

"QUEEN-OF-THE-MOUNTAIN: A GAME I CAN PLAY"

KEN MARANTZ

From the top, let it be known that I was dragged into this arena, persuaded to participate only out of friendship for the organizers. My avowed reluctance was a function of genuine puzzlement about my ability to add any notions of substance to an already overloaded panel (I objected to the number of panelists, concerned about front-end overload) and to concerns which to these simple-minded ears are far too academic for me to understand.

As I gathered clippings, cartoons, conversations, and correspondence, my initial blushing reticence (a female characteristic?) gradually turned to bullish resistance (surely a male characteristic). I use such stereotypes consciously to point out what I've found to be a flood of discourse based on prejudicial generalizations, creating straw men in order to emasculate them. In such an arena, I'm tempted, like the ancient Roman gladiators, to put on my brass knuckles and grab a spear.

In the Women's Caucus, "A Call for Action,"¹ there is a public challenge which I can readily rise to, to help explain my current quandary about my role in an alien organization. While Professor Kristin Congdon, the author of this public document, has no doubt that the Women's Caucus "has been a strong force in creating positive change in the NAEA," I remain more doubtful. But we all need to believe in something if we're to get out of bed in the morning. Her point #1 asks for guidelines for non-sexist language. With so much being done in the outside world to pervert our language, what could our tiny art education family add that would make any difference? I, for one, would be happy to totally feminize our language by using "she" except when there is an obvious reference to a male. But, more practically, who will develop such a list and how will it differ from those already in print?

Point #2 asks that we "promote affirmative action guidelines" for NAEA. Again, I question the arrogance of this suggestion in the face of scores, nay thousands, of such well-honed guidelines from the Federal government to local school districts. Anyway, why should this Caucus take on guidelines for that wonderful hermaphroditic "she/he"? If I want your help, I'll ask for it, thank you.²

The third point deals with sexual harassment on the job. So much stuff is out there, but the Caucus could reinforce the agencies by "developing an information sheet" - a checklist of actions that "constitute" such deviant behavior.

Point four DEMANDS facts—I've been told that this attitude is a male thing with the implication that it's bad. Somehow the general claim that we "recognize the fact that women at all educational levels . . . are not JSTAE, No. 10, 1990

getting hired and promoted as often and as quickly as men" is political cant. My counterclaim is that our field is becoming feminized. The elementary school has fallen long ago, and secondary schools are fast following. Soon even the last bastion of the "Old Boy's Club" (higher education) must cave in to the female forces. Further, I suggest the point should be to examine the quality of the lives of women art educators, *not* the statistics of their employment alone.

The fifth point, to "act to disseminate information on scholarships, [etc.] for women, is, indeed, very much the business of the Caucus, Bravo!

It is timely, a la number six (which "invites the Caucus on Minority Affairs to respond to the "Women's Caucus" goals and directives, helping to delineate future directions), for any self-identified groups with grievances against the MANstream, to get together to form a phalanx for more effective action. Each special interest will have to give up some autonomy; they may have to make compromises they don't like, however.

How far we want to stretch our necks out into fields like toys and TV (point seven) is surely a matter for the NAEA as a whole to discuss. I want our field to get involved with the world of political action. Someone else feels that we can contribute to sex education. How thin do we stretch ourselves? What is our research that can be used "to promote peaceful, cooperative, quality learning processes in all aspects of the media"? Where is it? How good is it? And, for this panel, why THIS Caucus?

Finally, point #8—and here I sit on nails, fully attentive as a student in order to be *shown* (don't tell me to read another book, please) "female ways of learning and understanding knowledge" (is there a difference?); for me, the crux of any claim to special gender treatment rests on making this case. Of course, it may take one to know one—i.e., how can I, with my limited male ways of knowing, possibly understand how a female learns? Is there a danger that in promoting such fundamental differences, the case for parity, for equality, may be eroded? "Equal but separate" seems a slogan which may be reborn with a similar nasty result.

If, as my biased mind perceives the scene, we are engaged in a power struggle, a sort of queen-of-the-mountain game, I'm not at all interested in giving away anything. You want it, then come and try and get it. I am a touch offended that my belief in the value of human beings per se should be questioned by one segment of that population. If the Women's Caucus is essentially for *all* human beings, its current role as Amazon warrior belies such a claim. The strength of the Women's Caucus seems to lie in its role as information generator (points 2, 3, and 5) and promoter of constructive actions to bolster the position of the female art educator. From my perspective today, it seems as if I must desex myself if I'm to play a role in your club.

Please teach me how I've misunderstood your request that I join.

Footnotes

¹ *The Women's Caucus Report*, 39, Fall, 1988.

² Upon reflection, some months after the Convention, I find my vehemence ill-founded. The Caucus can indeed serve us by policing existing guidelines and by coaching interviewees.