

M/E/A/N/I/N/G

Feminism, Theory, and Art Practice

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In 1986, Mira Schor and Susan Bee founded *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* as a forum for discussions in contemporary art. For the next decade, the biannual journal sustained critical insights and observations that had difficulty finding a platform anywhere else in the current scene. As a noncommercial, artist-initiated and produced publication, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* took advantage of this identity to circumvent some of the constraints that usually hamstringing a journal's editorial purview (loyalty to a board of advisors, advertisers' interests, or a predefined editorial program).

M/E/A/N/I/N/G succeeded in an intellectual enterprise that was feminist in its foundational impulses and implementation: it largely escaped the controlling determination of market forces and enabled a nonformulaic, heterogeneous discussion. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was iconoclastic, nonaligned, and nonprogrammatic in a way that makes it difficult to characterize in any single attribute or descriptive term. This was the strength of its character—it put feminist theory into practice by sustaining a discussion that resolutely refused to congeal into any unified, singular point of view. The journal remained aloof from any or-

thodoxy and thus allowed a distinctly polymorphous consensus to emerge from the ideas it aired. This is not to suggest that the journal was simply open to all comers or that it exercised no editorial prerogatives in positioning itself within the critical field. But the shape of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was determined over time, by its inclusions and exclusions, its thematic points of focus and editorial emphasis, rather than being set in advance.

M/E/A/N/I/N/G's significance can best be understood within two traditions and a particular historical moment: the two traditions are those of the independent art magazine and the activities of the contemporary feminist movement, and the historical moment is that period in the mid-1980s when the New York art world was caught up in the inflationary rhetoric celebrating mainstream postmodernism. So, though the importance of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* is firmly rooted in the ongoing struggles for professional identity and validity given impetus within feminism's recent history, its contribution goes beyond the politics of gender to engage with issues often left only implicit within the field of postmodern criticism. During its ten-year existence from 1986 to 1996, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* effectively created a zone of critical discussion that was independent of academic or commercial art interests. The journal combined rigorous theoretical polemics and individual artists' voices, and gained respect and visibility that pushed it beyond a local audience of insiders. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s longevity was based on the fact that through dialogue and articulation it succeeded in producing a community for whom it served a vital purpose: *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*-ful exchange around personal and professional issues directly related to the experience of the artists who wrote and read its pages.

Both Schor and Bee are painters and live in New York; they are women who came of age artistically and politically in the 1970s with the energetic development of what is known as Second Wave Feminism. These activities included Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's founding of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, a crucible for radical transformation of consciousness about concerns central to the professional and personal struggles of women artists. Schor, a student in the program and participant in the 1972 Womanhouse project, absorbed the lessons and attitudes of this environment. As an artist and critic in the 1980s art world in New York City, she was aware that much of the sought-after parity envisioned as the goal of earlier struggles had

proved elusive in the intervening years. Bee, whose feminist consciousness was given its early boost in the context of Barnard College and Hunter College's graduate art program, likewise experienced the tempering of youthful enthusiasm in the face of the realities of her experiences in the art world. At the same time that Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and a handful of other feminist artists had achieved an unequivocal place in the pantheon of rising postmodern stars, the Guerrilla Girls began plastering walls in SoHo and other conspicuous urban sites as the self-proclaimed conscience of the art world, pointing out persistent structural inequities along gender lines. Feminism had arrived, but also, not arrived. Bee and Schor realized that the choice to publish a journal of their own was one way to produce a base of power and influence for themselves and their peers.

Independent artist-initiated publications have their origins in the nineteenth century, when their strongly aligned interests joined artists and poets in publishing enterprises that promoted aesthetic and political perspectives not aired in the mainstream press. By the end of the century, journals had become a significant mechanism for the promulgation of artists' ideas. Though hardly broad-based in circulation, publications like *The Germ* (1850), *The Yellow Book* (1894–97), and *Jugend* (founded 1896) took advantage of readily affordable print media fostered by industrialization to make their views available. Following the precedents of these aesthetes and fin-de-siècle artists, the publicity-oriented movements of modern art took up the independent journal as a major instrument of artistic expression. The early-twentieth-century avant-garde would hardly have produced the ripple effects it did had it not taken full advantage of publication arts as a means of promoting radical ideas. In every sector of European, American, and Russian/Soviet activity in the decades up to and after World War I, artists took advantage of the capacity of print to inflame bourgeois sensibilities, provoke outrage, or inflate the image of their movement in the public perception. The virtual community created by print permitted terms like Futurism and Dada to circulate way beyond their points of origin, finding an audience for avant-garde ideas outside the cultural capitals in which they had arisen. At the same time, a self-consciousness about books, magazines, and journals and the relations between their form and their political and aesthetic efficacy produced theoretical ideas that continue to be germane to artists' publications at the end of the twen-

tieth century as well (the inexpensive multiple, the subversive 'zine, and the capacity to control format and design and production costs).

But if the typographically adventurous, collage-bedecked, and linguistically innovative pages of such publications as *Dada* (1916–20), *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924–29), or *Merz* (1923–32) are the remote predecessors of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, then the productions of the post-1945 years such as *The Tiger's Eye* (1947–49), *Possibilities* (1947–48), and even *Avalanche* (1970–76) are more immediate precedents for Schor and Bee's undertaking. By their proximity in time, such publications established a background against which the necessity of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was forged. No feminist of the 1970s or 1980s would bother to tilt the windmills of the outmoded and long-gone avant-garde, but the policies of gendered exclusion, the disposition toward a masculinist art history and critical stance, and the persistently unenlightened boys' club atmosphere of abstract expressionism, pop, minimalism, and conceptualism brought the issues of gender into urgent focus just as Second Wave Feminism was coming into its own. If *The Tiger's Eye* stood for artistic independence of vision and voice, it also embodied the unquestioned assumptions against which feminism had to struggle from the outset: particularly, those which had naturalized the patriarchal terms on which art practice and its validation were continually institutionalized.

Closer to *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s own sensibility were the productions of independent poets and writers of the 1960s and 1970s in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere. In these communities, much of whose activity has been documented in an exhibition and publication curated by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960–1980* (in the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature of the New York Public Library), there was a successful interchange between poets and painters. Artists and writers such as Frank O'Hara and Larry Rivers continued the tradition of dialogue set by collaborations between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Alexander Rodchenko, Stéphane Mallarmé and Odilon Redon, or William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones in earlier moments. But it was from the immediate precedents of the mimeo, photocopied, and the offset-printed magazines such as *HOW(ever)* (1983–92), *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1978–81), and *Roof* (1976–79), that Schor and Bee took their inspiration. Bee was both designer for and contributor to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and published artwork in

HOW(ever) and *Roof*, so she had direct experience with the conversations fostered by venues—those in which ideas about language and art are passionately debated, without obvious commercial concerns. This continuity is evident not only in production terms—but also in the fact that the pages of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* contain works by individuals whose writings appeared in those earlier publications—Charles Bernstein, Nick Piombino, Marcia Hafif, David Reed, Geoffrey Young, Madeline Gins, Arakawa, Kathleen Fraser, Lawrence Weiner, and others.

Publications within the women's art movement began to appear with increasing frequency in the 1970s and subsequent years. *Women Artists' Newsletter* (1975–1991), where Bee also worked as an editor in 1979–80, *The Feminist Art Journal* (founded in 1972), *Chrysalis* (1977–80), *Female Studies* (1969), and *Heresies* (1977–93) (to which both editors of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* were contributors) were characterized by nonglossy formats, committed editorial positions, and the variety of viewpoints they published. Questions raised by feminist scholars and critics helped frame the work of women artists as well as to suggest that the policies by which their place in the art world were determined also needed serious attention and rethinking. Feminism became institutionalized within academic programs in the later 1970s, and factions aligned with separatist agendas, militant feminism, and radical academic or critical positions often found themselves at odds. With the publication of *Screen* magazine (begun in 1969) and *Camera Obscura* (founded in 1976), feminist film theory synthesized a relation between gender issues, representation, and critical psychoanalysis. At the same time, the terms of validation on which works of fine art were granted acclaim were being challenged by such figures as Carol Duncan, Arlene Raven, Ann Sutherland Harris, Griselda Pollock, Lisa Tickner, and Roszika Parker, to name only a few of the prominent contributors to the burgeoning feminist discourse in art history. Linda Nochlin's oft-cited essay of 1971, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" pointed to the cultural conditions that conspired against professional training and advancement for women who aspired to artistic practice—well up into the middle of the twentieth century. French critical theory suggested a semiotic construction of gender in opposition to the essentialist assertions of biology. Activist feminists agitated for transformations in health care, wages, and affirmative action. One debate that split feminist communities into various, sometimes violently opposed, positions in

the 1980s was the contest between assertions of “lived” versus “theoretical” approaches to the gendered experience (the first claiming a positivist knowledge grounded in individual lives, the second suggesting that such claims should themselves be subject to critical deconstruction). Feminism had become *feminisms* in a potent and sometimes contentious way. Neither Schor nor Bee felt completely comfortable defining herself entirely by any single feminist agenda, nor did they wish to exclude other artistic and political concerns from their consideration.

As veterans of art school environments and art world contexts in which these historical and critical assessments were being tested, both Bee and Schor were well situated to experience the ongoing resistance of the mainstream art institutions to make substantive changes in the decade or more between the groundbreaking activities of the early 1970s and the moment of initiating *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in the mid-1980s. It is in fact a testimonial to the resolute resistance to change that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* seemed so necessary. So much was different and so much was the same: the expectations of young women artists in the 1980s had been forged by the optimism of 1970s feminist theory and activity. The reality of 1980s professional life was shaped by the social forces of an art world flush with new money, stock market earnings, and a postmodern sensibility. But the agenda of stylish postmodernism was not focused on a feminist agenda, even if many of its critical positions had their origins within feminist interrogations of the structures of patriarchy, authority, autonomy, and truth that were the legacy of modernism in the arts. In the context of 1980s postmodernism the possibility of old-fashioned activism was viewed rather cynically. Aesthetic acts of political critique were frequently posed either in terms of appropriative strategies or else as community-based projects beyond traditional art institutions. The formulae according to which such politics were conceived left little place for hybrid forms whose subversiveness was imaginative and creative, rather than overtly oppositional or slogan-driven. Strategic intervention became a key concept in the struggle for *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in a broader sphere of public discourse.

As the somewhat depressed, or at least modest by contrast, economy of the 1970s was transformed by a junk-bond, Wall Street-driven upsurge in amounts of available cash in the 1980s, the New York art market thrived. The positive effects of this were everywhere apparent as the SoHo district became populated with galleries, artists acquired star

fruits of their labors. The unpredictability of historical whims notwithstanding, the 1980s established a paradigm for the emerging artist that couldn't have been anticipated a decade earlier. These changes had their upside—exciting new talent and a stylish, modish hipness permeated the art world—and their downside—some rather superficial values momentarily obscured deeper issues and commitments. But for better or worse, the flashy 1980s were a roller coaster ride of boom-and-bust waves of success in which entrepreneurial tactics were as essential and acceptable as critical insight or artistic integrity.

The decision to publish *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in a modest format, while initially determined by budgetary realities, marked it as distinct within the slick field of fine art publications that pitted advertising and editorial images in a continual competition for their readers' eyes. Coffee-table allure and newsstand glamour granted mainstream publications a high visibility, while *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, with its understated typography and simple title, seemed to present itself with the graphic rhetoric of authenticity. It is perhaps this earnestness that put the magazine into such contrast with the mood of the mid-1980s mainstream of the New York art scene. There was a sense that something more was at stake than blatant careerism or flash publicity in a journal that eschewed advertisers and the glossy illustrations and high production values that their monies would have supported. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s editors demonstrated a certain high-mindedness in producing a publication whose values were clearly intellectual and critical. If *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* had its adversarial and contentious aspects, it also served in the best sense as a location in which the meditative, reflective, personal essay (often on issues that were far from the topical fare that formed the monthly columns of *Artforum*, *Art in America*, or *Flash Art*) could find its place and audience.

Schor and Bee were not alone in sensing a dissatisfaction with the new status quo. From 1980 to 1985, they both participated in a loosely associated group of younger critics and artists (men and women) seeking a collegial context for exchange of ideas that might counter the emerging mood. Thus the precipitating incident for *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s founding was symptomatic of the atmosphere in which critical trends worked their own politics of exclusion and control. In 1985 Schor wrote an essay discussing the misogynist character of David Salle's depictions of women. Titled "Appropriated Sexuality," Schor's essay

made a point of the complicity between Salle's work and the critical views through which it was promoted. The essay was rejected by a series of mainstream art publications and academic journals—all of whom found it out of line with their commercial or critical agendas. This incident provoked Schor and Bee to found *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, since they recognized the need for a journal in which emerging artists and writers could publish work that was not following the established and often insidiously policed lines of existing critical discourse. Their intention was to create a nondogmatic forum that would counter the overt market orientation of mainstream art magazines and the critical, but remote from practice, attitude of many academic journals. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* would become the voice of the informed, thoughtful, and creative artist.

Though the independent vision of the journal, its forthrightness of critique, and the editors' capacity to question received ideas were all in some measure a result of their feminist consciousness, the first issues of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* were heterodox in the scope of issues addressed. Racism, the legacy of modernism, and the shock of the newly felt impact of AIDS in the arts community were all topics in the early issues. The tone of the magazine was in some ways as distant from the assumed community of sisterhood and solidarity that characterized certain feminist journals as it was from the celebratory mainstream. A survey of the authors and subjects of the magazine's first few years demonstrates the degree to which *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s editorial stance fostered an autonomous position within the field of publications.

As one of its most sustained contributions to mainstream postmodern critical theory, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* offered an emphatic insistence on the importance of studio practice as an integral part of conceptual and theoretical traditions. If *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was distinguished from any other art publication on any single particular point, it was on this continued insistence that there is an authority in the knowledge provided by artistic practice. The struggle was to keep studio work, painting in particular, viable as a form of critically sophisticated and engaged artistic expression in the face of the predominantly photo-oriented practices supported by postmodern critical theory. Photography had so important a place in the appropriative strategies that subverted long-cherished beliefs about originality and authorship that it dominated early formulations of postmodernism (in the work of influential critics

such as Douglas Crimp, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Craig Owens, and Mary Kelly). But even as the critiques of modernism developed through an engagement with media-centered imagery came to dominate art criticism and practice in the mainstream of 1980s postmodernism, a counterpoint narrative emerged in which painting was “reinvented” in all its figurative potential as a product of male, mainly European painters intent on creating self-consciously historical works. Such art world strategies eclipsed the ongoing and long-standing commitment of many women artists to a figurative and/or painterly tradition. Painting in particular was unfairly (and uncritically) associated with outmoded models of artistic expression, authenticity of gesture, and authorial mark making. Oddly (tellingly), the work of Francesco Clemente, Eric Fischl, or Georg Baselitz could be bracketed by the rhetoric of postmodernism, but the work of Susan Rothenberg, Elizabeth Murray, or Ida Applebroog somehow, at least initially, could not. Painting lived a split identity in which one of its aspects was cast as outmoded and old-fashioned (and performed by women) and the other was perceived as critically sophisticated, ironic, and acceptable (and just incidentally practiced by male artists). *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* became a counter-voice within this discussion, contributing an alternative scenario to the postmodern art = photography = theory point of view. Not all of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s writers were painters. But *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* did not put painting and other artistic practice into an opposition with theory; instead, it sought to articulate the theory of and from practice.

Given this stance, it was perhaps peculiar that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s editors chose the format they did: simple typography and design, without illustrations. *Without illustrations?* How could a publication for artists, by artists, and about visual art function without images? The very daring oddness of the choice gave the journal a notorious novelty, but the effect was to emphasize artists' voices and perspectives, to call attention to the materiality of different writing styles and characters. This variety of voices created the verbal “texture” of the publication, instead of editing each piece toward a house style or homogenized and general editorial tone. The noncommodified aspect of the editorial policy was reinforced by the absence of images, as if the very process of reproduction according to which artistic canonization and notoriety are achieved was short-circuited by a publication that only used language. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s essays were read for content, not as a gloss on illustrations, not as one part of a split discourse in which image and

text are always vying for attention through different modes of address to the eye.

The issues that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* promoted in its pages were numerous, but they clustered around topics such as the importance of visual pleasure, cultural activism and the place of feminism within it, the necessity of heterogeneous and polymorphous discourse, the possible value of anomalous and even eccentric perspectives, the need to reassess historical materials and the work of earlier artists by using contemporary critical insights, and the careful examination of artistic process as a serious undertaking and source of critical knowledge. Instead of being merely subject to criticism, artists found an exhilarating power in writing about their own work or experiences. Topics that would never have been given space in the trendy art world magazines—like the personal testimonials of the challenge of combining artwork and motherhood—found space in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s pages. Nonformulaic in attitude, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* had a permissive and polymorphous approach, so that wacky, wandering, and even righteously outraged perspectives found a voice. But at the very center of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s motivation was a persistent commitment to the editors' own interests—to painting and sculpture as fields in which traditionally coded practice was in dialogue with contemporary issues in a way often ignored or not recognized in commercial or critical journals.

The effect of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* as a crucible for the careers of a number of individuals has been one of its most significant long-term contributions. Many artists, myself included, can count their *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* publications among their first significant forays into critical writing. The editorial policy of Bee and Schor facilitated this activity. They used a number of different strategies to generate material in a variety of formats. The forums, always among the most successful of the pieces they ran, allowed artists to write shorter pieces that became significant within a collective discussion rather than requiring that they sustain a writing project through an entire researched or argued article. Interviews became a way of transforming artists' points of view into print without forcing them to the unfamiliar task of writing. Bee and Schor were more personally invested in the content of the magazine than many commercial or mainstream editors are and brought their artistic sensibilities to the task of transforming manuscripts into final pieces. They would frequently challenge an author with a substantive rebuttal penciled into the margins of a draft, asking, "Do you *really*

think this?” And as an author, one would reflect, reconsider, and sometimes—often—find that the position from which the article had been conceived shifted through this productive editorial dialogue. If one was left smarting from editorial comments, it was only to realize that what was at stake had to do with real values in a real life, not just some abstract turn of phrase conveniently lifted from current critical language. Such input is rare; it reflects the most serious kind of commitment to the shared enterprise of trying to sort out what one thinks, what we think, what can be thought *through* and thought *about* in the collaborative space of a magazine.

Just as important, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* published works that would never have appeared in a commercially supported magazine—because they were too critical, too speculative, too thoughtful, too individually written, or too something else. In other words, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* exploded the conventional constraints of either critical or academic discourse in the field, allowing more variety of voice and thought than had been tolerated in mainstream venues. Likewise, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* avoided the academic voice. The magazine never became a site for the kind of jargoned argument that serves mainly to display the command of specialized language essential for professional advancement. Artists’ needs were first and foremost in the magazine’s perception, and its formats and protocols were always designed with this in mind. The self-taught, polymath artist was a major staple of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*’s community of writers. Articles reflected artists’ heterogeneous reading through a broad spectrum of theory, fiction, anthropology, poetry, popular culture, spiritual texts, and criticism as well as art history. Such a catholic approach counters the parochial quality of more academic discussions in which the field of references is often narrowed to a few canonical works and authors for whom crucial issues are argued in a hermetic space of recirculating references.

M/E/A/N/I/N/G’s clear commitment to a feminist viewpoint was never doctrinaire or separatist. From the outset, men were present as contributors and as audience. This policy was reflective of a deeper philosophical vision—that the lessons of feminism, most importantly the commitment to freeing women from the social forces that kept them from professional and personal advancement, were of essential value to all individuals. The idea that men are oppressed by patriarchal structures and attitudes as well (though to different degrees and with

status, and zones of creative industry appeared in commercial and alternative spaces that spilled over into the East Village and Long Island City. There was an exuberance to this energy that gave art a glamour status that it had seemed to lose after the pop 1960s (the last period in which a surge of affluence had coincided with a high-profile art market and its attendant bonuses). For all their earnestness and pluralist tone, the years of the 1970s had not pumped a revitalizing spirit into the art scene. But the very market-driven character of the 1980s, and the play of terms like *simulacrum*, *sign*, and *spectacle* that accompanied the sleight-of-hand strategies of postmodernism's arch and often ironic critique of the earnest values of an earlier modernism, resulted in a surfeit of commercialization. There was much that was positive, smart, and successful in the work of the generation that announced itself with Douglas Crimp's 1977 *Pictures* exhibition at Artists' Space in lower Manhattan. But the phenomenon of early postmodernism is inseparable from the economic entrepreneurial spirit of the time. The art object's commodity status was not only not questioned or concealed, it was revealed in as a daring, even titillating, fact. The visual forms of design, mass media, and culture industries like film, television, and popular journalism found their place in the fine art realm through those characteristic gestures of postmodernism: appropriation, the technique of rephotography, and stylistic pastiche. Surface and superficiality were refracted in a critical mirror of endless reproduction in the early 1980s, and though much of this work was focused on a sharp critique of consumer culture, its visual appearance had the slickness of commercial photography and fabricated imagery.

The discrepancies between artists who succeeded in the boom years of the early 1980s and those who did not mirrored the marked distance between have and have-not sectors of the general population that are the legacy of the Reagan/Bush-era domestic policies. The fact that the overnight successes that swelled the ranks of new art stars were divided along generational lines did not ease the sting felt by artists already doing mature work. The demographics of the burgeoning field of postmodernism was shifted toward just-out-of-art-school celebrities. Suddenly being young, fresh, brash, and daring was an advantage and many artists who had come of age expecting their years of experience to come to fruition through critical recognition and attention found themselves sidelined at just the moment in which they had expected to reap some

different effects) as women meant that the feminist project was a shared one. The deconstruction of masculinist attitudes within the art world has promoted greater tolerance, respect for difference in sexual and gender positions, and a wider range of approaches to the valuation of aesthetic qualities in a new generation of younger artists, critics, and educators. Feminism's success has in this regard also been its failure: having been absorbed into mainstream positions, having achieved some real goals, it has also lost some of the distinctive profile that enabled its effectiveness. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s legacy (and that of other early feminists) is not always conspicuous or acknowledged in the current climate of diversity it helped to create. The dominant discourses of the art critical and academic world didn't necessarily engage with *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in return; many a critical salvo launched within its pages remained unanswered.

Still, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* did become a point of reference in the publishing community. In the last few years, as I became involved in the editorial board of another journal, the image of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* kept being invoked in our discussions as the quintessentially successful magazine for and by artists. The fact that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* has been able to do this, and that that image is sustained even beyond the original life of the journal, demonstrates the extent to which it defined a unique space in the general field of art publications. The point of this introduction is not just to place *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* within a historical context, but to point out that the topicality of many of the essays in this anthology is part of their value. The shifts and vicissitudes of focus they record are the traces of a group of individuals living through a shared moment in time. The refraction of that shared experience through the polyvocal lens of their many and different responses is another of the elements that any journalistic record can produce, provided it permits the individual voices enough freedom to express those differences. But with the historical retrospective glance comes another benefit: the recognition of the ways many issues and ideas aren't simply or only historical. Quite the contrary, the central issues of this collection—relations of gender and power, criticism and practice, individual artist and social process—are compellingly with us and will be indefinitely. The insights, partial solutions, and expressions of frustration remain as apt for the next decade as they were in immediate response to the last.

M/E/A/N/I/N/G was not merely a community in some vague, vir-

tual sense. Though there were authors who never met, and artists whose work or lives never intersected with each others' interests, there was at the core of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* a continually growing network among real people. But beyond this loose sense of community was a more important virtuality, the emergent discourse of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, of ways of thinking, that was the result of the editorial policies and efforts of the publication. In the ten years of its existence, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* recorded the experience of a coming of age with a group of one's peers, individuals not necessarily defined demographically, but defined aesthetically and politically. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* made it possible to be more than what one could have imagined or achieved within one's own capability by its capacity to push beyond the formulaic clichés and limitations in one's own thinking and attitudes.

The fact that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* refused to market itself or to participate in any of the more overt aspects of commodification within the art world makes the process of transforming the magazine into an anthology somewhat paradoxical. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s editors were always clear about their desire to avoid transforming their "cultural marginality" into a commodified product. Their self-consciousness about the fact that such a stance of marginality is often simply the first stage of an embryonic entrepreneurial instinct is evident in a response Schor and Bee authored jointly for a forum initiated by John Miller and Joshua Decker, for their artist-run periodical, *Acme*:

. . . what interests us is how marginality and otherness are actually apportioned and policed. Being marginal and other, let's say fashionably illegitimate, may be a market value promoted by the "alternative," "avant-garde" institutions of the art world; but others remain—well—marginal.

Primary to the creed of the art world is the dominance of fashion, trend, and superficiality and the suppression of eccentricity, oddness, and complexity of affect. Within this culture of Oedipal reversal and shocking the bourgeoisie (and reaping the eventual financial rewards of institutionalized rebellion), of prescribed pushing the envelopes of designated cultural permissions, there is a hierarchy of ins and outs, of correct and desirable infractions of aesthetic values and, incorrect, *really* marginal practices. (Susan Bee and Mira Schor, "What's 'Cultural Permission' Got to Do With It?" *Acme Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, p. 14)

But it would take a leap to believe that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was ever really marginal in the sense of outsidership or inconsequentiality. It was

produced in New York, as part of the activity of artists and writers who were part of the current scene, whose work was being exhibited and published. Rather than having been outside of the mainstream, it is one of the independent spaces that reconfigured the mainstream by extending the territory of discussion. Critical aesthetic territory, after all, is not finite; it exists as it is made and in this sense *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was always conceived and produced as part of the topos of contemporary art, not beyond or outside its domain.

And what of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* now, here, in this new life as an anthology? Does it lose its marginality, become precisely what it attempted to avoid becoming for so long, another packaged item for art world and academic consumption? Hopefully, it instead becomes recognized as a zone of independent activity within a historical field, a body of articulate thought worth republishing and rereading. While this collection should serve as inspiration, it shouldn't be seen as a mere record of past achievement. It would be far more gratifying if it comes to be a permanent reference in conversations and writing about art, not just women's work or feminist art, but for the broader field of contemporary art and criticism. This anthology will go a long way toward returning *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* to the conversation from which it was generated, and introducing a wide new readership to the work it provoked and published.