

### **Rough Layout,**

Doris Anderson, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1981. hardback, \$14.95.

#### *Sherrill Cheda*

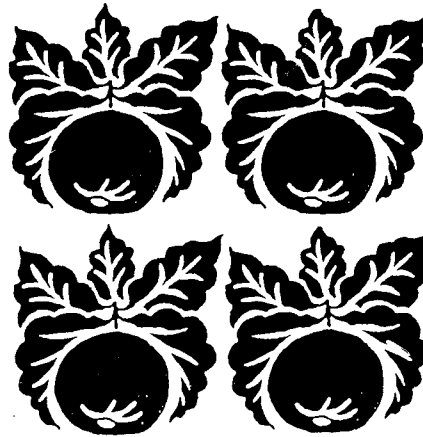
Stop, and, for a moment, think. How many novels can you remember in which married women have careers outside the home? Mary McCarthy's protagonist in *The Company She Keeps* is a journalist but she is single. Some of Fay Weldon's women work hard but they do not actually have successful careers. Fiction is most often about the relationships between people but seldom reflects the real world in which married women juggle the demands of work, children and husband.

Unlike writers of the recent women's confessional novels of the United States (Erica Jong, Francine du Plessix Gray, Lois Gould, Marilyn French) and the novels of manners of British women writers (Edna O'Brien, Fay Weldon, Margaret Drabble), Doris Anderson (former editor of *Chatelaine*) in *Rough Layout* writes a competent, realistic novel about the life of a married career woman. In it she authentically records middle-class family life in the 70s, sets the story in the social and political reality of the times and understands that, in female/male relationships, equality is a form of love.

With Judith Pemberton, managing editor of a popular women's magazine, Doris Anderson also gives us an exciting and interesting view of magazine publishing. Her excellent characterizations of magazine types with their jargon and idiosyncrasies are some of the best-written parts of the book. In

addition, she portrays a convincing view of intelligent women and accurately reflects both the humour and desperation of many of their conversations and, hence, their lives.

Doris Anderson tells it as it is for career women who have the role conflict of being mothers, wives and professionals with no time left to be themselves. She expertly hones in on family relations and the independence/dependence struggle that forms an integral part of every modern women's life. While the ending may seem melodramatic, so, then, often is real life.



### **The Politics of Reproduction,**

Mary O'Brien, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. 240 pp., hardback, \$24.00.

#### *Angela R. Miles*

How, in 500 words, can one describe one of the most important, exciting and complex books of feminist theory to appear in this creative period of women's struggle?

In a brilliant and detailed critique of Western political theory (from the

Greeks to Freud) Mary O'Brien shows how birth and the broader process of reproduction have been obscured and denied as human activities even as their power and product have been shamelessly appropriated for men and male spheres. The book does far more, however, than document the limitations of what it calls 'male-stream' thought. For Mary O'Brien develops an *immanent critique* of that thought in which the identification of its contradictions is at the same time the development of transcending theory.

She argues that 'it is not within sexual relations but within the *total process of human reproduction* that the ideology of male supremacy finds its roots and its rationales. . . . It is from an adequate understanding of the process of reproduction, nature's traditional and bitter trap for the suppression of women, that women can begin to understand their possibilities and their freedoms.' (p. 8, emphasis in the original). She goes on to reclaim the process of reproduction for women, and thus for humanity, in a dialectical, material and historical analysis which takes off from, even as it deeply transforms, the analysis of Hegel and Marx.

It is not possible in the short space of this review to outline the book's complex and convincing analysis step by step. In it Mary O'Brien argues that the assumption that male concerns, and only male concerns, are universal has condemned women to the particular, divided the world into the dualisms necessary to enforce this claim and crippled humanity even to the point, today, of threatening our survival. In challenging this deadly androcentrism she provides a truly alternative integrative set of values to guide the development of feminist strategy.

It was an important moment in the history of our movement when, not so many years ago, we recognized the necessity of naming our world from our own point of view as women. *The Politics of Reproduction* moves beyond this insight actually to 'develop theory, method and strategy' from 'the standpoint of women.' (p. 188) As such it is harbinger of the next major stage in the maturing of feminism as a universal philosophy 'that can transcend the unsatisfactory reductionism which has bedevilled male-stream thought.' (p. 62) Feminist theory here makes the qualitative and essential leap from being a marginal commentary on male-stream thought to appropriating centre stage, from making occasional interjections in male discourse to reshaping the discourse itself. This is theory to match the new needs of a movement in the process of making the transition from pressure-group politics to a universal politics.

Today, when feminists are faced with articulating the values and strategy of a struggle which goes well beyond immediate 'women's demands,' such theory has become essential. *The Politics of Reproduction* is thus a major contribution to women's struggle by a Canadian feminist. The book will be welcomed not only here but world wide. It is a work of great learning and great experience, a product of Mary O'Brien's struggles as a woman and a feminist as well as of her studies, a highly theoretical work with direct implications for feminist practice. The book is both an intellectual *tour de force* and a triumphant testimony to the essential relation between theory and practice. As such it deserves to be claimed as our own, to be celebrated and read and debated and used widely in our movement.



### **More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home,**

Meg Luxton, Toronto, The Women's Press, 1980.  
pp. 260, paperback, \$9.95.

*Harriet Rosenberg*

'Well,' said the middle-aged woman next to me on the subway, 'If that book says that housework is real work, that's good. Just because women do it doesn't mean that it's not work, for goodness sakes. Some of us even enjoy it,' she laughed. 'But lots of people enjoy their work and lots of people hate their work. It's still work.'

That kind of conversation, generated by merely carrying a copy of *More Than a Labour of Love*, demonstrates the deep significance to women of our taking domestic labour seriously. We have waited a long time for a book about women's work in the home in Canada. But it has been worth the wait.

Luxton's book is scholarly yet accessible. It is based on a year and a half of field research in working-class households in Flin Flon, Manitoba. One hundred women, grouped into three generations, tell the story of their life and work experience from the founding of this single-industry mining community to the present.

The book tackles the theoretical issues of the significance of domestic

labour in the working-class household in advanced industrial capitalism. It weaves together abstract issues of family, household, community and sexual division of labour with great firmness and clarity because all these concepts are grounded in the actual experiences of Flin Flon women.

*More Than a Labour of Love* is also, therefore, more than an ethnography of one particular town. It is a study of a work process common to half the Canadian population. That work is domestic labour. In order to understand more about this book, I interviewed Meg Luxton. Here are some excerpts from that interview.

HR: Why did you write this book?

ML: The idea began in the early seventies when I was teaching Women's Studies. The Women's Liberation Movement was providing us with new understandings about women's oppression in the family. There was much discussion of the way women are socialized in the family as daughters and future wives. Thus there was a lot of thinking about how women in the home were limited.

At the time, I was teaching 'mature' students. Most had been married and had kids. So it was natural for us to talk about work in the family context.

At the same time, at the level of theory, the debate about the value of domestic work to society as a whole was going on. It was a very abstract debate. It seemed to me that what was needed was concrete data on the experience of women in the family, in the household.

Another reason that propelled me to this study was the current in the Women's Liberation Movement that saw in wages for housework the solution to women's oppression in the home. That formulation was a

challenge to Marxist-Feminists, since Marxist analysis did not deal well with the situation of married women working in the home without wages. Marxist categories were being used only to deal with industrial workers and needed to be expanded to deal with the 'production of human life itself.' Millions of women were engaged in a labour process that was largely unstudied.

HR: Tell us about your field work.

ML: I spent a year and a half in Flin Flon doing what many social scientists do — getting involved in the daily activities of the women I was interested in studying to find out as much about their lives as I could.

After six months, I developed a questionnaire. I took five interviews done by other scholars and asked five Flin Flon women to go through each of the questionnaires with me. Collectively, we built an interview schedule which was based on what they thought was good in other studies, what needed changing and what should be added. Then I interviewed 100 women. It was a great experience!

HR: What do you like about this book?

ML: I like the way it integrates a fairly complicated analysis with daily life in a way that makes the analysis fairly easy to understand. It lets women speak for themselves.

Also, while it is in the tradition of other books about housework, it is not solely an attitudinal study. It takes the actual labour process seriously much as do books that are industry-based case studies. It's one of the few studies to incorporate an analysis of a labour process within industrial capitalism with a discussion by the workers themselves about their feelings.

HR: What kinds of responses have

you received to *More Than a Labour of Love*?

ML: Women from Flin Flon have read it and for the most part liked it. They especially liked the statements from women. Many wanted to stress that the negative things about women's lives were not just unique to Flin Flon. They didn't want these things dismissed as an artifact of a small town or a mining town.

The response in the academic community has generally been positive. People who have used it in undergraduate courses have found that it went well and that students enjoyed it. There have been criticisms, of course. One colleague told me that I could '... make this book sell much better, if I took out the theory...

HR: Who is this book aimed at?

ML: Primarily, it is aimed at academics teaching Women's Studies and Family Studies although it is also being used in Political Science, Sociology and Canadian Studies as well. It would be suitable for Community Colleges and for senior grades of high school. I tried to write it, too, for the general public and especially those women in the home who are trying to think about their work and how to change it.

HR: Should men read this book?

ML: I hope so.

HR: What will they learn?

ML: Men who read this book will get a greater understanding of the actual amount of work done in the home and a greater respect for their mates as workers. Perhaps also, they will get a better sense of how destructive the sexual division of labour is. The hope is that they will join with women to reconstruct the labour process inside and outside the home.

HR: What are you working on now?

ML: Right now I'm doing a follow-up study to see what's changed in Flin Flon after five years. I'm also working with some colleagues on a study of the household, community and workplace in Hamilton.

### **Shopping Bag Ladies: Homeless Women Speak About Their Lives**

Ann Marie Rousseau, preface Alix Kates Shulman, Pilgrim Press, 1981. hardback, \$16.95.

*Michael Pinkston*

They have no place to go. They live on the streets, wandering from darkened doorways to empty park benches. They rummage through garbage cans for food and clothing. They must constantly ward off the threats of thieves and other tormentors. And they always carry with them the bags that have become their trademark. Shopping-bag ladies are a phenomenon of every major American city: New York City alone has over 4,000 homeless women.

Who are they? Where do they come from? What leads them to live on the streets? How do they survive? Ann Marie Rousseau answers these puzzling questions in *Shopping Bag Ladies: Homeless Women Speak About Their Lives*.

Several years ago Rousseau, a professional photographer, began teaching an art class at a women's shelter in New York. She was intrigued by the women she met there, most of whom wandered in off the streets and returned to them after a hot meal and a shower. Rousseau decided to find out more about these lonely, mysterious women. With her camera, she took to New York's streets and began talking to and

photographing the women that most of us pass by with a curious glance or a disgusted shrug. Later, she traveled to Boston and San Francisco to seek out more homeless women and talk.

In *Shopping Bag Ladies*, Rousseau has compiled the results of her travels. Through photographs and interviews, we are offered an unforgettable portrait of homelessness. The women Rousseau photographed and interviewed share many of the same problems: alcoholism, mental illness, scattered families, yet each woman's story is unique.

Leslie Willow studied English and psychology in college. She has been married three times. Her second husband was a top executive in a large corporation and for years she lived in relative luxury in suburban Connecticut. Today, however, she subsists on welfare. She sleeps on the streets, using empty boxes for shelter.

Darian Moore has become a daily sight on the streets of Greenwich Village, where she has lived for about ten years. She uses a postal cart to store her possessions. Darian is talkative and makes friends easily, but she lacks the skill and patience to deal with the red tape to apply for public assistance. So she stays on the streets.

In *Shopping Bag Ladies* we meet many other women. Through their own words and through Rousseau's compelling and captivating photographs, we come to understand the context and environment in which these women must struggle to exist. The great virtue of *Shopping Bag Ladies* is that it neither sensationalizes nor trivializes its subjects, but rather brings to public consciousness the unfortunate plight of a neglected segment of society.

### **Getting Organized: Building a Union,**

Mary Cornish and Laurell Ritchie,  
Toronto, Women's Press, 1980.  
pp. 224, paperback, \$7.95.

*Susan McGrath*

A labour lawyer and a union organizer have successfully pooled their knowledge and experience to produce a valuable handbook on union organizing. *Getting Organized* is written, not for professional union organizers, but for employees who want to form a union or who are already involved in an organizing campaign.

The book describes in detail the process of unionization and certification starting with the need for collective action to win rights and dignity at work and ending with negotiating the first contract. Included are such steps as choosing a union, campaigning to have employees sign membership cards, applying to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for certification, attending the certification hearing and notifying the employer of the union's desire to begin negotiations for a collective agreement. By reading *Getting Organized*, employees should be able to participate more fully in a union drive and be able to evaluate more critically the advice of lawyers and professional union organizers who may be involved in the campaign.

The authors describe the legal rights of employees and highlight the sections of the law which can be used for the benefit of workers. At the same time, they point out the roadblocks to organizing which come both from the employer and from the labour laws.

One of the most interesting chapters is the one on deciding on the

bargaining unit. To be successful in applying for certification, the union must apply on behalf of an 'appropriate' bargaining unit, that is, a unit of employees which can carry on effective collective bargaining. If the Labour Board disagrees with the scope of the unit, the whole campaign may be in jeopardy. On the one hand, if the Board rules the unit is too broad, employees that have been signed up may be rejected by the Board. On the other hand, if the Board judges that the union has restricted the unit too narrowly, then the union may not have signed up the necessary number of members for the expanded unit. In a sense, *Getting Organized* is a critique of the present labour legislation and a testimony to the difficulties of organizing.

Women workers in offices and immigrant women workers in small factories and in the service industry are the target group for which this book was written. Chapter Five on building unity specifically addresses the problems of working women and immigrant workers. The organizing tips, however, throughout the book are useful to all employees. Again, although examples are given in the context of Ontario labour laws, workers in other provinces would find much of the information relevant to their own situations.

*Getting Organized* does not answer all the questions about union organizing. For example, it does not analyze in detail the nature and importance of initial grass-roots leadership in a union drive. What it does do is provide guidance on the legal and technical aspects of organizing and it does that very well. Although it is best read cover to cover, an index, appendices and cross-references throughout the text make it useful for reference purposes.