

**THEIR MEMORY IS PLAYING TRICKS ON HER:  
NOTES TOWARD  
A CALLIGRAPHY OF RAGE**



**Louise Fishman**  
*Angry Louise, 1973*

"Lesbianism is a much noisier word than feminism."

—Laura Cottingham<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Lord

One evening a few years ago I went to a screening of a new work by a happy man, a structuralist filmmaker. Delectable as the coincidence would have been, he was not the one played platitudo by platitudo upon the long piece of paper Carolee Schneemann pulled from her vagina in late August of 1975 before a group of women in the Hamptons and, once again in 1977, at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado, where her films had been relegated to a special showing titled "The Erotic Woman." Worse, the entire festival was advertised by a drawing of a naked man in sunglasses flashing—well, nothing. Blank space where his dick should have dangled gave Schneemann the anger necessary to do a rerun of *Interior Scroll*. I have the dirt only because Schneemann, in her 1979 book *More Than Meat Joy*, told the story and reprinted a text from that performance: "I met a happy man/a structuralist filmmaker/...he said we are fond of you/you are charming/but don't ask us/to look at your films/we cannot."<sup>2</sup> *Meat Joy* was not a best seller. For years, boxes lived under Schneemann's bed, allowing her to dream upon the archive of her self.<sup>3</sup> Schneemann was the only feminist artist of the 1970s so viscerally to connect her rage and her cunt. No displacements or substitutions. No strap-ons. No labial crockery.

I want to insist that this makes *Interior Scroll*, an icon of discredited feminist essentialism, expansively and stubbornly queer, although—even because—Schneemann is no lesbian. At once inventory and provocation, *Scroll* continues to unfurl. It is a mark of the indexical skank of pussy juice, even thirty years old, that the very idea of showing this small piece of paper—creased, stained, and barricaded under Plexiglas—can still get curators fired.<sup>4</sup>

Said differently, "feminist" is a category I choose not to split from homosexual, from lesbian, or from the oppositional politics implied by the word "queer." Lesbian and feminist—like lesbian and queer, dyke and fag, white and black—are neither coextensive nor mutually exclusive terms, making them, like the structures of memory and cultural interpretation they suggest, contested and unstable territories. Neither this essay, allegedly on lesbian culture between 1965 and 1980, nor the exhibition that it accompanies could be imagined without access to specific architectures of memory, to the repositories of artifacts and knowledge that enable and determine both recollection and oblivion—which is to say, an archive. Like Pandora's box, no archive is opened without an intention to reconfigure and reinscribe, which is to say, to propose and, in so doing, to institute a counter-archive.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Laura Cottingham, "Eating from the Dinner Party Plates and Other Myths, Metaphors, and Moments of Lesbian Enunciation in Feminism and Its Art Movement," in Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art; and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 212.

<sup>2</sup> Carolee Schneemann, "Interior Scroll," in *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* (New Paltz, New York: Documentext, 1979), 234–39. Queerer still—and thanks to Jenni Sorkin for calling this bit of 1970s genderfuck to my attention—the text parrots film historian Annette Michelson's graduate students, who were responding to Schneemann's complaints that Michelson had missed yet another opportunity to view her films. Schneemann, correspondence with the author, 7 December 2005. *Meat Joy* was partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

<sup>3</sup> I learned about the boxes from a conversation with Schneemann in the early 1980s.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Taylor, curator at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, New York, was fired midway through the run of the 2002 exhibition "Personal and Political: The Women's Art Movement, 1969–1975" after conflicts with the Guild Hall director about *Interior Scroll*. Schneemann's gesture was requeered by Emily Roysdon, wearing a "grandma-chic floral jumper," at the Fez Café in New York in June of 2003. See Matt Wolf, "New: Queer Live Art," *ITTTK*, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>5</sup> But, as Cottingham has acerbically noted, "it would be so much easier and so much more productive to think, write, and converse about the relationship between lesbianism and feminism within art and culture if the word lesbian itself didn't, on its own, without the addition of qualifiers, flip people out." Cottingham, "Eating from the Dinner Party Plates," 211.

In Los Angeles, for example, early in 2005, a happy man screened conceptual bookends. The first, made twenty-seven years ago, consisted of sixty static shots, each exactly sixty seconds long, of vernacular architecture animated from time to time by friends, lovers, the occasional child, and more than a few pets. The second bookend was a faithful remake of the first, executed by returning insofar as possible to the same locations, people, species, and breeds—indeed, almost the same positions for the legs of the tripod. That both time and the filmmaker conspired against success yielded a series of exquisite slippages between record, reconstruction, and recollection. The filmmaker said that the original strike of the film—the one he, and perhaps one or two of the older members of his audience, remembered—had supersaturated colors. That stock was no longer available. We just viewed a faded strike. He had intended to make a work about memory, the filmmaker added, but halfway through he realized he was making a film about aging. He sounded surprised. He had woken up in his own counter-archive.

I'm aging as fast as the happy man. It doesn't surprise me. What did surprise me was the depth of my envy for the sort of memory proposed by his methodical, affectless, disingenuously vernacular footage. I craved a lesbian version—tripod shots of womyn's bookstores perhaps, or plaid shirts, hairy legs, Tee Corinne drawing her *Cunt Coloring Book* (1975), or Valerie Solanas plunking away in the Chelsea Hotel. If I could have wished such a document into existence, I wouldn't have complained about fading. But there is no lesbian version, so by the middle of the second bookend, in the eye of someone else's obsessions, I found myself trying to locate the makings of an archive in the clutter that lies between my ears, wondering about the cost of film and processing in the 1970s, about economic inequities, about (yawn) sex discrimination and homophobia, and about whether the certainty that one's work is worth archiving is a symptom of privilege—generally white, generally Western, ponderously male, tediously heterosexual.

The archive is a pledge to the future. So said Jacques Derrida.<sup>6</sup> Heterosexuality is about reproduction. Same thing. History belongs to the victors.

The happy man was revisiting the moment he himself had created in full confidence that there would be a future for that self. My moment was also the 1970s, at the intersection of various liberation struggles—black, Chicano, Native American, women, left, gay, labor. Around and against silence, betrayal, and resistance, groups of all sorts invented their futures and their pasts in a moment of transformative, irrevocable utopian rage. Lesbians too. We were often, but by no means always, bourgeois and white. We tended (sincere apologies all round) to colonize not only the past, but other classes and races. The lesbian liberation struggle, however,

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"The archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way." Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

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Lesbian exclusion from the history of both queer culture and feminism is addressed in Cottingham, *How many "bad" feminists does it take to change a lightbulb?* (New York: Sixty Percent Solution, 1994), and in Harman, *Homeland: A Space of Intimacy and Pleasurable Hospitality* (1994).

Self-Representation in Visual Art," in Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven, eds., *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action* (New York: Icon, 1994).

"Lesbian" does not, by any means, manage the meanings, in Foucault's term, of all contact between women. The discourse of the mainly white lesbian feminism of the 1970s accommodated neither the butch-femme culture of the 1960s and 70s nor the relationships between women of color that would be described and theorized a few years after the series of paintings that is the subject of this essay was produced. See, for example, the *Combahee River Collective* (1981).

*Feminist Statement*," in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1982) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press, 1984), both reprinted in *Zami, Sister Outsider: Unearthing* (New York: Quality Paperback, 1993), and Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1981).

disappears from feminist and gay accounts of culture and art, and thus vanishes as a usable past, a history that might shape the culture of a queer present.<sup>7</sup>

Lesbians vanish not because we lack numbers or talent, but because lesbian visibility is an ontological impossibility. The public sphere cannot register the presence of lesbians because “public,” a historical construction serving to naturalize the connections between masculinity and citizenship, functions not by inclusion but by exclusion. Lesbians may be masculine, but they are not men. Neither, as Monique Wittig famously observed, are they women.<sup>8</sup> A meaningless concept in a heterosexual economy, lesbians are ghosted in the public sphere not by consistency but by strategic incoherence. As David M. Halperin wrote, “a potentially infinite number of different but functionally interchangeable assertions, such that whenever any one assertion is falsified or disqualified, another one—even one with a content exactly contrary to the original one—can be neatly and effectively substituted for it.”<sup>9</sup>

Here we go. It’s impossible to know whether a woman is a lesbian. Even if she’s caught in the act, it might be a phase. If it isn’t, her sexuality may have nothing to do with her work, be that visual art, writing, history, or theory. If she’s indisputably a lesbian, her work is inferior, or at least that portion informed by her lesbianism. Conversely, if the work isn’t inferior, she can’t really be lesbian. Or she may not be having sex—who can really tell? what is it that women do? what is sex?—so she isn’t a real lesbian. Or her work is not about her lesbian self, which means her work is not lesbian work. Or, if her work is about her lesbian self, she’s probably white—aren’t they all?—which narrows her vision. If she stopped producing work about being a lesbian, either she’s making progress or lacks courage. If the former, her work isn’t “lesbian” work; if the latter, she can never be a good artist. Or she’s queer. These days, sadly—no matter that the first documented use of the word “queer” is as a synonym for cunt—queer means either that it makes no difference she’s a lesbian, or that she’s a conspicuously chic sort of lesbian.<sup>10</sup>

This means that a counter-archive that embeds, no matter how ephemerally, the memory of the “lesbian” as part of “the” feminist revolution must construct and then track not a body but an idea.<sup>11</sup> Such a counter-archive—balancing lesbian, queer, and feminist among the possibilities of identification and subjectivity—should be able to weigh distortion, to register absence, and to follow the flotsam of disappearance. It should index not only the evanescent rage that sparked an entire enterprise but map the erotic joy that fueled a revolution. It must refuse a stable architecture of political identity, memory, or faith in information as a retrievable commodity.

<sup>8</sup> Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind” (1980), in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 32.

<sup>9</sup> David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>10</sup> See Terry Castle, ed., *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 35. Castle notes that Anne Lister, in her coded lesbian diaries of the 1820s, regularly used “queer” in her accounts of her amorous escapades, “typically conjoining it with the deliciously Anglo-Saxon verb to grubble.” The first documented use of the word was in 1815.

<sup>11</sup> Castle, *ibid.*, sidesteps decades of tedious rationalization about unascertainable biographical minutiae—writers who refused to self-identify as lesbian (e.g., Djuna “I-am-not-a-lesbian-I-only-loved-Thelma” Barnes) and chronic sexual ditherers—by constructing a thick anthology that restores the idea of love between women to the history of ideas—as trope, as stereotype, as obsessive and central image in Western intellectual life. See especially her introduction, pages 7–11.

Keeping these impossible aspirations in mind, I propose to reexamine some examples from a series of thirty paintings—acrylic, pastel, pencil, and charcoal on paper, all twenty-six-by-forty inches—called the Angry Paintings, which were scrawled by Louise Fishman over the course of a few months in 1973. I came to the paintings one at a time through occasional mentions in histories of feminist art, asides during talks with friends, or the odd catalogue.<sup>12</sup> When I contacted Fishman late in 2004 to ask whether I might see the paintings, she told me she had no idea where they were. She hadn't seen them for years; she thought that they might have been destroyed in a studio fire. We met anyway, more than once. We talked about her career, about the 1970s, about slides of the paintings I had wanted to see. I like to think that our conversations caused the portfolio containing the paintings to work its way out from under whatever stack had kept it hidden. This would reconfirm my opinion of the Angry Paintings—in 1973 and in 2004—as deliberately fabricated artifacts of a culture. Fishman's collection of subjects reflects the feminist ethos of subverting traditional hierarchy in order to propose other histories. My aim in resurrecting these paintings is not to fabricate condition reports or art-historical hypotheses about an obscure set of feminist objects from the 1970s, but to conduct a salvage operation, necessarily circuitous, that amends, contests, and expands. My project is an infection passed from one casualty of archive fever to another.

### Angry Louise

Fishman is now described as a third-generation Abstract Expressionist, a Jew, and a lesbian. In 1965, she left graduate school in Illinois and drove to New York to become one of the boys. (Seen from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, Fishman was already one of the boys, but women artists had not yet been invented, much less lesbian feminists or post-queers.) Already, she preferred a painting vocabulary that encouraged separation, code, and secrecy. She thought that if she stayed in the closet and followed every show, every event, and every happening while working her day job and painting at night, someone would look up and see her through the windows of her studio and she would get a gallery. This would have been the end of one more clueless woman except that around 1968 or 1969, a filmmaker friend told Fishman about a women's liberation meeting attended by a few dykes. Fishman was not terribly interested in the first mimeographed rumblings of feminist political theory, but she wanted more dykes in her life and consciousness-raising groups were well-stocked hunting grounds. She landed in Redstockings, and then, with Esther Newton (see *Angry Esther*), joined Upper West Side WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). Though these ex-Weatherwomen, mostly dykes, writers all, taught Fishman radical politics, they were

For example, in Hammond's "A Space of Infinite and Pleasurable Possibilities" and in her *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000); and Frueh, "The Body Through Women's Eyes," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 202. Some "Angry Paintings" were shown in 1982 at Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago. Six were shown in a retrospective of Fishman's work at the Tyler School of Art,

Philadelphia, in 1993, for which a catalogue was produced, *Louise Fishman* (Elkins Park, Pennsylvania: Tyler School of Art, 1993). The Angry Women are: Jenny (Snider), Jili (Johnston), Ti-Grace (Atkinson), Louise (Fishman), Jennifer (Wyland Harris, Bertha Harris's daughter, and Bartlett), and Paula (Cooper). The remaining are Razel (Kapustin); Joan (Snyder Thorne); Jane (O'Wyatt); Marilyn (Monroe); Sue (Perlmutt); Charlene (Sue's lover, last name forgotten); Bertha (Harris); Nancy (Spargo); Azara, Grossman,

Graves, Hoffman); Lynne (Strieb); Sarah (Whitworth, Draney); Elizabeth (Weatherford, Murray); Phyllis (Birkby); Patsy (Norvell, Rogers); Bianca (Lanza); Rita Mae (Brown); Judy (Leet, Friedlander); Gertrude (Fishman, Stein); Yvonne (Rainer); Carol (Calhoun); Harmony (Hammond); Diana (Barnes); Esther (Newton); Radclyffe (Hall); and Georgia (O'Keefe), Agnes (Martin), and Lucy (Lippard). (The last three were included in the same work.)

not artists. Their insights could not fully apply to Fishman's work. Around 1970, therefore, she began meeting with other women, all artists—all, at least then, straight (see *Angry Harmony*). In one of the abrupt transitions that characterize her career, and with the support afforded by her artists' group, Fishman stopped painting on stretched canvas. "That and being able to be out as a lesbian gave me more power than I have ever known," she said.<sup>13</sup> Painting was a male activity, which meant that Fishman realized the work she had thought her own had nothing to do with her. Instead of dividing paintings into grids, she chopped them into squares. Despite her considerable skepticism about the feminist reclamation of craft, she wove and she stitched. She made books that impersonated the journals she and every other woman in the movement kept. She got to know Eva Hesse. She used rubber. She looked for her own language. She promised herself that she wouldn't paint again without "a really good reason," which turned out to be getting into the 1973 Whitney Biennial—by accident; the curator happened to pass through her studio on the way to someone else's. Sometime between the selection of a small unstretched grid titled *Victory Garden of the Amazon Queen* (1972) and the opening of the Biennial, it dawned on Fishman that given the profound sexism at every level of the art world, she could just as easily have missed her big breakthrough.

She pinned a piece of paper to the wall and scrawled in paint and graphite the words that named her epiphany: *Angry Louise*. It terrified her, as much because she had made a painting of words as because she had made a painting of and with a tremendous, palpable, revolutionary, messy anger. She turned *Angry Louise* to the wall. Then, in rapid sequence, she made more—for the women in her artists' group, for the painters in her family (both women), for her friends, and, finally (moving from personal experience to sketch an enabling culture), for women she had never met. Though Fishman would not use stretched canvas again until 1977, the *Angry Paintings*, with their confusion of letters and color, their overlays of slashes and loops, their fields of muddled pigment, their rough edges and archaeological slices, were Fishman's route home. The choices she would follow in her later work are almost all prefigured here.

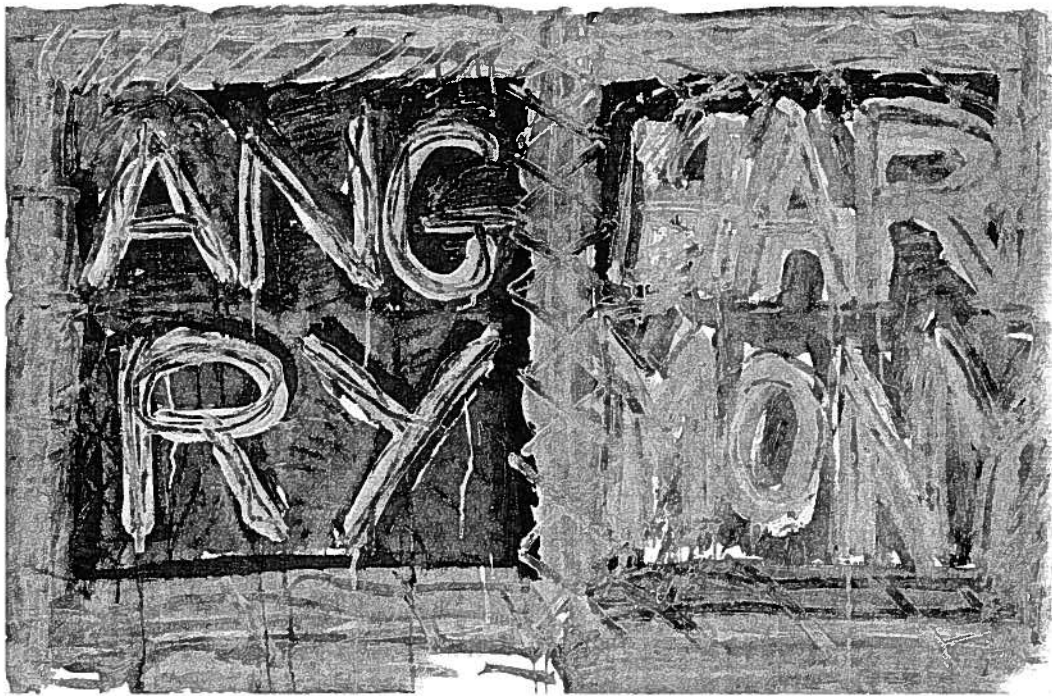
It may fairly be said that the explosions recorded in the series enabled Fishman to return to painting. This is hardly the trajectory one imagines for a feminist artist. Perhaps because it takes time to purge fear from the system, the corners of *Angry Louise* are laced with pushpin holes.

<sup>13</sup>

Unless otherwise indicated, direct quotations from Fishman, as well as the biographical information in this essay, were gleaned from my interviews with Fishman in February and May of 2005.

### *Angry Harmony*

Harmony Hammond was straight in 1972 when she helped to found the New York women's artist collective A.I.R. (Artists in Residence), but not in 1977 when she became one of the editors of the "Lesbian Art and Artists" issue of *Heresies*, the journal she had helped to found the previous year. In 1978, she curated "A Lesbian Show" at 112 Greene Street in New York, and in 2000 she published a mass-market, copiously illustrated book on American lesbian art. Even this morsel of curriculum vitae suggests that Hammond has always understood that visibility requires oil on wheels of all sizes. As an activist, she has written, mentored, networked, and curated. Like Fishman, she has insisted upon the liberatory potential of abstraction, but perhaps, in resonance with her commitment to political and cultural change, she has been more insistent upon a material imperative to recode materials generally read as trash: blood, for example, rubber, or old tin. Hammond has been eloquent in her protest against the erasure of lesbian contributions to feminist and queer culture, speaking out, when necessary, against a younger generation of lesbian artists who have rendered her invisible by "acting like the '70s didn't exist."<sup>14</sup> *Angry Harmony* is the most muscular of the series—"formal and strong," says Fishman, "just like Harmony's work at the time."



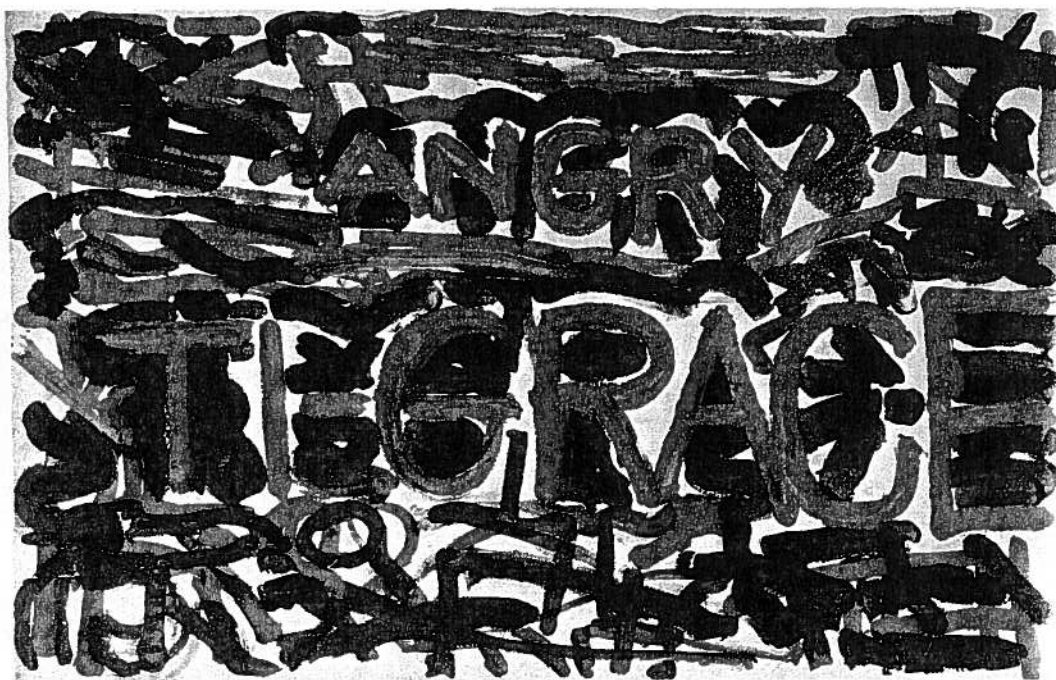
**Louise Fishman**  
*Angry Harmony*, 1973  
acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper  
5 x 40 inches  
courtesy Cheim & Read, New York



### Angry Ti-Grace

It is important to remember that feminists were freaks in the late 1960s and were visually coded as such. In 1969, Diane Arbus was commissioned by London's *Sunday Times Magazine* to photograph a few specimens who were, presumably, as potentially remunerative of photographic targets as dwarves, giants, transvestites, Tiny Tim, or the über-rich. Along with Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone, and Kate Millett, Ti-Grace Atkinson made the cut.<sup>15</sup> In Arbus's photograph, Atkinson is a dead ringer for a 1990s lipstick lesbian, except that they too had yet to be invented. By the time Fishman painted the words that suggest the tremendous amount of energy a hummingbird expends to stay in one place, Atkinson had departed the homophobic National Organization for Women of the Betty Friedan regime to found The Feminists, who reasoned that since women were often collaborators in their own oppression, married women should be banned from the group. The position was titillating but unpopular. Atkinson had already been chastised for collaborating with the media. "All sex is reactionary," she opined.<sup>16</sup> Atkinson shared this sentiment with Valerie Solanas, the butch dyke who, famously, put a bullet into Andy Warhol in June of 1968. Atkinson not only attended Solanas's trial but helped to circulate Solanas's as-yet-unpublished *SCUM Manifesto* (1973)—SCUM being the acronym for the one-member Society for Cutting Up Men. Atkinson introduced Solanas to Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who acknowledged that Solanas's wit lubricated early feminist organizing.<sup>17</sup>

*Angry Ti-Grace*, 1973  
Acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper  
26 x 40 inches  
Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York



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See Diane Arbus: *Magazine Work*, exh. cat. (Millerton, New York: Aperture, 1984), 122–25. Atkinson appears on page 124. Shulamith Firestone, in *Airless Spaces* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1998), described with some dismay the experience of being photographed by Arbus. See "Yvonne Tree," 146–47. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz described her experience with irritation that Arbus claimed:

to be "into women's liberation," *Outlaw Women: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960–1975* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), 194.

16

Atkinson, cited in Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 173, 181.

17

Andy Warhol's misplacement of the script for Valerie Solanas's play *Up Your Ass*, recently unearthed and performed in 2000, provoked the shooting. When she read about the shooting while in Mexico, Dunbar-Ortiz "blasted out...like a rocket" to go to New York and meet Solanas. Dunbar-Ortiz described

crashing an invitation-only national women liberation conference to read selection from *SCUM Manifesto*. Dunbar-Ortiz, "From the Cradle to the Boat," *San Francisco Chronicle* (5 January 2000).



### ***Angry Nancy***

There are five Nancys, a gallerist (Hoffman) and four artists (Azara, Graves, Grossman, and Spero). One of the lesbians, Grossman, made butch sculptures of industrial jetsam during the 1960s. Obsessed with various incarnations of masculinity, she turned in 1968 to a more explicit representation of male bodies in drawings and collages, then to covering sculptural heads with leather masks and various protrusions. Though Grossman says she was unaware of the implications when she began making the heads, and indeed thought of some of them as protests against the Vietnam War,<sup>18</sup> from this century the resemblance to S & M gear is inescapable. Arguably, Grossman understood earlier than most feminist theorists the performative aspects of masculinity. The letters that make *Angry Nancy* sink brown into two rough blocks of a dark blue partially mitigated by the background of saturated yellow. The effect is oddly cheerful.

### ***Angry Paula***

In its complexity of carmine shimmering through blue and gray, this is perhaps the most winning painting of the series. It has often been displayed: the corners have been repaired with linen tape. Shortly after she had completed the series, Fishman invited the gallerist Paula Cooper to look at the Angry Paintings. "I don't know if they're art," Fishman said, by way of introduction. "They're art," Cooper replied, "but I don't know what else they are."

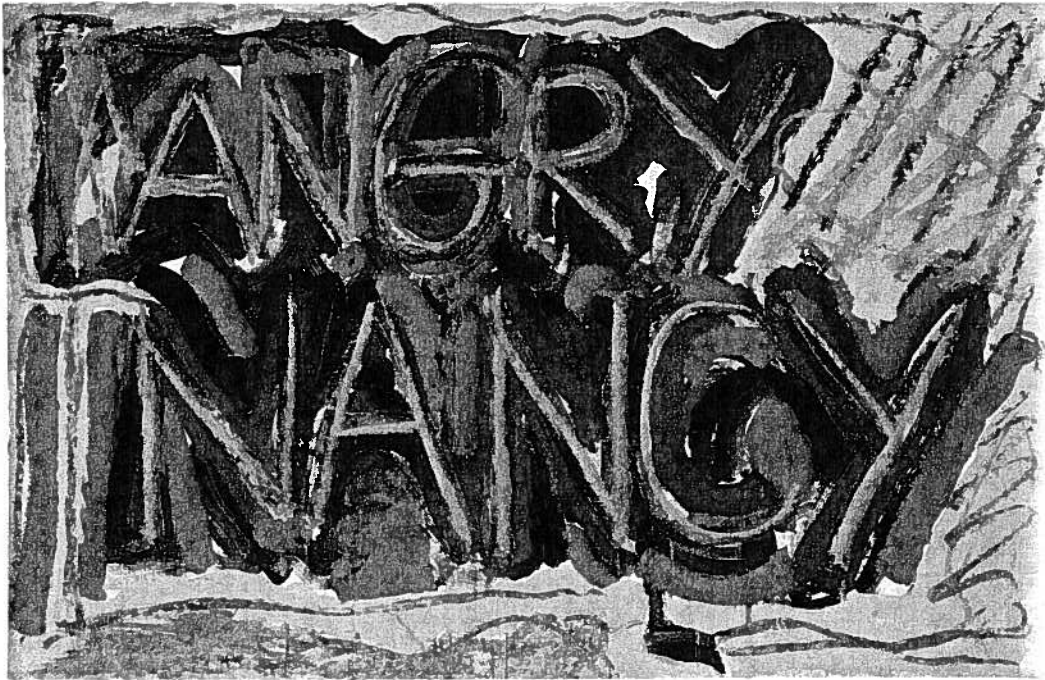
**Louise Fishman**

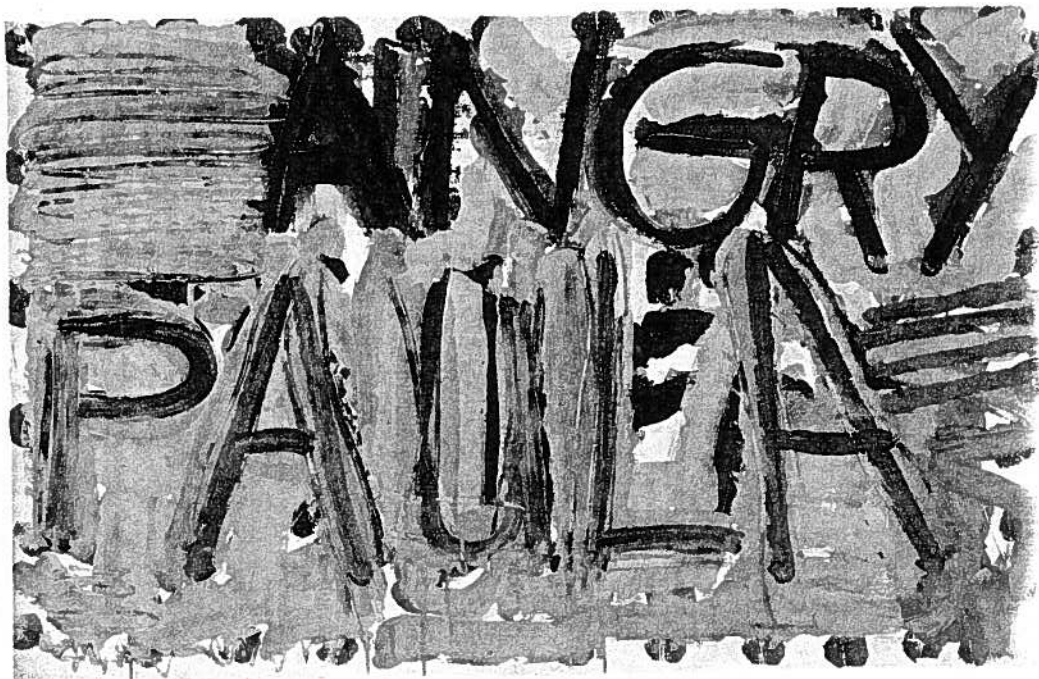
*Angry Nancy*, 1973

Acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper

26 x 40 inches

Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York





Angry Paula, 1973

### Angry Sarah

Sarah Whitworth, then a registrar at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, accompanied Marcia Tucker to Fishman's studio to choose work for the 1973 Biennial. In Fishman's rueful memory, Whitworth functioned as chaperone for the encounter between the heterosexual curator and that untamed beast, the out lesbian artist. Whitworth had already written several articles for *The Ladder*, the "Atlantic Monthly of Lesbian [sic] thought,"<sup>19</sup> published by the Daughters of Bilitis. Like Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock, Whitworth was intent upon retrieving a feminist art history from the ground flattened beneath the proverbial canon. Whitworth, however, was after a specifically lesbian tradition. In addition to reclaiming Romaine Brooks, Whitworth critiqued the "male chauvinist nude" and sifted art history for representations of women that were not geared to the normative heterosexual male—for example, in the paintings of Winslow Homer, whom she outed, gently but presciently, in an argument constructed entirely through his depictions of women. Fishman's technique in the Angry Paintings parallels Whitworth's. The cultures called into being are usably queer, fictive when expedient, and tilted toward Europe and the United States, specifically Manhattan. With the exception of a painting that includes Billie Holiday, all of the Angry Women are white.

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The first issue of *The Ladder* appeared in 1956. Barbara Grier, who became editor in 1965, described her ambitions in the introduction to Grier and Coletta Reid, eds., *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976), 13. Whitworth's essays are included in the anthology.



**Louise Fishman**  
*Angry Sue*, 1973  
 Acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper  
 26 x 40 inches  
 Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York

### **Angry Sue**

Fishman cannot for the life of her remember the last name of the subject of *Angry Charlene*, but she is certain Sue Perlmut, Charlene's lover, all crosses and loops, was a member of the It's All Right to Be a Woman Theater. To put flesh on the bones of the footnote, the theater troupe to which Perlmut belonged was a cultural byproduct of the 1970 manifesto "The Woman Identified Woman," produced by the Radicalesbians. The document declared that the term "lesbian" functioned to shame women against forming political alliances, thus transforming "lesbian" into a political identity, not an essentialist one. The second sentence locates both the motive and parameters of Fishman's project: "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion."<sup>20</sup> Even setting aside Solanas, the very incarnation of this observation, the statement was not hyperbole. Sexism and homophobia were life threatening. Abortion was legalized only in 1973. Homosexuality remained a mental illness, meaning that it could result in psychiatric incarceration, until about 1974.

### **Angry Razel**

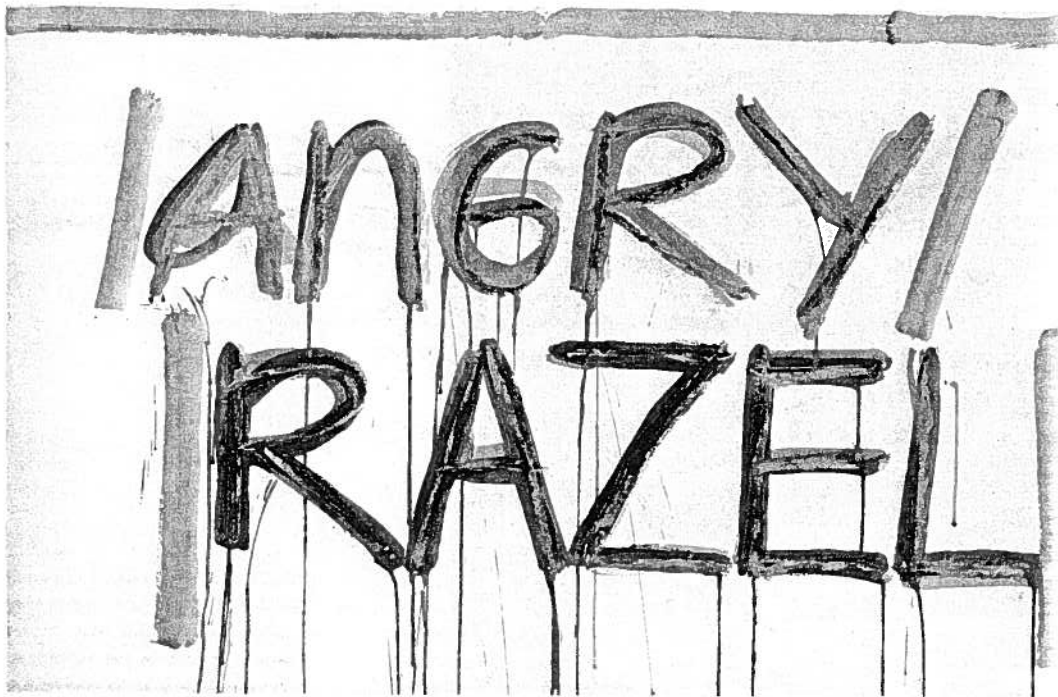
Fishman's aunt, a fine painter by the name of Razel Kapustin, starved herself to death a few years before Fishman scrawled her name across this atypically minimal painting, almost a grid in structure. One corner is ripped, the surface smudged with graphite.

### Angry Gertrude

There are two. One is Fishman's mother. Her reaction when her basketball-player daughter came out while attending art school during the late 1950s caused Fishman to attempt suicide. This Gertrude, also a painter, fainted at the opening of the Whitney Biennial that featured her daughter's work, which is to reveal that Fishman, like other feminists, had to learn to compete with other women, and win, in order to take herself seriously. Two, Stein, the big-boned, broad-shouldered, crew-cut bulldagger jamming the art machine, impossible to flush out because she was slipped between the gears by a certifiable male genius. *Gertrude Stein* (1906), the only portrait of a woman Picasso ever painted who looks like a sentient being, hangs safe on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.<sup>21</sup>

### Angry Marilyn

The dark blue block caps that make "MARILYN" are bordered by a muddled brown rectangle in which "ANGRY" founders, dividing the icon who endures as an object of Fishman's fantasy from the calligraphy of her rage. Fishman saw her first Marilyn Monroe film as a teenager. It told her she was queer. She knew enough to hide her desire. Fishman's reverence for Monroe may explain the nonexistence of an *Angry Valerie*, the butch terrorist dubbed by



Angry Razel, 1973  
Acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper  
26 x 40 inches  
Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York

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Except when implicated in a muddled effort to remedy lesbian invisibility. In 1989, for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art removed the portrait, for one day, as its contribution to "A Day Without Art." Douglas Crimp suggested that the museum would do better to replace the portrait, preferably for the duration of the crisis, with "a text about the refusal of the Centers for Disease Control to include lesbian transmission in its epidemiology." "A Day Without Gertrude," in Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays*

on AIDS and Queer Politics (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 168. Gertrude Stein, like Solanas, erupts over and over again in histories that at once erase the lesbian and invoke her to signal a queer presence. Calvin Tompkins, for example, described Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg reading *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) to each other in the 1960s: "One day they'll be writing about us like that," Johns recalled Rauschenberg saying. Tompkins used the reference to

Stein's relationship to segue into the relationship between the two men, as if, it being 2005, they had never in fact manifested any reticence whatsoever about their sexuality. "Bob and Jasper didn't hide their sexual preferences, but they didn't broadcast the information, either." Tompkins, "Everything in Sight: Robert Rauschenberg's New Life," *The New Yorker* (23 May 2005): 76–72.

Norman Mailer the “Robespierre of feminism.”<sup>22</sup> The two women are difficult to hold in the same frame, though Pauline Oliveros managed in *To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe, in Recognition of Their Desperation* (1970), scored for a Buchla Electronic Music System or any group of instruments numbering more than six, and consisting of “very long tones and any possible modulation...that does not change the fundamental frequency.”<sup>23</sup> The piece was played at Oliveros’s 1971 lesbian marriage to cellist Lin Barron, a detail that survives because Jill Johnston (see *Angry Jill*), who thought Solanas “very advanced,” recounted the minutiae with relish in the *Village Voice*.<sup>24</sup>

Fishman knew Johnston, but says she knew nothing of Solanas until later.

Here the skeptical counter-archivist must restore a foundational moment to the history of angry women. *SCUM Manifesto* is a hyperbolic, ruthless, knee-slapping call to “destroy the male sex,” a satire on the order of Jonathan Swift’s call to cannibalism. Solanas sold mimeographed copies across the street from the Women’s House of Detention in New York and, had she not tried to kill Warhol, she might never have attracted the buzz that made it profitable for Olympia Press to publish *SCUM*. Book and shooting, the latter effectively blurring

uise Fishman  
gry Marilyn, 1973



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Quoted in Avital Ronell, introduction to Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1973, reprint, London: Verso, 2004), 10.

23

Pauline Oliveros, *To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe, in Recognition of Their Desperation* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1977).

24

See Jill Johnston, “Their Inappropriate Manhood” (1972) and “The Wedding” (1971), reprinted in *Admission Accomplished: The Lesbian Nation Years (1970–75)* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998), 120, 20–23.



the former, buttressed the feminist revolution. SCUM was the theory, Warhol the practice. Without bullet, SCUM would have achieved neither the circulation nor the authority to make it of any importance to the feminist revolution—as boundless as the amount of bodily fluid, male and female, expended over Marilyn.

Solanas is not to be underestimated in her impact. By linking capitalism and patriarchy, she effectively split sex from gender, thus making her the first to take down the apparatus that Redstocking member (and ex-painter) Firestone would unravel in her 1970 book *The Dialectic of Sex*, and what anthropologist Gayle Rubin would term the “sex/gender system” in 1975 when she finally published her pivotal text “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.” Solanas was vortex, motive, standard bearer, and inspiration—not merely one angry woman but a distributed network of revolutionary fury.<sup>25</sup>

No Valerie, no third-wave feminism. No third-wave feminism, no Louise Fishman. No Valerie, no queer theory.

### Angry Jill

By far the most formally imbalanced of the series, this painting, the only one that incorporates collage, manifests the lightest touch of anger. The painting is perversely theatrical, like Johnston herself, whom many accused of betraying the women’s movement by becoming a media star. Johnston began her writing career at *Dance Journal*, joined the *Village Voice* in 1959, and became a linguistic daredevil when she collided with the women’s movement, amalgamating words, thieving quotes, hurtling past paragraphs and punctuation to arrange lowercase run-on guileless rectangles of type, in so doing creating an “‘enclave’ locution, like ebonics, representing a group apart.” Needless to say, she was a separatist: to “engender a misbegotten blot on the authorial landscape” was precisely her dream. She made it happen in her column, layering confession, travelogue, soap opera, soapbox, complaint, gossip, fashion advice, and sex. For example, creating one mythology while invoking a series of others in order, nominally, to cover Oliveros’s lesbian wedding, Johnson interwove Sappho’s last dive, getting laid by a pretty opera singer, Charlotte Moorman’s tits, the nickname of the Stein-Toklas car, Oliveros’s matrimonial toga, and Susan Sontag’s closet.<sup>26</sup>

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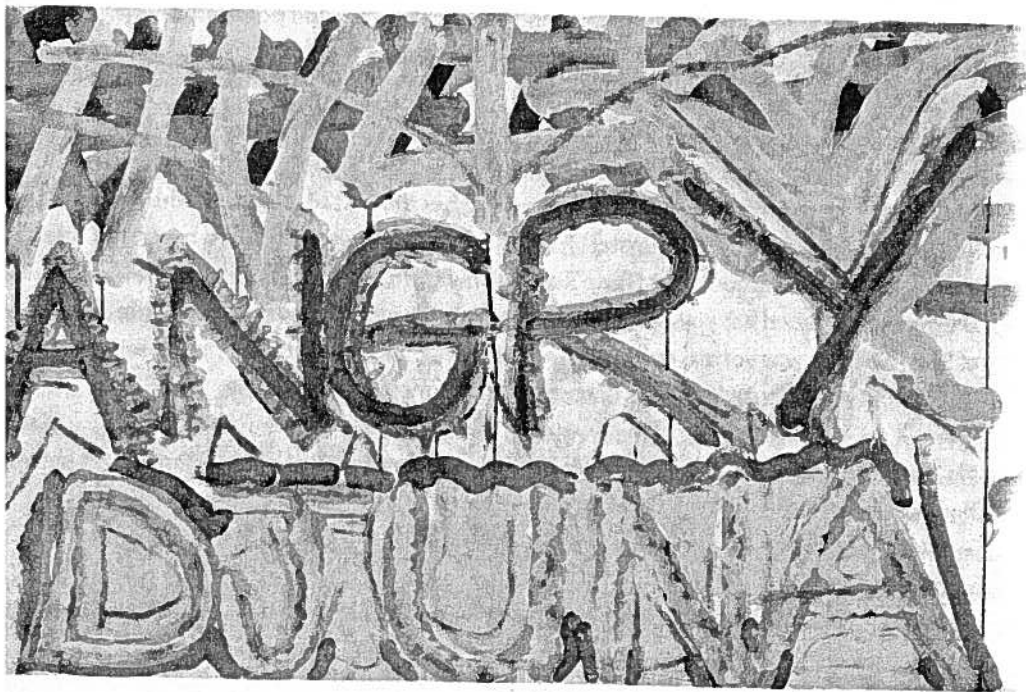
Since 1968, by my rough count, SCUM has gone through nine English, three German, two French, one Italian, one Spanish, one Czech, and one Swedish edition. After the first French edition went out of print, Delphine Seyrig and Carole Roussopoulos produced a deadpan video in which Seyrig dictates the first section of SCUM, punctuation and all, to Roussopoulos, in order to keep the text in circulation. (The 1976 tape has been reissued by Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, Paris.) The most recent English edition includes an introduction by Ronell, who brilliantly addresses, from a feminist point of view, “the delicate topic of an indefensible

text.” SCUM Manifesto, 15. Echols pointed out that radical feminists in New York knew nothing of Solanas until she shot Warhol. See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 104–06. See also Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); as well as Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1970). Dunbar-Ortiz gave a full account of Solanas’s influence in *Outlaw Woman*, 136–43. Firestone grudgingly acknowledged her in “I Remember Valerie,” in *Airless Spaces*. Schneemann said that SCUM “anticipated and contributed to the

acceleration of issues that would carry feminist theory and practice into our present moment.” Schneemann, “Solanas in a Sea of Men,” *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 91. Solanas reentered the world of avant-garde contemporary art via Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, and Amy Scholder, eds., *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1995).

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See Martha Gever, “Going Public: Star Wars in the Liberation Movements,” 88–92, in *Entertaining Lesbians: Celebrity, Sexuality, and Self-Invention* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 88–92. Direct quotations are taken from Johnston’s introduction to *Admission: Accomplished*, n.p. Parenthetically, Sontag is a perfect example of a dyke whose cultural contributions are too great to call her a dyke. She died in 2004 without once being acknowledged as a lesbian by the mainstream press, even though she had outed herself in *The New Yorker* and, as Wayne Koestenbaum observed, came out “forcibly, repeatedly” in her books. Sontag had a queasy relationship to activism, however. She spoke in code through her characters. Nobody listened. Koestenbaum, “Perspicuous Consumption,” *Artforum* 43, no. 7 (March 2005): 14.



Ise Fishman  
 ry Djuna, 1973

### Angry Djuna

It enraged Djuna Barnes, the highest femme of the 1920s Paris community of women writers, that Stein found her legs delectable. Barnes's 1928 send-up of lesbian Paris, *Ladies Almanack*, was reissued in 1972, the year before Fishman let the two words that form this painting, separated by an eccentric horizontal ripple of deep blue, fill the entire pictorial space. Barnes dismissed the book as "fluff," but then she was tossing the whimsy of her youth deep into another world. Published in an edition of one thousand, *Almanack* offered a tongue-in-cheek "lesbian creation myth" to an audience of dykes.<sup>27</sup> It was sold along the Left Bank by "bold young women."<sup>28</sup> Predictably, United States Customs banned Barnes's queer riposte to Molly Bloom. (Barnes, more respected than Stein in her day, was the only person besides James Joyce's wife allowed to call the master "Jim.") Barnes herself did the illustrations that camouflaged her bare-assed, thick-thighed Amazons in faux-primitive pen-and-ink. *Almanack* accomplishes the fatal: a gift of utopia—linguistic, comedic, sexual, cultural—to women who take pleasure in women. As Barnes put it, puzzling over her oblivion during her forty years of silence, celibacy, and seclusion in New York: "My talent is my character, my character my talent, and both an estrangement."<sup>29</sup>

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Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). Benstock's chapter on Barnes, pages 230–67, is an excellent account.

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Steven Moore, afterword to Barnes, *Ladies Almanack* (128; reprint, Elmwood Park, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1992), 88.

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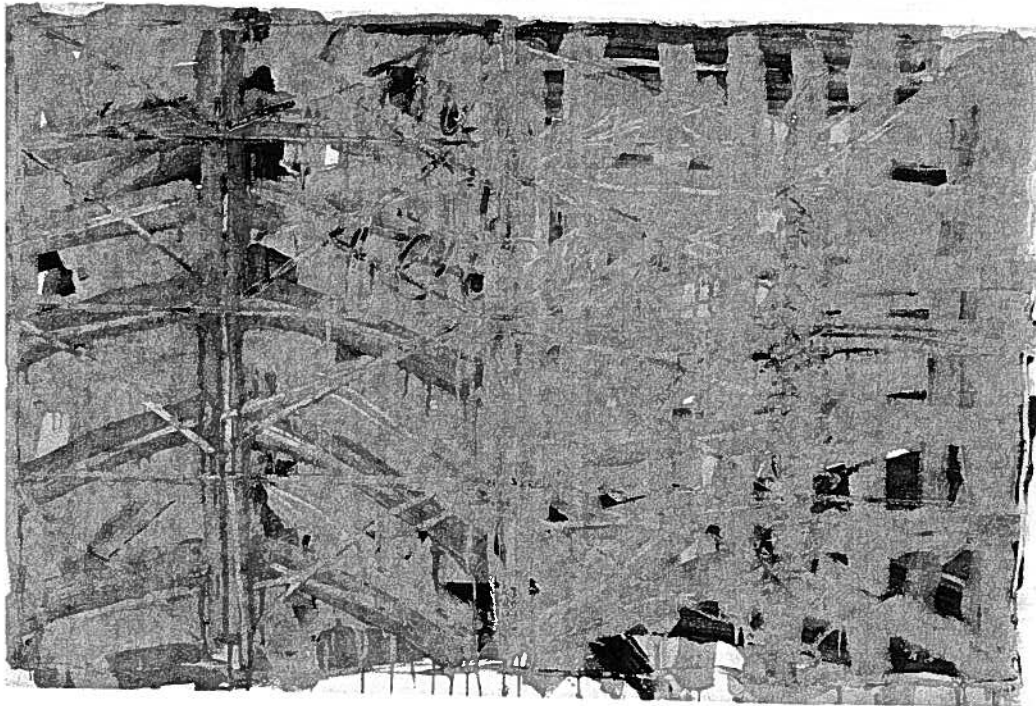
Barnes, cited in Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 234.



## Angry Bertha

In the late 1950s, Bertha Harris "prevaricated" her way into the rare book room of the New York Public Library disguised as "Dr. Valerie von Trilling" in order to get her hands on *Ladies Almanack*. Harris had a self-confessed thing for old lesbians and made a practice of tailing Barnes when she left her apartment on Patchin Place. They never exchanged a word. "[I] received," Harris recalled, "the silent messages about my past I needed."<sup>30</sup> *Angry Bertha* registers a complete confusion of mark and color, anesthesia over exposed nerve. Letters barely surface from the crosshatched ground, battleship gray flecked with oxblood. Harris's *Lover* (1976), a subversion (of the novel) and seduction (of Fishman), appeared thanks to June Arnold, (yet) another lesbian, who ran the legendary small press Daughters, Inc. (many would say into the ground). *Lover* would probably be extinct by now, even on the web, had it not been reprinted in 1993, but Harris didn't exactly play along with the domestication of homos under the guise of Queer Theory. "Feminism...got the best women horny," she bragged on the occasion of her resurrection.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, *Lover's* band of outlaws are wet and brilliant, too. Underlying their antics is the theoretically expansive axiom that the lesbian—not that dykes are the only inhabitants of *Lover's* pleasure dome—is best understood as a forgery of woman. Freed from the inertial drag of usefulness or meaning or exchange value, the figure of the lesbian carries a utopian potential for "better art,"<sup>32</sup> by which Harris did not mean political correctness or social realism, but artifice. And artifice Harris understood to be inherently queer, a term inflected by her own pre-1970s "short and peasantmade"<sup>33</sup> butch feminism.

*Angry Bertha*, 1973  
Acrylic, charcoal, and pencil on paper  
16 x 40 inches  
Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York



Bertha Harris (left) and Louise Fishman at a lesbian feminist protest, New York, c. 1974

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Bertha Harris, "The More Profound Nationality of their Lesbianism: Lesbian Society in Paris in the 1920s," in *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology* (Washington, New Jersey: Times Change Press, 1973), 77.

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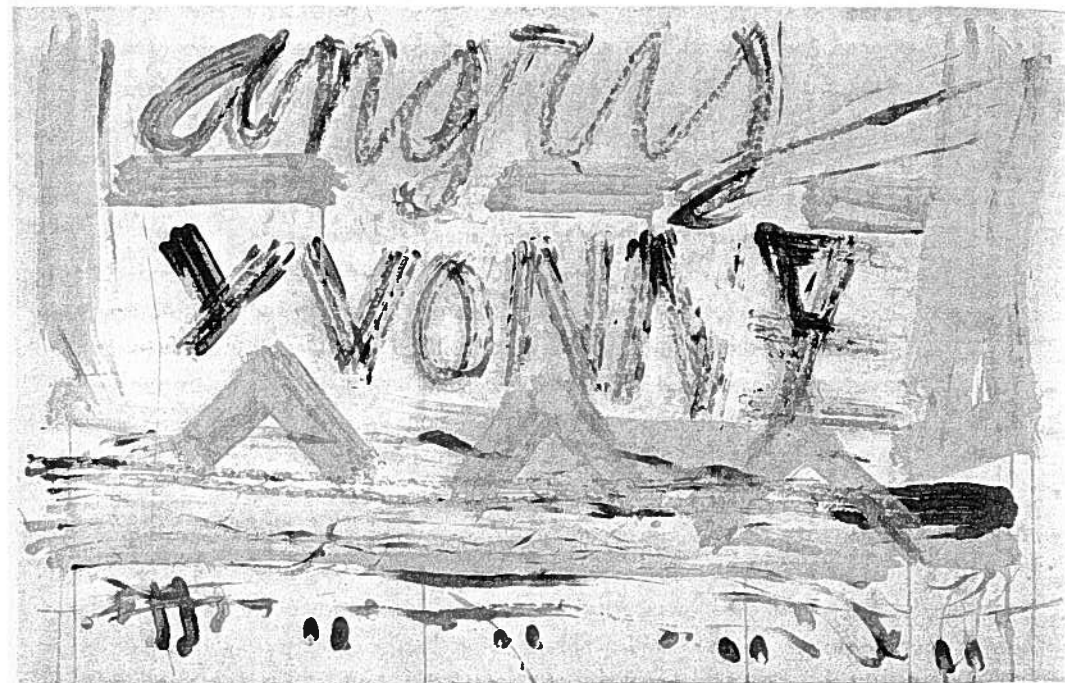
Along with Barnes, H. D., and Natalie Barney, Harris was republished by Karla Jay, editor for the New York University series "The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature." Harris's introduction to *Lover* is a hilarious account of the chronic, and excruciating, class differences that characterized her employment by June Arnold. Harris, introduction to *Lover* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), xxix.

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*Ibid.*, xxvi.

33

Harris, "The More Profound Nationality," 78.



Louise Fishman  
Angry Yvonne, 1973

Harris, however, did more than look backward to lesbian Paris of the 1920s. She followed Merce Cunningham and John Cage. After Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) ran away with her, Harris began to conceive of sedate acquiescence to narrative exegesis as an immune-system collapse akin or leading to brain cancer. *Lover* repaired her defenses. Harris may have learned that the body that made *Trio A* was eventually inhabited by a lesbian, but by then Harris may not have cared. Like many dykes for whom bars were the only space that opened onto a public culture—and culture is not private—Harris was an alcoholic. She slipped through the other web, the one of relationships among women described, and reinscribed, here. When she died in 2005, no one found her body for three weeks.<sup>34</sup>

### Angry Esther

Made of the anger of Esther Newton, Fishman's lover at the time, this black-on-black-on-black painting remains in the collection of its subject. A PhD student in anthropology at the University of Chicago, Newton did her fieldwork with drag queens in Kansas City and Chicago in 1965 and polished off her dissertation in 1968. In the four years it took to prune academese into the groundbreaking book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1972), Newton was transformed by the feminist revolution. "When I first recorded that impersonators believed the major and most fundamental division of the social world to be male/female," Newton wrote in 1970, "I thought I knew better...Perhaps what needs to be explained is why I was blind where they could see."<sup>35</sup>

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Fishman, conversation with the author, June 2005.

35

Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), xvi–xvii.

36

See, for example, Rainer's account of the evolution of her sexual identities in "Skirting," in *A Woman Who...: Essays, Interviews, Scripts* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 120–25. The reference is, of course, to Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," first

37

published in *Signs* in 1980. Rainer described the audience reaction to *Trio A* in "Some non-chronological recollections of *The Mind is a Muscle*," in *Yvonne Rainer: Work 1961–73* (Halifax, Canada: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; and New York: New York University Press, 1974), 75–76.

Rainer, "Late random notes and quotes on four points of focus: Performance, Autobiography, Fiction, Media," in *Yvonne Rainer: Work*, 275–79.

### Angry Yvonne

Fishman's angry women are an erotic collective composed not only of lovers but of love objects—unrequited, impossible, ill-advised. In the 1960s, when Fishman went to see *Trio A*, she got butch in Rainer, loud and clear. Everyone else says they got something like a seismic shift in contemporary art, but Rainer remembers the 1960s audience as restless. She was in the period of her “compulsory heterosexuality.”<sup>36</sup> She has never seen her anger embodied in the most austere of Fishman's paintings, both in the lightness of the palette and in the decision to let blank paper allow the eye room to move.

Rainer didn't dare to call herself a feminist until several years after this painting was made. She wasn't an activist. She didn't understand herself to be a lesbian for another twenty years. While Fishman painted the words that veer up and out of the painting like one of Rainer's choreographic notations, Rainer was touring *Inner Appearances* (1972). Having been told that the vacuum cleaner in the piece “stood for women's oppression,” Rainer began to rewrite the script for a male performer. She switched pronouns, only to be confounded by the impossibility of gender reversal. “He doesn't take me seriously. Goddamn him!” could not be changed to “She doesn't take me seriously. Goddamn her!” without making the male performer “culturally controversial”—that is to say, either a weak heterosexual or a homosexual. Neither were routes Rainer could abide.<sup>37</sup> She has always distrusted narrative closure. Her remarks about the homophobia of the 1960s and 70s, her own included, are thus particularly astute. “I knew of only two lesbians connected with the Judson Dance Theater,” Rainer recalled in 1991, “and their relationship was an object of destructive gossip or detachment on the part of the straight women, and outright harassment by male artists.” At the time *Trio A* was performed, Rainer could neither have seen Fishman seeing her as butch nor have recognized that fictive community to which she would probably not, in 1973, have been welcome. Rainer did recall that Solanas, the butch terrorist shadow of the movement, helped her theorize her way out of a horrible breakup into a distinguished career in filmmaking.<sup>38</sup>

Were there space to work through all of Fishman's women, the silhouette of this subset of the history of ideas known as “the lesbian” would continue to shift in its shape. The Angry Paintings are not a truth, an interpellation of a fixed identity, an Althusserian act of hailing, but contours in motion, paintings about an idea, abstractions about abstractions. In this case, abstraction is gendered and dated, butch—which is to say, as far as it is possible to be from the gesture of pissing into a fireplace. Fishman credited the formal success of the marks she made with paint to her 1950s jock skill at basketball: her peripheral vision, her vigilance over lines of change, her ability to predict dodges and feints, her readiness to occupy space suddenly empty. From this subversion proceeds Fishman's sly and delighted aspersion of guilt by association, a deployment of mischief about the act of naming that continues to erode the rules of evidence. The Angry Paintings are calligraphy on the rebound and a collapsing archive. They are gossip, an act of witnessing that unsettles, as Gavin Butt has argued, the status of historical “fact” that accrues to itself the “testimonial power to make evident that which could not [be] seen, which was not clear and which was not disclosable.”<sup>39</sup>

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Rainer, “Working Round the L-Word,” in *A Woman Who...*, 114. Rainer acknowledged, wryly, that her career might not have been ill-served had she “focused on lesbian subjects and subject matter throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s.” Rainer acknowledged Solanas in “Skirting”: “Shulamith Firestone and Valerie Solanas figured prominently in my enrage, demise and recovery” (122).

39

Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1945–1963* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.