

Copenhagen Free University #2

With Emma Hedditch

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LAMBETH YOUNG WOMEN'S PROJECT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

As a staff team we will endeavour -

To provide a 'safe space' for young women, acknowledging the differences arising from race - gender - sexual identity - culture - religious belief - disability - class or age.

We will endeavour to offer choices and options and to promote equal access to the project and its resources for all young women.

We will establish active relationships with young women and other agencies. We will organise sessions/events which will provide social education, informations and discussion related to issues in the lives of the young women we work with.

We will befriend young women and offer encouragement, informal counselling and support.

We will encourage young women to participate in the affairs of the project through young women's committee representatives and through management committee meetings. We will work towards empowering/enabling young women to play a full part in the affairs of their community/society.

We will provide activities/sessions which will help young women to value themselves - each other and to promote self confidence and awareness. We will actively encourage and support young women we work with in the building of networks with other young women in other agencies.

We will challenge prejudice in all forms. We will actively oppose all forms of oppressive behaviour in this project such as racist, sexist, heterosexist language.

We will encourage young women to value and take pride in their space and to take care of it. We will not tolerate acts of vandalism such as pointless or offensive graffiti and the destruction of project resources.

We will not tolerate any abusive or intimidating action, harassment, verbal or physical by any member to another, nor by any member to a staff member. In response to acts which persistently oppose project policy we reserve the right to exclude those responsible from using the project.

In the interests of health and as required by law we will not allow drugs or alcohol inside the building. No weapons must be brought inside the building.

LAMBETH
EDUCATION

Coming to have a public life/ Working things out together

Lambeth Women's Project

Lambeth Women's Project was established in 1981, initially it was for young women, more recently it has become a centre for women of all ages. The centre provides a safe place for women to meet and socialise, no men are allowed, only boys up until the age of 8 years. The building has three floors and includes computer equipment, arts, craft and maintenance materials, a kitchen, administration offices, crèche and a lounge, with a television and audio equipment. Lambeth Council own the building, but do not charge any rent, and they do provide some maintenance work. Several groups use the centre on a regular basis, including 'Stockwell, Portuguese Women's Group', 'Eritrea Community Club' and permanently renting one office is a group for 'French speaking African Women'. Until December 2000 there was one paid worker for one day a week, now everybody is a volunteer. Decisions are made by a Management Committee, who meet each month and are ultimately responsible for dealing with all of the finances regarding the Centre.

The Project was one of many, born out of initiatives established by the Women's Committee of Lambeth Council. At that time supported by the Greater London Council, which came under Labour's control in 1981, led by Ken Livingstone. The Women's Committee of the GLC emerged later in 1982. It's purposed to provide political and financial support to Women's organisations and issues. It drew on the political experience of the community struggles which had developed since the 1970's, and aimed to unify and co-ordinate the knowledge which existed already, among women from those communities.

Over 70 Women worked for the Women's Committee Support Unit, at the GLC. The unit issued grants to Women's groups and organisations throughout London. Grants were available for projects including Women's Centres, infant day-care, safe transportation and health campaigns. It was involved in the promotion of equality for all women, including black and ethnic minorities, lesbians, women with disabilities, older women and girls. It was an information and campaigning resource, and it worked with other GLC committees and departments – housing, transport, planning, arts, recreation and employment – to ensure that women's needs were recognised in all aspects of the councils work. The GLC was abolished in 1985, although many local councils were still run by a Labour Councillor, the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher began withdrawing funds



Clockwise from the top left: Ego, Abda, Dara and Christine at The Lambeth Women's Project

and support for this kind of community based project.

In 1997 Lambeth Council withdrew almost all funding for the Lambeth Women's Project, and its support workers. Women's Network took over the running of the building, on a voluntary basis. In the next three years, one worker was employed for a contract of 6 months for one day a week. Her contract ran out in December of last year and it was announced that the building would have to close, due to a lack of funds and support from the local community. Meanwhile, 16 million pounds had been granted to the Stockwell Regeneration Committee to improve facilities, infrastructure, housing and establish initiatives for young people and the unemployed in the area. In the following discussion at the Lambeth Women's Project, we tried to establish a way of tackling the issue of why the Women's project had not been considered an important community facility, and had not been offered funds from the Stockwell Regeneration Committee. This we hoped would help prepare us for a meeting, taking place between the representatives from the Stockwell Regeneration Committee and the local people in Stockwell, that evening.

Maureen: I think this area is under-funded, and in particular there is no money being put into Women's issues. You can see here that a lot of things need to be done because it is in your face. People talk about it, and well, I can see it. It's just a facelift as it were, looking good, but the deeper issues are how we live every day. There needs to be a lot more information, visual, I mean I know Lambeth council, they have a web site, but how many people have access to a web site. It needs to be well circulated, because I don't really know much about what is going on in the community, apart from what I hear from other people, like some of the things that I have heard from the women here today. Now I am taking things back, I realise there is not a lot, and things are closing down and there is not enough funding to do it up, so perhaps there is not that much being done.

Abda: My name is Abda, I am a member of the management committee of the Lambeth Women's project, my involvement with the project has been many years. As a person, my interest is Women's issues. I wanted to see different Women's projects within this centre, where women can meet together, socialise. At the same time there are different needs for women, as mothers, workers and part of the society. This is the only project for women in Lambeth. I am a community worker, I also work for the Horn of Africa Refugee Parents Association, where we only work for the needs of refugee women. If funding is given to this centre, a lot of activities can be provided that will impact positively on the rest of the community. At the moment, the changes I see are in terms of cleaning, the area seems much cleaner, but in terms of meeting the needs of the population, I don't think a change has really been shown. If you see in society, many women are at home doing everything, women are under pressure. In order for women to come together, in order to get time for themselves, to look at themselves and to develop

themselves they really need to meet with each other, it is very important to meet within their own space and their own organisation.

Christine: In other projects, where men are involved, they quite quickly become dominated by men and men's issues. I think men see these projects as much for their own personal gain and advancement, and women, well I do think it is important to try and maintain it as a Women's project. In a way the issues were more separated 20 years ago in terms of equalities for example and it was very clearly recognised that there were inequalities. There were very specific political ideas to deal with those separately. For example, there was a race unit, and a Women's unit, but because those were seen to be expensive, even though the issues didn't go away, there was a lot of rationalisation for doing away with those units. It has gone with really, very, little protest. Now again the government is talking about equality, and for example Lambeth has done a big report on race and all the same things have come up that came up ten or twenty years ago. But are they prepared to put the resources into it? and my guess is no, they're not. We have got a real struggle now, when there seemed like there were open ended resources, now those are the things that are going to suffer.

Abda: I really agree with what Christine is saying. In terms of this, things like child-care, there is still not enough child-care provision in this country, and support for women in the family. The government is really not funding Women's projects. I mean if we really have to follow what is the politics of today the needs of the people who are on low incomes or poor or working class families will not be met. Really at the end of the day, it is working class women who really need the centre, those women need to come together and resolve the issues that really concern them.

Ego: But women don't realise that they have that right to space and time, to decide what they want to do, or understand more about themselves and the value of that.

Christine: We don't value it, and society doesn't value the informality and the necessity for people to get together in groups. It's no good having a consultation and expecting people to come if they have not already developed their voice from any kind of perspective, as an individual. Why would I go?

Emma: I don't see why we should have to try and develop more vocational or training activities here, to get women back into work, in order to get funding or stay open. The centre should stay as it is, an informal meeting place for all women to use. I think the language issue is important, if we can regularly meet to develop good arguments and ways of discussing women's issues, and for women who want to learn English or other languages.

Dara: It was Women's Network that was connected to the project, at that time

they had full time staff, the place used to be open then so you could always drop in. Now you are usually having to find out when it's going to be open and if you can make it at that time. It's interesting, a nice mixture of older and younger women. Lot's of people are interested in things, but not necessarily to start them themselves, but if something is happening they will come, but everybody is waiting for somebody else to start something.

Christine: The money that's left will cover the bills up until the end of September, but we have to prepare for that, because if we go beyond that we will be liable for whatever money we incur after that. We have got a few people who are using and paying a bit towards the upkeep of the building. We are dependant on a lot of things that we don't have control of, we don't know what is going on. There was a long period where the council did support work with young women, this is a council building and it was more than a 50% council run project. When the council withdrew funds, we were put in a position where we said, the Women's Network said, we can't let this building close, when it looked like the council was just going to board it up, that was more than three years ago.

We did go to the meeting, it was obvious that the consultation process was not really a consultation, more of a platform for the Stockwell Regeneration Committee to tell local people what they were doing in the area, and how things were going to improve for them. The next day one of the women, Ego from the project and I decided to go to the offices of the Stockwell Regeneration Committee and speak to a representative directly. We wanted to find out how the consultation had taken place, what part of the scheme was funded by private investment, and was there any attempt to address Women's issues in the process of consultation, if so why hadn't we been contacted?

We were told that the Lambeth Women's Project fell outside of the area that the Stockwell Regeneration Committee was dealing with, despite the fact that nearly all the women that use the centre are from within the area. When we pointed this out somebody decided to meet us. Consultation had been in the form of a mail out to all the residents and business in the area. It was not clear how many people responded and how much work was put into encouraging responses. Half of the money for redevelopment has been given by private investors, whether in kind or in cash. This is particularly daunting, the effects can already be seen in a number of sites which have been dedicated to private housing. The existing shopping centre, occupied by a number of small independent shops and services, seems destined to become a more generic centre, for modern chain store outlets, despite claims to the local business forum that this would not happen. Women were seen to have been key players in the consultation process, particularly in the structure of the new community centre, local crèche facilities, safety on the streets and tenants associations. We asked why had we not been consulted, when we were going to be affected by these changes, and already had been to some extent. He



International Women's Day 2001 at the Lambeth Women's Project

said he would look into it.

On the way back to the Women's Project we passed the site which used to be the Black Women's Centre, in it's place Luxury apartments are under construction, they will have a gymnasium in there. When we get back to the Centre, some junkies have constructed a ladder to get over the wall, into the derelict land beside the Women's Centre. They used to hang out on the site of the Black Women's Centre before construction began. We ask them to not use this as an access point, because it is a women's centre, they agree to go in from the other side in future. This piece of land has been derelict for about 5 years, we tried to find out who owns it, but all we know is that a government grant was given to it, but where the money went, we don't know. It's dereliction affects the Women's Project enormously, the building that used to be there was the supporting external wall for the Women's Project building. Since that has gone, now the building is subsiding, and this alone threatens the Women's Project with closure. In addition the junkies that hang out there now, although they do not really impose on the space, make some women feel uneasy about coming in and out of the building.

We decide and realise that if we are going to keep the centre going it has to be by ourselves and with our own initiatives. In the next meeting with the Management Committee of the Lambeth Women's Project, everybody agrees that we will try



Top: The derelict land next to the Lambeth Woman's Project. Below: Ego at the site which used to house the Black Women's Centre

and develop independent ways to fund the building and maintain it. Some groups that already use the building agree to pay something towards renting some of the spaces, and other women decide to hold an open day, to celebrate the activities of the Centre.

The Feminist Library

The Feminist Library is in a 'multi-purpose building' near the Elephant and Castle roundabout in South London. When you go in, there is a long corridor that used to be covered in posters for different activities aimed at women, such as self defence classes, aerobics, poetry readings etc. The administration offices are at the end of the corridor and there are two other rooms off to the left and right, with books and magazines on free standing shelf units. There is a group of women sitting around the table in the magazine room, all reading. Into the other room, where some books are scattered on the floor. There is one woman standing reading a leaflet from a magazine holder, marked 'radical, lesbian, feminist', she holds the leaflet up to me, open at a page that shows six women lying on a zebra crossing in the early 80's, as part of a peace protest in Central London.

I am overwhelmed by the amount of information, leaflets, documents and literature housed in the Feminist Library. There is so much to do in terms of the archive and new volunteers are needed all the time. The space rental is subsidised by Southwark Council, but there are many threats to withdraw this subsidy, that is why the shelf units are free standing. The Library is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 12 noon until 8 o'clock, and staffed only by volunteers. It operates as a collective, and members meet once a month to discuss coming activities and business. To become a member of the Library you must pay £5 but as a volunteer it is free and if you have children, child-care is paid for. The Feminist Library chooses to distinguish from the Fawcett Library, which is another Women's Library in London, the Feminist Library as a collection is more radical and concerned with a 'Practice of Feminism' than the record of Women's histories, as is the Fawcett Library. Men are allowed to use the library, but only women can work there.

The Feminist Library Needs You!

The Feminist Library is in desperate need of volunteers to join the management collective. Recently, several long-standing collective members including Emma Small (5 years on the collective) and Beth Follini (8 years on the collective) have decided to step down to pursue other interests. In the past, enough new volunteers have joined the management collective to keep the library running.

What does the management collective do?

- Make policy decisions about the running of the library.
- Do strategic planning and budgeting
- Liaise with other organisations and professionals such as council officers
- Ensure that the library is meeting its legal obligations as a charity and voluntary organisation
- Do publicity and fund-raising work

What will you get out of being a collective member?

- Experience in being on a management collective and taking responsibility for the running of a small voluntary organisation.
- The good feeling of knowing that you are helping to keep a small women's organisation running and open.
- The opportunity to attend events and meetings on behalf of the library.

What will happen if the collective doesn't get some new members?

The library needs to have new collective members in order to ensure that they library keeps running. If new women do not step forward to join the collective, the library might have to look at shutting down as we cannot continue to run with so few people. The library can only keep going if women continue to support it through getting involved.

How can you get involved?

Come to a meeting for all prospective collective members on Saturday, Feb 26th 2:30pm at the **Feminist Library, 5 Westminster Bridge Road, SE1**, where you can find out more about what is involved. If you can't make it to this meeting, then please ring the library on **0171-928-7789** to find out about the next collective meeting. **NOTE:** The library pays travel expenses for volunteers who are unemployed or students. Also, if you want to get involved with the collective but can't because of child-care commitments, the library will pay child-care expenses for volunteers attending collective meetings (up to £20.00 per meeting on production of a receipt) which are once a month for 1.5/2 hours. We will also cover your child-care expenses to attend the meeting on the 26th February 2000.

Bulletin

On the GLC Women's Committee
DG/WCSU, County Hall, London SE1



MAY 24-TELLING LONDON ABOUT PEACE!



GLC Working for Women
in London

Issue 8 May 1983

Cinenova

"They're asking 'Why do we need two Women's Distributors', but the question should be reformulated as 'Why don't we need more?'" Jenny Holland one of Circles workers.

During the Seventies and Eighties in the UK, the task of distributing women's film and video work was taken by two organisations: Circles and Cinema of Women. Through the promotion of a feminist distribution practice which ensured, firstly that distribution opportunities existed for films and videos directed by women, which spoke from and about the position of women, and secondly that such films were not misrepresented, or presented in a manner contrary to the film maker's wishes.

Circles began in 1979, and produced its first catalogue of about 30 films early in 1980. It emerged as part of, and drew many of its practices from, the Women's Liberation Movement.

Part of the initial reason for establishing an alternative distribution network for women, came from the experience suffered in 1979 by film makers Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow, when they were enlisted to contribute to an Arts Council of England exhibition on 'experimental' film at the Hayward Gallery in London. These women saw this as turning into an inherently anti-feminist event, and they responded by withdrawing their painstakingly researched work altogether, and leaving the gallery space blank. The research into forgotten and neglected film makers, such as Alice Guy and Maya Deren, later became the initial acquisitions in the Circles distribution catalogue.

When Circles began it was run on an entirely voluntary basis. In 1980, Circles received some grant aid from Tower Hamlets, the local council then under the guidance of the Greater London Council. However, seven years later all funds were withdrawn. Following a number of fight back campaigns eventually the British Film Institute agreed to take up the funding of the organisation. It was unlikely that a large scale income would ever be generated by the kind of film and video work they were distributing, it would have to remain as a non-commercial organisation.

Cinema of Women began largely as an outlet for campaigning films, on women's work, later expanding to take in full-length features, narrative and non-narrative, on film, and on tape. Perhaps most importantly, Cinema of Women acknowledged the way in which their feminist distribution strategies directly affected who made up the audience for a particular film. They sought ways to make the work more accessible, through the introduction of compilation video tapes with particular themes, such as 'Sexuality', 'Work' and 'Race' which allowed for a lower cost hire.

By the late Eighties an increasing number of women began to resist the category 'Feminist' film maker, and turned for acceptance to alternative distributors, such

as London Video Access, known at that time, internationally as the video art distributor in the UK. As a result, finding a strong, clearly defined identity for a women's distributor in the 90's became more difficult. Circles and Cinema of Women joined hands to form Cinenova.

Launched in 1991, Cinenova became the only UK based, non-profit making distribution company, specialising in independent films and videos directed by women. The collection of films spans 90 years of film-making, with over 400 titles ranging from documentaries to feature films, and including animation, and experimental work (see www.cinenova.org.uk and right: The contents page for Cinenova women's film and video distribution catalogue in London).

I was working at Cinenova in 1994, for a few months, in the distribution department. I was conducting research into educational institutions who ran women's studies courses that we could contact, with regard to representing some of Cinenova's titles in their libraries. At that time we were also aware of the impact that video installation in galleries was having on video in distribution and began to engage in discussions with artists and gallery owners about this trend.

I was able to watch a lot of Cinenova's collection during that time. When you look through the catalogue it is impressive to see the diversity of women's experience represented, and how for example there are many political works alongside established artists and film makers in the same collection. I had always found the structure of the organisation somewhat confusing, there is a Management Committee and a Board of Directors. The organisation is a charity, so these kind of bureaucratic structures need to be in place. There were two full time employees, and several volunteers.

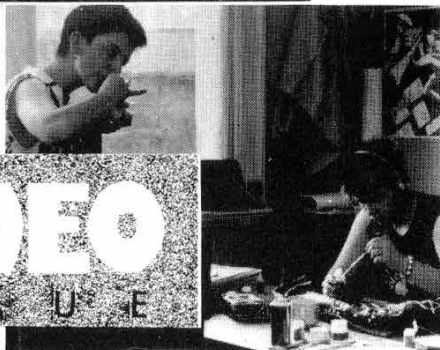
I had not worked at Cinenova again until this year, but had been in close contact with its activities. The organisation had always been threatened with closure, but in March of this year it had become clear that a decision had to be made about the future of Cinenova. The London, Film and Video Development Agency who were now funding Cinenova seemed unlikely to continue supporting the organisation as they had been, and the money being generated from distribution was not enough to support other administration costs. All distribution was suspended, and the Board of Directors began seeking new offices to house the collection as an archive. Glasgow Women's Library agreed to take the collection, and a letter was sent to all artists with work in the collection, stating that they must withdraw their work by the 11th of May this year, if they did not want their work to go to the archive in Glasgow. For me the distribution of the work has always been the most important struggle, so I have started seeking ways of extending this possibility.

We are sitting in the tiny office, the heating is on full blast, I end up sitting on the floor. Suddenly I find myself involved in an impromptu meeting, between two

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CINEMA OF WOMEN



FILM & VIDEO C A T A L O G U E

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women who are administrators for Cinenova, and two women film makers, Lis Rhodes and Sandra Lahire. One woman is trying to explain that without more support they don't feel that the organisation can continue. Sandra and Lis are saying how they would be willing to offer that support, and try and enlist the support of other women academics. Sandra expresses how important the collection is to her research for a Ph.D. Lis emphasises the historical significance of the organisation, what if it were to disappear? The other woman begins to describe the options which are currently available to them, which include moving the collection to Glasgow Women's Library, or the Fawcett Library in London. This would end all distribution but maintain the collection as an archive. Slowly Lis turns to me and asks 'what do you think?' I blush with anxiety (and the heat). I had promised myself that I wouldn't interfere. "I think we should write how the collection and the organisation as a feminist ideal is culturally significant now, in relation to other film and video distributors". They say it is a good idea but how would it help things? I suppose I am thinking about how it would help me, to understand how I feel about the situation. I can in a practical way continue to promote Cinenova, answer requests for video and film work and organise tape dubs for screening.

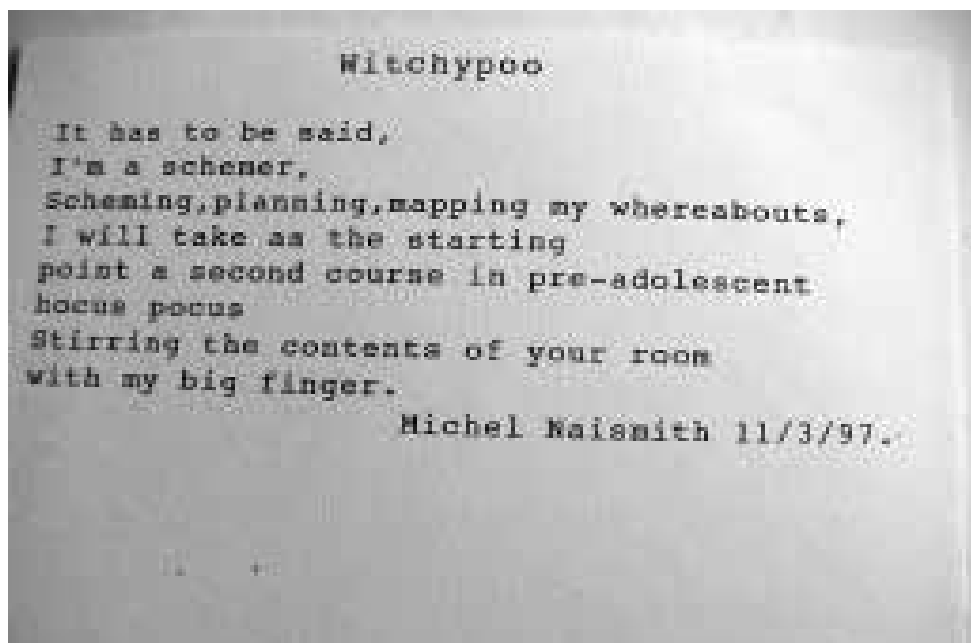
When I was at Cinenova in 1994, I remembered picking up a flyer which said 'Big Miss Moviola' a video distribution/chain letter from Miranda July in Portland Oregon. I wrote to Miranda at that time and received one of the Chain letters, and the suggestion from Miranda that I start something similar here in the UK. During March of this year Miranda visited London to premiere her new video and performance work, as part of the Pandaemonium Festival at the Lux Centre. I was co-curating a programme for the festival which featured works from Cinenova, in an attempt to highlight the fact that distribution was going to stop at Cinenova, and probably most of the collection dispersed. We began a conversation about how to still get to see the work we want to here in London. Through Joanie 4 jackie in the US (this was Big Miss Moviola, now go to www.joanie4jackie.com) it is possible to see other women's video work at a relatively low cost (by mail order) and in easy to screen formats, on VHS video compilation tapes. So I answered, "Yes, let's try and do something similar here".

My attempt to establish meeting places for women through cultural activities

And I'll do anything to get girls into my bedroom

We had been friends at college, and we had even lived together for two years. Since then our friendship had waned for one reason or another. I wanted to find a way to regain her trust, and let her know that I wanted to be friends again. I decided to invite her to exhibit some of her video work in my bedroom, which at the time (1996) was on the 17th floor of a tower block in South London. She agreed, we spent some time discussing the idea, she came to stay, made suggestions about how best we should set up the room, we swapped books, made cards to advertise the show etc. I helped to shoot the film that would later become her installation on video. We got along really well and became good friends again.

I decided that this was a good way to offer something to women, who's work I like and wanted to show them that I respected their work. I wanted to express myself as a feminist, and place certain demands upon myself with regards to solidarity



A flyer advertising Michelle Naismith's show at 'And I'll do anything to get girls into my bedroom'



Runhild Wirth and Niveen Saleeh visit 'And I'll do anything to get girls into my bedroom' and discuss the work by Kate Betton, that they find there

and action.

I lived in that apartment for another two years, in which time I tried to present work by women artists each month. We would have gatherings each month, to discuss the progress of the project and if participants (not just the artists) had suggestions we would discuss them at these meetings. Men were not excluded from these meetings, but I have to admit I did discourage them. I began to feel less isolated through these actions, but still within my own particular set of circumstances, which I have always felt determined to retain and value, rather than try to change them, in the hope that I could find something 'better'.

This is a list of the participating artists as far as I can remember, some of whom made work, which I have attempted to describe here, for the lack of documentation.

Michelle Naismith: 'If you lived here you'd be home by now' Two video monitors, with a single mattress in between, and 'top to tail' pillow arrangement. On one monitor is a close up, fuzzy black and white image of a woman lying on a bed. She is wearing rabbits ears and reading a book of Rembrandt paintings. On the other monitor, there is the same woman, with her hand down her underpants.

Kate Belton: Three Cibachrome images mounted on thin aluminium. Kate's photo's are taken from painted, cut-out and constructed arrangements, she makes in miniature. Two are of a woman's head, almost covered by a sheet, and one is a small portrait of a naked figure, rolling back in a pose, legs in the air, with a smile.

Moyra Derby, Jennifer Williams, Claudia Lee, Jyll Bradley: A Poetry reading, for one evening only. **Helena Goldwater:** A Performance installation, for one night only. **Emma Leslie and Krista Bagnell:** Video and music designed to put on

when I was getting dressed in the morning. **Janine Rostron:** Her own Music on a walkman. **Angela Basson:** I would like to come to your place and film myself throwing a bag of feathers out of your window. **Sofia Hulten:** Sofia made a bed that floated in the room, using helium filled balloons and a sheet.

There was a group show called 'It's been so long since I've seen you, so much has changed, It would be great to see your face again.' Which included Photographs by **Kristin Lucas, Fran Gore, Niamh McMann, Virginie Amant, Paula Roush, Soozi Mead, Anna Lucas, Sandra Hedditch and Vivian Berardinelli Galvagna.**

Moot Point



Women in Black

London

We thought it was about time we sent out another mailout, as it seems to be the most effective way of keeping in touch – the phone tree has not been as successful as we might have hoped. Some of us managed to meet recently to talk about the last three months and where we might go from here.

There have been three vigils on the first Wednesday of each month at the statue of Edith Cavell. As agreed, these have been in protest against the continuing bombing of Iraq, and the British government's enforcement of the sanctions regime. The vigils have been well-attended and there has been a lot of public interest – we have handed out more than 500 leaflets each time, as well as making a strong visual statement.

At October's vigil, we agreed to carry on with four more vigils, again on the first Wednesday of each month, and keeping the focus on Iraq. However, we do not want to rule out the possibility of a quick response to crises in other parts of the world – to activate the phone tree in such an event, call anyone in the core group (marked * on the phone tree). If you do not have a phone tree, send an SAE to the above address, and we'll send one out to you.

- Sian and Ippy from Women's Aid to Former Yugoslavia (WATFY) continue to work with women's groups in the region and would welcome donations. Their new address is; 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX.
- Several women will be going to Brussels on the weekend of 13th October, for the international meeting of Women in Black.
- Sue Finch has a supply of Women in Black T-shirts for sale at £12. Contact her on 020 8806 1333.

Our next vigils are on Wednesdays 8/11/00, 6/12/00, 3/1/01 and 7/2/01 from 6-7 pm at the statue of Edith Cavell opposite Trafalgar Square. Vigils are silent, and will be candlelit. Please wear black.

This mailout has been paid for by the stamps and contributions sent in – **thank you!** Anyone wanting to make contributions please send cheques payable to **Women in Black London** c/o The Maypole Fund, PO Box 14072, London N16 5WB.

Liz and Shereen, for Women in Black London

Bettina Wilhelm, Nicoline Van Haarskemp, Yoko Hata, Janine Rostron, Runhild Wirth, Anna Lucas, Claudia Lee, Angela Byrne, Janette Parris, Rayna Nadeem, Maritxu Ontondu, Kathy Williams, B+K, Paula Roush, Oreet Ashery, Helga Oskadottir and Emma Hedditch.

I was asked by Bobo's, which was a small gallery in Peckham, run by Mike Wilson, to curate the final show in the Autumn of 1999. I liked Mike enough to say yes. I invited the women artists above and one psychiatrist to meet up and talk about something we could do together, or that the idea would be that we should make a project in which we all try to engage in each others work as much as possible, on a really conscious level. We met seven times before the show, each week in a different place. I hadn't anticipated more women getting involved, but a few people invited friends along and this seemed to work out, as other people I had initially invited dropped out. Once we met at my flat and I made tomato soup, another time in a cafe. Bettina made a Swiss fondue in the Belt Space, run by her friend, I can't remember the name of just now. I just remember seeing my old friend Alison Buckle again, which was wonderful. Alison once made this beautiful film about a girl who is in the back of a big old car, playing with a necklace that is made from cotton reels. The man driving the car keeps stopping and sometimes he reaches into the back of the car and takes out a large black bag. Since then Alison had a baby and moved to Cumbria.

By the time it came to moving into the gallery, we almost didn't want to be there. Paula and I really wanted to do something about the area where Bobo's was. We met a woman and her mother who ran a market stall nearby, and got involved in a whole conversation about how the council was trying to evict her. So we decided to make a video about it. Oreet wanted to make a campsite, in the communal garden at the back of the house. Yoko's friend came and convinced everybody that she was pregnant. We did all of this, we even made a picnic in the gallery with coffee and different foods from the take away shops along the street.

On the night of the camping we built a bonfire and sat talking until late. It was during the Kosovo conflict and I imagined us as refugee women. A couple of days later, I remember walking through Central London and there were many protests happening. I felt like giving up. The next day everybody decided to go to an exhibition at Camden Arts Centre and I couldn't understand why they wanted to go. I felt upset about the whole thing and refused to go.

I had been involved in 'Women in Black' who are an international women's peace group for about two years. They hold monthly vigils in Trafalgar square, previously they were campaigning against sanctions in Iraq, and now they were turning their attention to the situation in Kosovo. My friends from Bobo's got interested and came to support the vigil that evening, held banners and gave out leaflets.

The Sewing Circle



Miranda July, knitting at the Sewing Circle with Jannie Rostron DJing, March 2001

The Sewing Circle happens on the last Thursday of each month. It is an evening for Women Only, in a small cafe, above a large cinema in Brixton, South London. Here it is possible for women to meet, listen to music or DJ, discuss their work and lives, drink and eat. The most interesting part of the evening for me is that we are able to show 16mm films made by women from the Lux Distribution Archive, formerly the London Film-makers Co-op. The films are selected by myself, Chloe Stewart, who also operates the 16mm projector and Jemma Burns, who works at Lux Distribution. I had always wanted to see more of these films and learn about the film-makers and this seemed like the best way to make that happen. The films are for the most part experimental, and so far have included works by Shirley Clarke, Jayne Parker, Barbara Hammer, Vivienne Dick, Sharon Sudunsky, Betzy Bromberg and Tanya Syed. At some point during the evening, we turn off the music, and turn our attention to the big white screen. Then we are all learning together, about the history of experimental films made by women.



Nicole and Marina

Self Sufficiency / The idea that you are working things out alone

Raising a Resister

'Raising a Resister' is a video tape that you can put on and off. It can be played on a small TV at home or where you have one, or it could be played through a video projector in a larger room, like a cinema. It could be broadcast on TV or via the internet. It is quite self-contained.

The content of the video is based on certain texts that I have been working on and have been reading, which reflect my interest in a feminist, psychological and philosophical language, in the video it is spoken through an actors voice. I have used video material gleaned from the Lambeth Women's Project in addition to new video that I shot. I worked closely with Marina Vishmidt who appears in the video, and performs the voiceover and edited the video with me in her character. It is almost like there are several versions of this video that could be made, so I am still working on that premise, I am still making other versions.

The Script of 'Raising a Resister' by Emma Hedditch

Much of the video is low quality image, and records activities undertaken by a group of girls such as 'role-play' telephone conversations, to rock climbing. The new video footage records Carol (played by Marina) who can't decide between isolation and becoming part of a group.

C = Carol played by Marina Vishmidt.

E = Emma played by Emma Hedditch

There is some music that is quiet and melodic. Pictures of girls at around 11 and 12 years, in clothes that are the kind you wear when you mostly wear a school uniform, but for some evenings and weekends you chose your own clothes, from a limited range.

C. Look that's me there, there I am with the Brown Hair.

C. No there I am, him, no there were no hims.



Top: Marina Vishmidt in 'Raising a Resister'. Below: Video still from the LWP archive

C. Really (Coughs)

C. At home...yes I still get a rash, but it is only...I think because I insist on washing with really hot water...

C. Sorry...I forgot, hmm...but there were no hims.

Colour pictures of the same girls, climbing a climbing wall. Other girls are watching from the ground wearing thin nylon jackets.

C. It's odd because I am sure I was...I mean I really remember looking up at that larger woman, and the smaller woman there with the harness, with the glasses. You see I think I was there but I am not on the picture...I was watching from behind the woman there on the bench that's me. There behind her...I remember looking up at the climbing wall, and the helmet I was wearing seemed really heavy.

Pause.

Black and white photos of four Asian girls on a beach collecting shells, It's windy.

C. And the sweater there that she is wearing, she had it because it complemented her figure...it helped to emphasise the top part of her body. It was never that cold...it was raining a lot, they actually showed us a marker for the water level in the river.

Pause.

C. You mean strong physically...? Well I am good at sustained walking, endurance, you know long distance walks, but not at lifting things. I could walk for miles though, I am good at pacing myself...a beginner and an ender. But no not lifting, the helmet was heavy it made my head pull over the way.

C. No I can't swim...

Black and white photos of two older women, in between them are two younger girls, it is like they are superimposed over one another.

C. Sorry...not 'the' leader, you see her, Margaret, she was the leader. I don't really think of myself...alone...more as part of a team...not at all, it would be hard for me...but physically, no I don't think I could do some things. I mean I can do this for example (there is a pause and a shuffling noise, and perhaps a grunt) There is quite a lot of lateral movement there, with the left arm which sort of balances the rest of my body, it basically stops me from falling over...and it also really helps with pointing towards the direction that the ball is actually going to move.

There is a video sequence of an older woman shot from a distance in the park from behind. The park is a wide expanse of grass. The woman has a number of dogs, some are larger than others, one in particular is very small. She is wearing a big green jacket and the dogs are all running around her, occasionally she throws a twig or something and they run off but they always come back and she let's them individually lick her fingers. It cuts to pink blossom on a tree, and then to a cat in a doorway, licking the floor, and then another cat with a dark shadow.

C. What body? I mean which part of the body, the foot, leg, arms...the whole thing? It's there, I mean I know it's there, I could see my shadow, only I don't feel it, I don't feel it at any particular time of the day, whether there is a shadow or not.

We are in a Gymnasium, in front with her back to us, she has her hands behind the back of her head, and is turning left to right. In front of her, but for us, behind her, is a small girl, on a treadmill, smiling, wearing inappropriate clothes for this kind of exercise. The walls are very green, in fact the whole room has a green tinge. Alongside on an exercise bike, the view moves to a girl wearing a black and pink shell suit and then a girl on a rowing machine.

C. Hi, it's me...ok, yes I am ok...and you? good...but listen, could you do something for me? There is this picture that I have sent through to you, but I am worried that I may have sent the wrong one. Could you check that nothing has come up on the screen, if something has could you tell me what it is...could you describe it ?

Pause.

C. It's no use, there was no way I could talk to this woman on the phone, it was an emotional issue for me. I wrote her a letter, explaining why I was so upset. I even sent her pictures that illustrated what she had done. I put a card in with the letter, with a stamp on it, that she could fill in to tell me she was sorry, with tick boxes.

Image changes to a girl, trying to do role play with a telephone.

E. Did you get any response?

C. No I did not hear from her until roughly 3 weeks later, she sent me the card, she crossed out the part that said I am sorry with a marker pen, and wrote complaining that her bank had charged her, because I had stopped the payment to her account. She said I still owed her, which led me to believe that she knew she had made a mistake.

E. You originally gave her 25, she gave you 24 of them, while she worked on the other one, didn't you have time if you had wanted to, to look at the 24?

C. No I didn't have time, I was babysitting him in the back room.

E. When you came home that night and started to put it all together, did you realise that there had been a mistake?

C. I already explained that.

E. Did you at any time pick up the phone and tell her?

Girls Dancing.

C. No it could not be fixed, she couldn't fix it, I didn't want to talk to her, I didn't want to get into a conversation with her about it. I knew that if I called her she would start talking about something else. I got the photos developed in an hour so I could send them straight away.

E. When did the infraction take place?

C. Three years ago.

E. And you haven't seen her since then?

C. No, I couldn't face her.

E. How did you work out how much she owed you?

C. Well, I added up the time it took, and all the expenses incurred and multiplied it three times. It's not even an estimation of the true value. But it's the only system I know, and have used with regard to the value of this kind of work.

It is a small room, with wood chip paper, and a sloping roof, there is a low table and a girl sitting at it drawing, occasionally she looks up.

C. She was thought to have been born to a family earlier this century. She was a baby playing out in the garden, near her parent's remote home, when she was stolen by a she-wolf who carried her away, (the wolf probably clutched her in it's teeth) Her parents searched for her, but they could not find her.

Probably she survived by suckling the mother wolf as the cubs did, until she grew big enough to fend for herself. Years later, stories spread around the village of a ghost-like creature prowling with the wolf-pack at night.

The local pastor investigated the situation. He found that instead of a ghost there was a girl with filthy matted hair. She ran on all fours, and snarled, baring her teeth. When she was captured she crouched in the corner of the yard into which she was locked and howled at the moon.



Top: Cat with a shadow from 'Raising a Resister. Below: Video still from LWP archive

It took many months before she was able to change from animal, to human ways. Gradually she learned to like day time better than night, she learned to kneel at the table. It was difficult at first to stand, or even kneel as her knees were very stiff. She learned to eat cooked meat and to refuse to eat raw, dead animals, she stopped howling and became more friendly. Gradually she began to walk upright, imitating the other humans, learned a few words and started wearing clothes. She died 10 years later. One could hazard a guess, that the strain of change was too great.

She had been kept with her Grandfather in an upstairs room, given just enough attention to keep her alive. When they found her, her clothes and bedding were filthy and she was not able to walk, or talk or do anything that showed intelligence. All she could do was to lie quietly, without responding to anything around her.

When they found her, she received some skilled help, and learned to say a few words and walk a few steps, although she was clumsy when she ran. Those in charge decided to train her in a very systematic way. By the age of eight she was normal, which means that she had made up for her six lost years, in the short time of two and a half years.

C. Well I went over there, and sort of took her ear. I kind of took her over to some other part of the room, where the other friends couldn't hear, and I said, this is making me feel bad for leaving me out, can you please play with me too. That I will just go home if you don't, because this is making me feel bad.

E. Have you tried that?

C. Yeah, but she just said go home. They don't really care, they don't really care, they just leave, they just don't talk to me. They whisper in each other's ear, saying things about me. It will take a couple of weeks to understand it, could you give me a couple of weeks?

I would have a friend over, and also have her over. I would show her how I felt. If we were 'even', then we could start being friends again, she would have to know and experience how hurt I felt. This knowledge is necessary for our relationship to continue.

E. And if it happened again?

C. Sometimes things seemed to be going really well, and then she would say something that everybody likes, apart from me, and I feel like they really won't want me to do this. They don't want me around, because I don't have good ideas. I get afraid to say it, I get afraid to say, I hate you.

C. It terrifies me, because they might tell somebody else, and then before you

know it, all the other people know, maybe ten of them. It doesn't feel good, I feel that, that it is really turning into a whole mess. I mean if it is like this now what is it going to be like in ten years time? How would you feel if your life looked like that?

There is a drawing of a circle of friends, with a stick man in the middle. Then Carol is drawing out a diagram of how she is going to achieve certain errands for the day. Then she is on her errands in the park, in the woods, and in the street and she keeps noticing graffiti which says, 'Carol likes to stay up late', 'Carol is at home', 'Carol never learnt how to use a VCR', 'Carol decided today was the first day of the rest of her life', 'Carol, I am real'.

A/part from the family, living in the Copenhagen Free University

We are both sitting at the table, with our hands under our legs, waiting for the food to arrive. I am not sure if I should speak, anyway she starts talking and pointing at things on the shelf, but I don't know if it is an expression, or a word. I try to copy what it is she is saying, but it is hard to keep up. I do say a couple of things, but later I realise that it was a question, not a name. I imagine what it would be like if I learnt to speak Danish from her, and then I imagine how disappointing I must be, as an adult that cannot answer her questions. I am not sure that she would be interested in teaching me, if I was not able to have an exchange with her at this point time, when she was willing to.

My room is built in such a way, that it has both a door that leads directly to the outside, the stairs, and another sliding door which is the entrance to the home. You could be here, but feel quite separate from the rest of the household. You could also come and go without the others knowing (not that I have done that) I prefer to keep the sliding door open, then I get to hear more of the rest of the house and smell the cooking. It is hard to tell how much I spill out, but there is definitely a place where we all combine, and I like it when somebody pops their head around the door.

I know how to use a salad drying machine, but I need you to tell me, like I want somebody to explain the washing machine, the transport ticket system and translate a late night TV programme.

I read 'The Dialectics of Sex' by Shulamith Firestone last week. *"Every person in his/her first trip to a foreign country, where he/ she knows neither the people nor the language, experiences childhood. Children then are not freer than adults. They are burdened by a wish fantasy in direct proportion to the restraints of their narrow lives; with an unpleasant sense of their own physical inadequacy and ridiculousness; with constant shame about their dependence economic and otherwise; and humiliation concerning their natural ignorance of practical affairs"*

Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectics of Sex.

I decided to cook dinner. I wanted to cook something simple, that I had done many times. I made an omelette, it was a little too small for three persons (Solvej ate a separate dish, soup), but it tasted ok. I feel hungry, like somehow it gave

me the knowledge of food that I didn't have before, and I am distracted by that thought.

Emma Hedditch, Copenhagen May 2001

I'm on the way to my first visit at the 'Sewing Circle'. Solvej is in the pushchair. We have to be there at seven pm when the 'Circle' opens, otherwise we won't be able to get back in time for Solvejs evening bottle and bedtime. It's a not-to-warm evening in June. I feel quite uncomfortable with walking through Brixton, even though it's not dark yet.

We enter the cafe at the top level of the Ritzy Cinema and you sit by the door as a kind of doorman. You let us in for free. I release Solvej from the pushchair, she has just learned to walk. With her in my hand I start to explore the place and end up at a huge round coffee table in front of a window. There is a heap of knitting yarn on the table. Two women are sitting in a sofa; one of them is knitting something indefinable. There are other indefinable pieces of knitting on the table. If you want to keep your hands busy, you can just start knitting. I chat with the women and it turns out that we are all here for the first time. We form a kind of first-timers-solidarity.

Now you're free from your duties at the door and introduce me to some other women. We sit around a table chatting. Solvej is on the floor keeping her balance with one hand on my knee. She is enjoying the loud disco music and is eating the lemon from my glass of Coca-Cola. I'm enjoying myself as well, but it's time to go home to start the before-bed-rituals.

On my way home I am thinking about the Sewing Circle. It's almost dark now and just before the end of the journey I realise that I have forgotten to be afraid of walking through Brixton.

Henriette Heise, Copenhagen May 2001

The Copenhagen Free University opens in May. The Free University is an artist run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge. We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion - collectively.

Credits

Except where otherwise stated, all material by Emma Hedditch emma_hedditch@hotmail.com

This booklet was released as part of a project by Emma Hedditch at the Copenhagen Free University. Emma's airfare was paid by the DCA

Published by Copenhagen Free University / Henriette Heise & Jakob Jakobsen

Læssøesgade 3, 4th floor
DK-2200 Copenhagen N

info@copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk

2nd edition, 2001

ISSN 1601-4014

Copenhagen, May 2001

