oppression experienced by women of color and poor women. The authors disagree with Smith's assertion that "social-cultural" issues are somehow less important than "the more stringent realities of class and race."⁶² This assessment merely reverses the hierarchy she accuses "cultural feminists" of creating.

Women of color, looking for a new "home" or community, could fit into the Woman's Building in limited ways. Some women, like Rosalie Ortega felt they did not belong in the community of women of color, despite their matching skin tones. Ortega ultimately felt more comfortable among a mixed group of women. Other women, like Linda Nishio, found a niche in the Woman's Building as an artist already familiar with the spirit of feminist art created at the Woman's Building. Women like Gloria Alvarez may have been more typical, however. She went to the Woman's Building to enjoy the women only space, but felt that the Woman's Building really was meant for white women. She found it hard to accept what she saw as the separatist aspects of the Woman's Building that potentially divided women of color from men of color.

Ultimately, it is difficult to separate the issue of racism at the Woman's Building from the insider/outsider conflicts discussed above. All new women experienced some degree of difficulty gaining acceptance at the Woman's Building. Over the years, the Woman's Building developed into a tight knit group of women who assumed responsibility for the organization, making it difficult for any new members to acquire power, regardless of their skin color. Perhaps this division of insider/outsider is inherent in the very notion of community, feminist or not.

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Whether or not the Woman's Building experience points to another example of a failure of community-building in U.S. feminist movements, institutions, or organizations, in general, is a matter to be explored in another essay. The inability of the Woman's Building to create space for all women had the ironic result of creating that splendid isolation that Woolf craved, the room of one's own. Poet Eloise Klein Healy, a long-time Woman's Building member and leader, observed this final irony: "I feel like I've been sent to my room," she said about life after the Woman's Building, but the thought might just have easily might have been an ironic statement on isolation.⁶³

As I have stressed throughout this essay, the travails of the Woman's Building in building community were not unique. One needs only to look at the recent histories of any number of feminist and progressive organizations to see the parallel with the Woman's Building. However, the spirit of community-building and the efforts to confront and deal with racism are among the positive legacies of the Woman's Building and its contribution to the troubled and dynamic history of contemporary U.S. feminism and arts movements.

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¹ The play on “a room of her own” is an obvious reference to Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991 [1927]). If radical feminism finds its origins in the work of Simone de Beauvoir, then certainly Virginia Woolf stands as the mother of the feminist art movement.

² This chapter is the result of a writing collaboration between Michelle Moravec and Sondra Hale. The original research (oral histories and archival) was carried out by Michelle Moravec. Therefore, any time the personal voice is used it is Moravec's; all interviews were carried out by her.

³ This is a letter, dated April 15, 1975, that was sent to prospective students of the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW). Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. The Woman's Building was founded to house the FSW, an educational program, along with galleries and other feminist enterprises.

⁴ The material for this essay was partially contained in Michelle Moravec's dissertation on the Woman's Building: “Building Women's Culture: Feminism and Art at the Los Angeles Woman's Building,” PhD diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 1998. The work is partially based on interviews Moravec conducted as part of the Woman's Building Oral History Project from 1992-1999 in Los Angeles, California, unless otherwise noted. The project involved audio recording fifty interviews with selected participants in the Woman's Building over the years. At the time of publication of this e-book, the tapes are in the collection of the Woman's Building Board of Directors, Los Angeles, CA. Unless otherwise stated, all interviews referred to were part of that project.

⁵ Terry Wolverton, editor, *The First Decade: Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Woman's Building: A Pictorial History and Current Programs* (Los Angeles: The Woman's Building, 1983). The Mission Statement is printed on the back cover; the quotes are from p. 8 and p. 6, respectively.

⁶ Charlotte Bunch, “A Note on Sagaris,” in *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education*, eds. Bunch and Sandra Pollack, (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1983), 114-115.

⁷ Jackie St. Joan, “The Ideas and the Realities: Sagaris, Session I,” in Bunch and Pollack, 118.

⁸ Susan Sherman, “Women and Process: The Sagaris Split, Session II,” in Bunch and Pollack, 133.

⁹ Marilyn Murphy, “Califia Community,” in Bunch and Pollack, 130.

¹⁰ Betty Ann Brown, *Expanding Circles: Women, Art & Community* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996), vii.

¹¹ “Moral community” refers here to an ethical community—that which is value-laden and is built on social and kin relations as contrasted to political or economic relations.

¹² This is a quote from an unpublished work by Arlene Raven, “Notes on a Feminist Education.” At the time, Raven was a member of the staff of the Feminist Studio Workshop. Quoted in Ruth Iskin, “Feminist Education at the Feminist Studio Workshop,” in Bunch and Pollack, 72. Italics are Moravec's.

¹³ *Womanhouse* (Valencia, California: California Institute of the Arts, 1972).

¹⁴ Arlene Raven, ed., *At Home* (Long Beach, California: Long Beach Museum of Art, 1983).

¹⁵ Undated flier in Moravec's possession. According to Faith Wilding, the Woman's Building received its name when “Nancy Youdelman . . . found an old book which turned out to be the catalog of the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago 1893.” The Wilding quote is from Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands: The Women Artist's Movement in Southern California, 1970-1976* (Santa Monica, CA: Double X, 1977), 61. See also Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women: The Story of the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1981).

¹⁶ Undated Woman's Building flier in Moravec's possession.

¹⁷ Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower, My Struggles as a Woman Artist* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975).

¹⁸ Terry Wolverton, interview by Moravec, Los Angeles, CA, 30 July 1992.

¹⁹ Most of the fifty Woman's Building participants Moravec interviewed as part of the Woman's Building Oral History Project mentioned the importance of community. While not always defining community (and there were many different kinds), it was clear that each respondent had a particular notion in mind.

²⁰ There was, in fact, a great deal of programming that dealt with racism, cross-cultural issues, and the diversity of Los Angeles. One of the earliest efforts, in 1976, was collaboration by Chicana muralists led by Judy Baca, “*Las Venas del las Mujeres*.” In 1983, artist Linda Vallejo offered a printmaking project, *Madre Tierra*,

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for Latina artists and writers. "Cross-Pollination" (1986) was a project in which the Woman's Building commissioned twenty artists of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to produce posters that reflected those cultures. A cross-cultural writers series was organized in 1987. "In Whose Voice?" (1990) attempted to deal with the issue of whether or not white women or any group should speak for women of another group in their artwork. Women of color also served as Artists-in-Residence, e.g. Gloria Alvarez in 1990. These are just a few of the programs that women of color either instigated or the Woman's Building programmers organized to respond to complaints or simply as part of their political agenda.

²¹ Sharon Sidell-Selick, in her study of Woman's Building management, *The Evolution of Organizational Meaning: A Case Study of Myths in Transition* (PhD diss., The Wright Institute, Berkeley, 1985), 77, comments on the irony of being able to hire more women of color, only to have it create more conflicts. See also Meg Henson-Flores, undated grievance petition, c. 1979-1980, Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

²² Annette Hunt, interview by Moravec, San Francisco, CA, 8 August 1992.

²³ Henson-Flores.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Personnel Evaluation of Sue Maberry, February 1980. From the personal files of Sue Maberry.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Meg Henson-Flores to Maurine Renville, 30 April 1980. Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute. There was a professionally-facilitated forum held for staff in 1979 or 1980 (recollection of Terry Wolverton, e-mail correspondence, 13 January 1997.)

³⁰ Maurine Renville to Meg Henson-Flores, 26 March 1980. Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

³¹ See Notes by Suzanne Shelton, 3 September 1980, Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

³² *Chrysalis* occupied office space in the Woman's Building, and many members of the Woman's Building were involved with the production of the magazine. Previously, Angers had helped to found the Detroit Feminist Credit Union, an organization with a controversial history in the women's movement. For a concise history of the controversy over the feminist credit unions, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

³³ Woman's Building Staff Meeting Minutes, 13 April 1978, Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

³⁴ Sue Maberry, interview by Moravec, Los Angeles, CA, 9 September 1992.

³⁵ Sidell-Selick, 74.

³⁶ "New Executive Director," *Spinning Off*, 1 November 1980, 1.

³⁷ Sheila de Bretteville interview by Moravec, 12 August 1992, Los Angeles, CA.

³⁸ Terry Wolverton interview by Moravec, 30 July 1992, Los Angeles, CA.

³⁹ Maberry interview.

⁴⁰ "New Executive Director," *Spinning Off*, 1 November 1980, 1.

⁴¹ Suzanne Shelton, "Vision Statement: Problems/Possible Solutions," c. March, 1981, Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wolverton interview.

⁴⁵ Sidell-Selick, 1985, 77, italics Moravec's. Sidell-Selick chose to make her respondents anonymous. Thus, we do not know if we are hearing a woman of color, a white woman, an insider or an outsider. Nor has she dated her interviews so that we can temporally contextualize.

⁴⁶ Cherrie Moraga, "La Guera," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 33.

⁴⁷ Bia Lowe, for the GALAS Collective, letter, December 21, 1979, the Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁸ From interviews with GALAS participants: Bia Lowe Interview, 19 November 1992, Los Angeles, CA, and Terry Wolverton Interview, 30 July 1992, Los Angeles, CA. Some women of color threatened to boycott the show unless there were women of color included.

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⁴⁹ Elly Bulkin, "Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism," in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith, eds. (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1984), 89-153.

⁵⁰ *Spinning Off*, 6 October 1980. Members of the group included Terry Wolverton, Bia Lowe, Mary-Linn Hughes, Tracy Moore, Cindy Cleary, and Ginny Kish. Later Cyndi Kahn, Barbara Margolie, Jane Thurmond, Pat Carey, Jacqueline De Angelis, Judith Lausten, Patt Piese, and Louise Sherley. E-mail Correspondence with Terry Wolverton, 14 January 1997.

⁵¹ Out of fourteen women involved in a white women's anti-racism workshop, eleven identified as lesbian. Of the three heterosexual women, two identified as Jewish. It may be that lesbians, because of their experiences of exclusion within the women's movement, may have heard the charges of racism against the women's movement with a less hostile ear and that Jews may have embraced "liberation by analogy." A similar argument has been made by Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart," in Bulkin, et al., 20. However, Terry Wolverton, whose anti-racism work at the Woman's Building is discussed later, disagrees with this interpretation: "For me, the critical difference in our [lesbians working on racism at the Woman's Building] willingness to receive feedback about racism did not have so much to do with being lesbians but with a developmental shift in theory about racisms. We'd been previously stunted by a simplistic analysis that 'Racism=bad, feminism=good, therefore feminists cannot be racist.' We felt we'd been oppressed as women, and could not therefore conceive of being powerful enough to oppress anyone else. If we owned up to racism, we lost our innocence (and our 'victimhood'!). But by 1980, there was starting to be some more sophisticated analysis about oppression, and the complex machinations of multiple strands of oppression (race, class, gender, sexual preference, physical ability) and that one could, in fact, occupy many different positions on those multiple spectra. This allowed us to see, as Elly Bulkin articulated, that the choice was not between racism and non-racism, but between racism and anti-racism. If lesbianism had anything to do with it, it was that within the lesbian community there was more opportunity for interaction across lines of race and class than there might be for heterosexual women in the larger community. Also, politicized lesbians had less investment in the status quo, and were more committed to re-creating society and culture at a radical level, and might therefore be more embracing in their analysis." Moravec correspondence with Terry Wolverton, 13 January 1997.

⁵² Maberry interview, 9 September 1992.

⁵³ Marte Jones from a Woman's Building flier, n.d., c. 1980, Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D. C.

⁵⁴ Joan Watanabe taught in the Woman's Building graphic programs, and Helen Ly was a student in FSW.

⁵⁵ Cheri Gaulke interviewed by Moravec, 6 August 1992. Other feminist organizations were also forced to resort to such mainstreaming and fundraising methods. For example, in late 1979, the Women's Action Collective, facing a financial crisis, transformed its house manager into a "development coordinator." [Nancy Whittier, *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 46.]

⁵⁶ Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You: Racism in the Women's Movement, introduction to Jo Carillo's poem 'And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures with You,'" in Moraga and Anzaldua, eds., 61.

⁵⁷ Linda Nishio, interviewed by Moravec, Pasadena, CA, 13 December 1992.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Rosalie Ortega, interviewed by Moravec, Pasadena, CA, 12 December 1992.

⁶⁰ Gloria Alvarez, interviewed by Moravec, Los Angeles, CA, 19 November 1992.

⁶¹ Pratt, 51.

⁶² These comments were made as part of a sister-to-sister dialogue between Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue, Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith," in Moraga and Anzaldua, eds., 113-127.

⁶³ Woman's Building Oral History Project, 2 October 1992. Woman's Building Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

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