

Amnesia Interrupted: Re-Membering the Living Past in Feminist Theory and Suzanne Lacy's *Crystal Quilt*

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People have never had a problem disposing of the past when it gets too difficult. Flesh will burn, photos will burn, and memory, what is that? The imperfect ramblings of fools who will not see the need to forget. And if we can't dispose of it we can alter it. The dead don't shout.

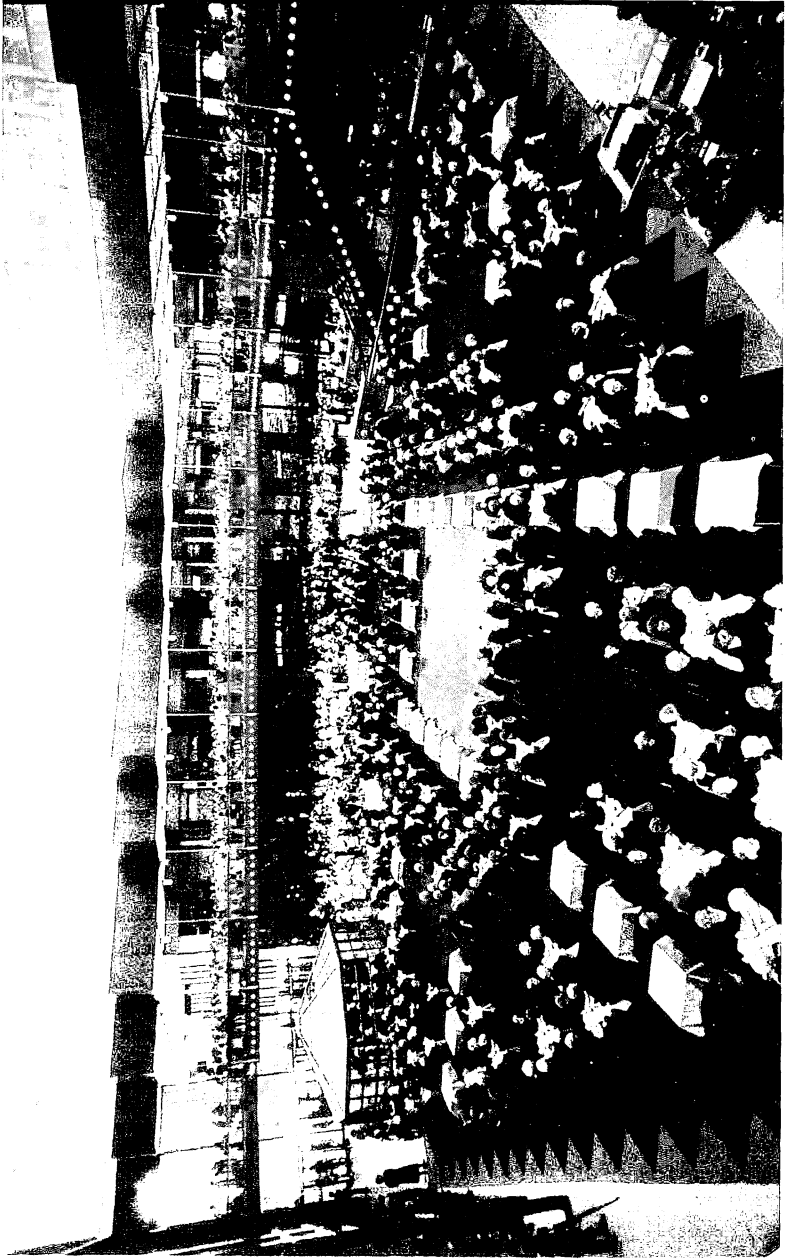
Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*

On Mother's Day in 1987, 430 older women ranging in age from their mid-fifties to mid-nineties, filled the atrium of the IDS tower, a high-rise office building in the heart of downtown Minneapolis. Sitting in groups of four, at tables arranged in patterns and covered in colored cloths, the women created a living quilt as they joined, crossed, and opened their hands. Director Suzanne Lacy orchestrated their movements from a balcony three floors above the women. A soundtrack by Susan Stone featuring bits and pieces of the women's memories accompanied the living quilt patterns, and echoed the simultaneous conversations among the women at the tables. The commotion no doubt surprised some Sunday shoppers emerging from Minneapolis' extensive skyway system that connects the IDS Crystal Court atrium with countless nearby retail stores. Although the free performance was advertised, many of the audience members standing on the balconies above the Crystal Court were passers by. At the end of the performance, "stage hands" offered brightly colored scarves to audience members, inviting them down the escalators to the main floor where they could in turn offer their scarves to an older woman as an entree to conversation. "I remember it being very powerful," said Jean Quam, Chair of the Department of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. "I remember seeing women who had no idea about the performance, carrying those scarves down the escalators, lining up to talk to these older women. I had no idea it would be so powerful."¹

Suzanne Lacy's performance art piece, *The Crystal Quilt*, was the culminating event of *Whisper Minnesota*, a two and a half-year project which sought to empower older women across the state as active citizens. *The Quilt*

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430 older women perform as 3,000 look on. Photo by Ann Marsden. *The Crystal Quilt*. ©Suzanne Lacy



used the older women's physical presence and oral histories to interrupt the silence and cultural amnesia that shrouds the elderly, particularly older women, assuming "out of sight" to be "out of mind." The show's scale, form and subject matter question the tendency in contemporary American culture to dissociate the present from the past and to draw distinctions between generations rather than seeking out their common ground. I read the performance as challenging Western practices of writing history in postmodern culture, and as establishing older women as powerful embodiments of a *living past*: women with rich histories, deeply invested in the present and future. Guiding questions include: how might the ways in which history is written and categorized perpetuate a breaking with the past, a scrambling to draw lines between now and then, new and old? How might history and generational distinctions be reshaped to acknowledge links to the past, between women of different ages, within the long lives of older women themselves?

I address the performance in four sections. The first is a brief description of the immense structure of *Whisper Minnesota* and *The Crystal Quilt* as a whole. The second section looks to the unique qualities of the performance—including its public setting, its orchestration of non-actors, and its simultaneous embodiment of several forms of feminist theatre—and their hand in shaping the performance's vision of aging. The third section weaves contemporary theories of the practice of writing history and definitions of generational divides. The fourth joins the third, revisiting and reading *The Crystal Quilt* as a model of aging that asserts intergenerational connection and interdependency of the present and the past. Interspersed among these sections are my memories of meetings of the Women and Theatre Program (WTP), whose 1994 summer conference marked the group's 20th anniversary replete with growing pains and nostalgic tales of both a supportive feminist community and of heated and productive debates. Uneasiness around aging, both individually and as an organization, is not unique to WTP. Instead, I believe the WTP examples to be typical of generational tensions haunting the shifting women's movement today as it splinters into identity categories and struggles to maintain its anti-establishment image as its founders are embraced in the higher reaches of academic institutions. I include these memories here to grapple with my complicity in the generational structures within feminism(s) today.

In an opening session at the joint conference between WTP and the independent Black Theatre Network, African-American scholar Glenda Dickerson passionately invoked a long list of influential freedom fighters across many generations. When she finished, the room fell into a stunned silence. As I struggled to comprehend the powerful arcing of Dickerson's voice and the

presence of the spirits she called to be remembered, Barbara Ann Teer, stepped in to fill the silence. Teer led the two groups in what she called "honoring of the ancestors" who, she said, needed acknowledgement before anyone could respond to Dickerson's performance. The references to spirituality and ancestors seemed to unsettle the WTP (and some BTN) participants, the vast majority of whom, including myself, are middle-class, white, academic women. The joint conference with BTN was part of WTP's effort to re-imagine itself, yet exploring connections to the past seemed to ignite cynical doubts among the women scholar/practitioners. Spirituality? It seemed to preclude theory, to assume Christianity. Isn't spirituality another mystical meta-narrative? Doesn't it separate body from mind? Ancestors? Didn't many women struggle to break from abusive families? Didn't many lesbians lose their families by daring to proclaim their sexuality? Both Teer's and Dickerson's invocation of ancestors and WTP's effort to assess its own twenty-year history dredged issues of ethnicity, race, sexuality, and spirituality. Of aging, generations, and the past. Throughout the conference, discord also seemed to form between WTP scholars across lines of age. As an established scholar in her forties pointed out the neutralizing effects of the academic institution that generously pays her to "perform lesbian," a "twenty-something" graduate student reminded the group that she owes "a small house" to an institution that is rapidly downsizing her out of a job. I remembered the previous night's dinner gossip about a new Clinique product that magically erases wrinkles, and wondered how much this conference really might have to do with anxieties of physical aging and generational adjustment.²

WHISPER MINNESOTA AND *THE CRYSTAL QUILT*

In 1984, Suzanne Lacy transformed her whimsical vision of hundreds of older women wearing white and standing on the beach into a moving performance that was the genesis for what would become the Whisper Minnesota project. The 1984 performance, *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* featured 150 older women descending to the beach in La Jolla, California, from buses parked on a hillside above. The women, all dressed in white, sat at white-covered tables arranged in the sand. Their directions were simply to talk—to air what too often goes unspoken: fears and hopes, images and reflections on aging and death. Lacy's 1987 *Crystal Quilt* similarly created a bold visual image of older women and facilitated dialogue among them. The canvas of *The Quilt*, however, was considerably larger. Embedded in the Whisper Minnesota project, *The Quilt* marked the end of a two and a half-year, state-wide recruitment of urban, rural, lower- and middle-class older women, the organization of older women into leadership groups, and the mobilization of a communication network that would link older women and provide an outlet for their concerns both during and after

the project. The structure of Whisper Minnesota was a large part of Lacy's artistry. When I asked her if juggling the interests of all the organizations that took part in Whisper Minnesota had shifted her vision for *The Quilt*, she responded succinctly that "the artistic vision *was* to create a working relationship with them. They didn't limit it [the performance] they *were* it."³

Five goals outlined in the Whisper Minnesota mission statement reflect the multiple levels of this project, particularly its "structure as art" bent. The mission of the project itself was "to bring visibility to the abilities, talents, and interests of women in their later years and to demonstrate their leadership in the public arena, through an innovative union of community activists, policy makers, and artists." The project's five goals elaborate the mission statement:

[1] To raise public consciousness toward older women and their ability to make significant contributions to our society.

[2] To challenge prevailing images of the elderly as frail, passive, and needy by providing new images of the elderly as important participants in society.

[3] To engage new constituencies, particularly older women, in public debate of issues that affect the elderly and humankind.

[4] To provide an opportunity for the collaboration and communication among individuals, groups, and institutions from a cross section of social, geographic, ethnic and professional areas.

[5] To develop a model which demonstrates the potential interaction of artists, policy makers, and community leaders.⁴

The project description, which contained the mission statement and goals, helped inform potential funders and participants of Lacy's aims and the project's structure. The structure itself was extremely dynamic—almost chameleon-like—shifting to accommodate the funding requirements of various sponsors or the needs of various older women's advocacy groups. Lacy outlined the complex structure of Whisper Minnesota in the September 1985 project description with the following diagram:

National Board

- Minnesota Board on Aging
- Minneapolis College of Art & Design

3-5 Community Representatives

- Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

3 Co-Sponsors

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Committee Chairpersons

- Education Committee
- Analysis and Outcome Committee
- Community Events Committee

Project Director

- Administrator
- Communications
- Publicity Committee
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Transportation

The executive committee was the main governing body of the project, responsible for planning, policy decisions, hiring, staffing, and allocating resources. Lacy assumed the role of Project Director, Nancy Dennis, then working for the Minneapolis YWCA, was Administrative Director, and Phyllis Jane Rose, then of At The Foot of the Mountain Theater, was Associate Director. Committee chairpersons came from the many sponsoring organizations of the project, whose specific roles were also detailed in the project description, along with three tiers of programming, Education, Analysis and Outcome, and Community Events.

The Educational tier of Whisper Minnesota programming included a wide array of programming. In the fall of 1985, The Reflective Leadership Program of The Humphrey Institute of Public Policy sponsored The Older Women's Leadership Series, a workshop for thirty older women in the greater Twin Cities area identified as potential leaders. Through a number of seminars, the goal of the series was to encourage the women to develop their leadership skills and to continue their involvement with the Whisper Minnesota project by aiding in administrative planning and recruitment. From the fall of 1985 to spring of 1986, Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) sponsored an "Apprenticeship" program, designed to develop student interest in projects such as Whisper Minnesota. Lacy, then Artist in Residence at MCAD, directed the program. The School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota offered a similar program under the guise of "Independent Studies," which encouraged

student research in the area of older women. "Consultations and Special Forums" provided opportunities for Whisper Minnesota or Older Women's Leadership participants to share information on the project itself, or issues surrounding it with interested organizations. In the Split Rock Arts Program, housed at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, Lacy and several collaborators created a series of "tableau performances" of older women in four scenes of Minnesota's changing seasons.⁵ The tableaus were to increase the profile of the Whisper Minnesota project, and again to encourage recruitment of participants in *The Quilt*. Similarly, At the Foot of the Mountain Theater, then the longest running feminist theatre in the United States, developed and launched a state-wide tour of *Ladies Who Lunch*, a comic play featuring older women actors, which was used to increase awareness of and involvement in *The Quilt*.

Like the project description, the program for *The Crystal Quilt* performance itself featured the project's structure as a main component of its artistry. The program describes the show as "the culmination of more than two years of artistic planning and community organizing by a coalition of artists, public policy specialists, and concerned citizens . . ." and as "the most visible component of the larger Whisper Minnesota Project." The twelve-page program served both *The Quilt* and Whisper Minnesota, detailing individual and institutional roles in both projects. Newsletters circulated monthly by the Whisper Minnesota project also emphasized the multi-layered organization, featuring sections on each of the various education, community, and analysis programs, as well as encouraging involvement and/or donations of time or money.

At a WTP conference several years ago, a guest performer rolled across the floor as if in agony, expressing the pain that being woman entailed for her. A friend leaned over to me and whispered "someone please tell her it's over, that movement's dead." The sentiment is familiar. I recall saying words to the same effect watching an Artaud-esque performance rife with young, screaming, naked bodies and fake blood. "How embarrassing," I say. "Someone tell them it's over."

PRESENTING AGED WOMEN

The intricate and expansive structure of Whisper Minnesota, and the project's continual self-reference to that structure, clearly suggest that the organization and mobilization of older women as leaders in their community was the project's main focus; a focus served by the performance of *The Crystal Quilt*. *The Quilt* tackled this social/political mission by blurring distinctions between on and off stage, between theatre and everyday life, and most importantly perhaps, between public and private spheres. Still largely unaddressed by academic

feminists, aging remains to a great extent ensconced in the realm of the private, passed over by the 1970s women's movement motto "the personal is the political." The threat of dependency, whether by economic vulnerability or physical frailty, veils the later years in fear and shame, in turn commonly relegating older women to an isolated silence. Even among older women active in a "public" life, those who provide the backbone of the large volunteer core of older adults in this country for example, invisibility and purposelessness still ghost individual and cultural perceptions of aging. As Barbara Myerhoff's work suggests, invisibility may have its benefits. As socially accorded gender roles are most stringently applied to women of reproductive years, older women drop out of standards of beauty and ideals of the feminine based on younger women, leaving them both culturally invisible and relatively free of prescribed social roles. Yet the stigma of purposelessness, especially in a country mad for productivity, can be devastating. Myerhoff was careful to add that releasing older women from social roles can also reduce them to "nonpeople," an act of degradation that may contribute to depression and even suicide among older adults.⁶

Lacy steps into this fray, this flux of invisibility and lack of defined social roles, that greets older women. By staging a coup of sorts in a public space in the heart of Minneapolis' financial center, *The Crystal Quilt* asserts that older women can and do take an active and valuable role in the *present* life of a community. *The Crystal Quilt* is what Myerhoff calls a "definitional ceremony" for older women, declaring a purpose for older women by creating a ritual for their public expression. For a little over an hour, those who might normally take no notice of older women except to step around them as they rush to work, became an audience—listening, watching, some even speaking with the 430 older women gathered at the tables in the Crystal Court's atrium. *The Crystal Quilt* collapses distinctions between on and off stage, between theatrical performance and theoretical performativity of everyday life, in order to create a sense of authenticity, a sense that the performers are "real" people. In turn, Lacy uses this theatrical authenticity to then transform the women's roles in culture at large from forgotten dwellers in the private sphere to indispensable participants in the public sphere.⁷ Lacy has several mechanisms for achieving this transformation: experiential reports from the women, an exposed theatrical apparatus, and universalizing imagery.

Throughout what can be considered a two-year "pre-show," Whisper Minnesota emphasized the individual lives of several key participants in the Older Women's Leadership Series. Their stories provided the cornerstone for a video used to encourage funding as well as participation in the performance and/or administrative duties. KTCA, a Twin Cities Public television station, also edited

the video clips of the women's stories into their live coverage of the performance. These same women were also featured in various newspaper and local magazine articles promoting the performance. The women and their stories are richly diverse: Muriel Vaughn was a former Irish Catholic nun; Bea Swanson, an Ojibway from Minnesota's White Earth reservation; Agnes Reick, a white woman raised in a rural area outside of Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Etta Furlow, an African-American woman whose careers included nursing, factory work, and community activism. Each of the stories is presented journalistically as "real" and as an asset to the women's communities, not only for the women's wealth of experience and knowledge, but also to demonstrate their continuing leadership abilities. Because their diverse life experiences were the focus of *The Crystal Quilt*, the women performers needed no particular theatrical skills; they needed only present themselves. Thus even as they took the "stage," sat at the tables, crossed and opened their hands in a rehearsed pattern, the older women were first social actors, and theatrical actors a distant second.

In addition to the presentation of the performers' stories, *The Quilt* also collapsed performance and performativity by fully exposing the tricks of the theatrical apparatus. The inability to control and disguise the theatrical illusion in *The Quilt* was partially a result of presenting a large scale performance in a public space. With no traditional dressing room or backstage space, performers were visible as they readied themselves to enter the playing space. With no wings or light booth, Lacy, wearing headphones and a microphone, became part of the action as she stood in clear view of both the audience on the balconies beside her and the performers below. Although the space certainly dictated the performance style in some respects, the exposure of the theatrical apparatus was also a choice. In some of her past performance art pieces, Lacy disguised the modes of theatrical production in order to bring into tension the distinction between "art" and "life" from a different perspective. In *Inevitable Associations* (1976), for example, Lacy, clad in black and wearing layers of makeup to look old, sat in the lobby of a hotel for four hours until she was joined by three older women friends, also dressed fully in black.⁸

In *The Crystal Quilt*, however, programs painstakingly described the efforts of countless volunteers and participating organizations. No black curtains veiled performers or stage hands. The sheer scale and striking images of the piece, with 430 older women at more than 100 brightly-colored tables, hyperbolized its theatricality. Live television coverage of the event cut from Lacy's conducting to the performers in the playing area, to audience members, melting distinctions between the creators, the players, and the watchers. The extensive labor of creating the performance, from recruitment, leadership training, and fundraising efforts acknowledged in the program and promotional

materials, to Lacy's visible orchestration of the performance, became featured parts of the performance itself, in effect borrowing the transformative qualities of theatrical representation while subordinating its status as illusion by exposing it.

The theatrical aspects of the performance exposed in *The Quilt* also emphasized the "realness" of the performers by creating a common language for and a universal quality of older women's lives. Set on Mother's Day, *The Quilt* invoked images of a positive and universal Motherhood in order to lend respect to older women. One newspaper article, for example, quotes Lacy describing the performers as "the symbolic mothers of our culture."⁹ The colors featured in the performance, namely red and black, borrow from myths of the goddess, a conglomeration of what Barbara Walker describes as the three phases of woman: the virgin, the mother, and the crone.¹⁰ The colors corresponding to these phases of womanhood are respectively white, red, and black—colors that dominate nearly all of Lacy's work including *The Quilt*. In her 1988 article "Suzanne Lacy: Social Reformer and Witch," Moira Roth even suggests that the notion of "whisper," upon which both the San Diego (La Jolla) and Minnesota projects were based, might be traced to a medieval German legend of a "triple goddess" from the "Valley of Wisperthal."

The Crystal Quilt also reinforced associations of motherhood with nature and traditional women's roles, even as it staged its interruption of stereotypes of older women in the downtown office building. The urban setting was offset rather poignantly, and subtly compared to Lacy's earlier works, by loon calls woven into Susan Stone's soundtrack to the performance.¹¹ The arrangement of the tables into a quilt pattern designed by Miriam Schapiro, conjured connections not only to women's communal work of sewing, but also to the gathering of women in kitchens where they are catalyzed into community by the acts of preparing and sharing food.¹² The ritualized, universal symbols of motherhood and womanhood in *The Crystal Quilt* united the 430 older women performers in a common past and a common goal—the struggle to assert their worth as citizens by sharing stories of their life experiences.

The drawbacks of uniting women through such universalizing symbolism have been made clear by more than a few feminist scholars as the essentialism/plurality debates preoccupied the field during the 1980s and early 1990s.¹³ Not all women are mothers. Not all mothering experiences are positive. "Mother" as a term and symbol has a range of meanings to a range of people, and not all necessarily elicit respect. Such cultural or radical feminist reasoning, depending on the feminist historian's categorical definition, is now considered passé, an outmoded approach in these more complicated times. Yet such universalizing symbolism also serves/served to mobilize feminism in the 1970s

and remains in the memories of women whose lives were changed by the women's movement. *The Quilt* tapped into this unifying power even as the women's diversity in class, race, age, physical ability, and geographic distribution (urban and rural), considerations of difference so prevalent in contemporary feminisms, simultaneously eroded the idealism of such unity. Lacy's inclusion of several performance styles, in turn indicative of several modes of feminist political thought, creates an important link between the present and past—between generations of feminists. Before I explore these links, however, I turn to some of the machinations of writing history and of generational divisions that accomplish the opposite, separating the present from the past and fueling the already prevalent association of youth with “now,” and age with “back when.”

The reception for WTP's 20th anniversary celebration was held in a cavernous banquet room. Amidst the overstuffed furniture and the dark wallpaper, Vera Mowry Roberts stood talking to other fellow past presidents of the organization. Their conversation fell into silence and I imagined walking around the long banquet table to talk to her. She is a vibrant, active member of the field with an invaluable view of its beginnings and its present. But what would I say? Does respect breed silence? Or am I just shy? The older women resume talking. I stay on my side of the hors-d'oeuvre table and pick at the cheese cubes with my fellow graduate students.

TALKIN' 'BOUT GENERATIONS

The isolation of generations is forecasted to intensify as the number of elderly rapidly increases in the first half of the twenty-first century.¹⁴ As the baby boom generation, those born between the years of 1947 and 1962, approaches old age, they will cause a radical demographic swell in the number of older Americans. Squabbles across age groups for economic resources are predicted to solidify generational identities and alliances, and to continue to fuel tensions between the “young” and the “old.” Intergenerational tension has already increased in recent years as citizen groups mobilize around the concern for a failing social security system.¹⁵ Much of the literature devoted to defining “Generation X” is rife with blatant hostility toward the “greedy geezers” who are depicted as country-clubbing through their “silver age” while “Xers” vie for “Mcjobs” at coffee or copy shops.¹⁶

Such over-simplifications of generational identity are fairly easy to unravel; one need only turn the model slightly to see them as predominantly white and middle-class. Pepsi's “Be Young Have Fun Drink Pepsi” advertising campaign or Centrum Vitamins' depiction of older adults swirling past the television camera in a dizzying waltz are rather obvious examples of advertisers'

or political organizations' efforts to create an identity for a "generation" that may sell products but does not necessarily ignite a fierce sense of belonging to any particular age group. Still, these types of images are sign posts of a larger emphasis on differences between people of various ages, rather than imagining the whole of the human life span.¹⁷ Potential connections across, and relationships between age groups are made opaque by such over-assertions of difference. But is the process of constructing generational identity necessarily antithetical to the forging of intergenerational connections? Is the antagonism between generations that pervades Western culture—from Greek myths of Titans devouring their children to the early twentieth-century American imbrication of "youth" and "progress" to the current use of narrowcasting among advertisers creating and isolating generations of consumers—given? This section examines the construction of generations that inform the cultural logic that sets the backdrop to WTP's uneasiness with aging, and my own contradictory reactions. It is also the logic that Lacy's *Quilt* combats, and that informs her vision for recasting the role of aged women in American culture.

In *Time Passages*, George Lipsitz describes the separation of generations as dominant ideology's effort to keep lessons of the past from being transmitted to future generations. Using nostalgic television situation comedies as his example, Lipsitz writes: "The social relations of the past are used to legitimate a system that in reality works to destroy the world that created those historical relationships in the first place." Lawrence Grossberg describes a similar construction of generational identity in terms of the rock and roll culture born of the youth movement of the 1960s. Grossberg suggests that the genre of rock and roll defines itself by creating an age-based gap between the rebels and those to be rebelled against, between the hip and the hip-nots.¹⁸

But as 1960s rockers continue to sing about their generation, and as Xer's decry the none too flattering depictions of theirs, just what does "generation" come to mean? The popular use of the term generation has become ambiguous amidst the changing structure of the American family and age-related social roles. Sociologist Vern Bengtson notes that the term generation has become too loose for gerontological research. Bengtson traces four definitions for the term. First, it can refer to one's position in family lineage; grouping siblings as one generation and parents as another. Second, it can refer to a group of people born within a span of five to ten years. Third, it can also refer to groups born in a larger span of time, ranging from ten to twenty years. The fourth common use of the term generation is to describe a group of people of similar, yet unspecified ages, mobilized around a specific social issue. I refer to generations in two general categories: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal generations refer to widely drawn groups of people born within similar time periods who share formative cultural

experiences such as wars, fashion, popular music/arts, or major economic shifts. Vertical generations refer to one's order in family lineage, with the understanding that differences such as ethnicity and shifting social roles undermine the universality of such categories.¹⁹ Confusion can also arise with the use of these categories when one is used to metaphorically describe the other, forcing horizontal generations into relationship in terms of vertical, universalized family structures.

To add to the confusion, increases in longevity have led to the emergence of four- and even five-generation families. Delays in childbearing, decreases in fertility, and/or voluntary childlessness have also contributed to the appearance of "age-gapped" intergenerational structures. In both cases, multi-generational families and age-gapped families, chronological age is no longer indicative of one's position in the family. Grandparents more commonly take a parental role for their children who are single parents or parents struggling to keep the two income-family engine running. Increases in divorce and the ensuing, complicated structure of step-families also add to the difficulty of specifying one's identity in generational terms.

The speed of contemporary technoculture pushes us further toward ambiguity and perpetuates generational divides embedded in the practices of organizing history in Western culture—a practice which seems to necessitate the fabrication of a break between the past and the present. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau asserts that: "Modern Western history essentially begins with differentiation between the present and the past."²⁰ The past, a dead and silent "Other" in de Certeau's terms, is the raw material with which historians weave narratives that separate "the living" from "the dead" in order to clear a space for the historians' own "progress." Quoting Alphonse Dupront, de Certeau expands:

"The sole historical quest for 'meaning' remains indeed a quest for the Other," but, however contradictory it may be, this project aims at "understanding" and, through "meaning," at hiding the alterity of this foreigner; or, in what amounts to the same thing, it aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs.²¹

In contrast, de Certeau suggests that Indian culture, for example, embraces the past in a "process of coexistence and reabsorption" and the development of "new forms never drive the older ones away."²²

It is easy to see how the Western division between past and present might coincide with larger social fields in which the aged, saturated with past, are

stripped of cultural capital and in which “youthfulness” in physical appearance and/or mental attitude comes to symbolize this country’s ideals of productivity. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, describes the aging process as an accumulation of capital throughout the process of maturity, and a loss of capital with the transition into old age.²³ After retirement, for example, an elderly man might be stripped of the cultural and symbolic capital that he may have enjoyed as a successful businessman. An older woman, no longer marked as physically desirable, can lose her capital as well, even if she remains gainfully employed.

The rapid rate at which historians assess the past and the changing shape of American families further complicate the dubious cultural standing of the aged in this country. In a culture based on speed, the present moment becomes flattened to an instant. Trends flash by at phenomenal speeds. Styles are out before they are in. Nostalgia shrinks from its twenty-year cycle to a fond yearning for last week’s styles.²⁴ Applying de Certeau’s theory to Paul Virilio’s world in which time and space collapse as humans master the speed of light, the rate at which historians separate the present from the past would also increase. Although philosopher Richard Terdman suggests that history is only written when the social memory of those who lived through the experiences begins to fade, I disagree.²⁵ The past need no longer be pronounced officially dead before it is consumed and reshaped for the present, creating a culture, in de Certeau’s terms, of the “living dead.” The lists of what’s in and what’s out, usually reserved for the lead of New Year’s Day newspaper entertainment sections, could potentially shame those deemed “out” on a daily, if not hourly basis. In such a realm, the term “old,” usually reserved for chronological age, slides into association with “old-fashioned” or “out of date,” a confusion that can prematurely toll the bell for entire “generations” of people, regardless of political and social differences. The past is to be shed like so many dead skin cells—if not by exfoliation, then by face-lift. For an older woman to accept her physical age is to allow her body, marked with time, to be associated with past beliefs. For an older woman to accept her physical age is to risk slipping into the living-dead-zone of old age where the quick-handed pick-pockets of culture relieve her of what remains of her cultural capital.

Differences certainly exist between people born at different times. As Bourdieu carefully demonstrates, “social agents are the *product of history*.”²⁶ Children coming of age in today’s mediaculture, amidst high rates of child poverty and the continued threat of AIDS, have significantly different expectations of the future (if they fathom such a hopeful concept) than the children raised in the Depression or in the booming Post War years. Yet with scattershot definitions of the term generation and the changing shape of social roles across the life-span, isolating differences between age groups proves difficult. In Virilio’s world,

generation gaps could potentially exist between fourteen and sixteen-year-olds. Even so, in a culture driven by speed and technological advancement, the pressure to keep up-to-date with the latest trends interlocks with the historical practice of separating the present from the past to construct generational identities whose uniqueness rest in their exclusion from other categories despite myriad differences among those born in the same year and similarities they may share with those born at a later, or earlier time.

YOU'RE NOT MY MOTHER/I'M NOT DEAD YET

As Medical Anthropologist Margaret Lock notes, the inculcation of numbers that so commonly introduce essays on the coming of the aging society bespeak the dangers of a country peopled by frail, older women who will deplete the economy and exhaust the social security system.²⁷ Aging is a certainly a feminist issue. Yet while feminists have begun to turn to the topic in general, little writing on ageism and aging within feminism has emerged. Barbara McDonald's anger at this absence, republished in the first issue of the reformed *Ms.* in 1990, echoes unanswered; a battle cry sounded on a nearly empty battlefield. Despite Betty Friedan's *Fountain of Age*, aging and generational relationship within feminism remain relatively unexplored topics within feminist studies.²⁸

The sparsity of critical writing on age and aging within feminism is ironically countered by a considerable amount of stratification around age, as horizontal generations of feminists adjust to an uneasy coexistence. The symbolic grandmothers of first wave feminists, the real grandmothers of both the much maligned silver age and their daughters of the second wave, and now the young upstarts of the third wave, toss about in this swirling sea of very different historical locations and very common goals. Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After*, Rene Denfeld's *The New Victorians*, and Friedan's *Fountain of Age* speak to widely divergent audiences of feminists who are just now beginning to look to constructs of age and generation as an unnecessary factor in their division and separation.²⁹ The lack of gender readings among cultural critics such as de Certeau, Virilio, and Grossberg is met by a similar lack of age readings among feminist scholars, making my attempt to dialogue across these discourses both uncomfortable and necessary.

Do contemporary feminists also contribute to the segmenting of and confusion of generations? In an increasingly volatile academic job market, are established scholars reluctant to share their power? Do younger scholars polarize their work to what has come before in order to ride the novelty of their voices toward goals of publishing and securing increasingly elusive employment? I suggest they/we do; in several ways. First, feminists across generations fail to

explore constructs of age and generation that perpetuate fears of aging between and among women. Second, what attempts have been made, tend to conflate horizontal and vertical generations, using metaphors of parenting to analyze all generational relationships. Third, we continue to divide the feminist movement into categories that clearly, although often in unspoken ways, are devalued proportionate to hindsight.

The relative absence of scholarship on intra-movement constructs of aging is especially evident in the light of the immense consideration given to differences of class, race, sexuality, and ethnicity. It may just be a matter of time. As second and third wave feminists come to coexist in academic and activist settings, their concerns and aims born of their differences in historical location will become more apparent. The trick, as with other differences, will be to question how social constructions of age separate and divide women without either dismissing age differences as somehow imagined, or concretizing them as unalterable reality.

Another trick will be to avoid the temptation to describe generational relationships between horizontally defined groups in the terms of vertical relationships; particularly the problematic use of mother/daughter analogies. Certainly my relationship with my mother has a part, a large part, in teaching me patterns of interaction with women older than myself in general. But transferring my relationship to my mother to that of *my mother's generation* masks countless considerations of individual difference, and tends to polarize generations into stereotypical images of child/parent relationships.³⁰ For example, Joannie Schrof's "Feminism's Daughters" which appeared in the mainstream *U.S. News & World Report* in 1993, depicts young feminists ("third wavers") as the rebellious children of middle-aged feminists ("second wavers") who are in turn threatened by the energy, audacity, and lack of respect of their "daughters." Schrof writes:

"We hear all the time from older feminists that we're demanding ingrates," says Nadia Moritz, director of the Young Women's Project, a group that promotes political activism. "We're told how much we should appreciate, for example, that we now make 70 cents to a man's dollar instead of 33. But we're not about to celebrate that." Such talk burns the ears of older feminists, who after decades of activism know how gut-wrenching it can be to effect even minor changes. [. . .] Young women tell story after story of seeking the guidance of older feminists only to be told, "I'm not dead yet" or "That's my issue, I've been working on it now for 20 years."³¹

An alternative example comes from a 1995 essay in which several young Italian feminist historians seek to define their generation of historians.³² Their definition indicates “neither a bond nor a relationship dependent on biological fact [. . .] but points to a strong link both within the profession [. . .] and to our awareness of being women historians of one age group that notes a relationship between itself and women historians of other age groups.”(130) These young historians carefully explore their unique historical location in terms of intellectual thought, economic conditions, social roles, and family structures. They connect themselves to the work of women who came before them and question the models of “ascendance and descendance” within feminism, asking: “what kind of relationships could arise among three generations of women historians as determined by the different relations that women of different ages have and have had with politics and feminism?”³³ Where Schrof reads the waves of feminism in terms of familial roles, these young, feminist, Italian historians question the troubling connection between their personal relationships to their mothers and their professional relationships to the generation of feminists that preceded the young historians.

Perhaps it is a cultural difference. Perhaps the antagonistic tone of Schrof’s article is the result of its appearance in a mainstream news magazine in which harmonious alliances rarely make headlines. Regardless, these two examples provide helpful markers for negotiating the way through the slalom course of generational relationships that will only increase in significance as more radical differences between the second and third wave emerge when the second wave enters “old age.”

The final trouble spot in the growing consciousness of generational relationships is the way in which feminists categorize the past and distinguish it from the present. The temptation here is to disconnect one’s self from the past in order to appear new, novel, and fresh, all qualities that “sell” education to students, books to publishers, and essays to journals. The danger here is in the slippery association between the ideas and the author, between “out-of-date” and biological age. Youthfulness becomes a desirable and unremarkable sign while old age marks the body with the past, with the weight of what was, making engaging in the present nearly impossible.

As an example, I return to the field of feminist theatre studies, a field whose historical divisions provided the foundation for my early work as a “young” scholar. When I began my graduate studies in 1988, Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan had both recently published books in the field of theatre studies in which they applied Alison Jaggar’s categories of cultural, liberal, and materialist feminisms to feminist theatre practices. Both scholars’ ground-breaking works (Case’s *Feminism and Theatre*, and Dolan’s *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*)

continue to resonate in the field today, and both were instrumental in my own development as a scholar and theatre practitioner.³⁴ The categories clearly oversimplify the wide range of feminist theatre activity over the last several decades, as both Case and Dolan acknowledged at the time. Case includes a long list of “strands” of feminisms of which people might identify with two or three:

A basic list might include radical feminism (sometimes called cultural feminism) liberal feminism, materialist feminism, socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, lesbian feminism, radical lesbian feminism, critical positions such as psychosemiotic feminist criticism, and l'écriture féminine (an application of French feminism).³⁵

After being criticized for asserting one good feminism and two “ugly” ones, Dolan was careful to emphasize the debt materialist feminism owes to the movements that preceded it, discouraging their facile dismissal.³⁶ In the last several years, materialist feminists (who created the division of historical categories) within theatre studies have begun to question the impact of their own methodologies on history, a step that acknowledges, in de Certeau's terms, a triangular relationship with the past rather than the oppositional relationship between “the living and the dead.” But to a certain extent, the separation of political approaches to the criticism and production of feminist theatre seems to have gone underground, exchanging overt criticism for a silence around methodologies deemed to be “past,” “over,” or “out of date.” Gayle Austin's 1990 *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* extends Case and Dolan's division of feminism into three basic political agendas by also defining their chronological stages, the overlapping of which can lead to the association of the past with passé, of old age with old-fashioned. Austin's stages of feminism read as follows:

- 1) working within the canon: examining images of women;
- 2) expanding the canon: focusing on women writers; and
- 3) exploding the canon: questioning underlying assumptions of an entire field of study, including canon formation.³⁷

The categorical containment of political agendas into chronological time periods explicit in Austin and implicit in Dolan risks suggesting that only one political agenda exists today.

The uneasiness with spirituality and ancestors that rippled through the WTP conference would seem to support this idea.³⁸ WTP in particular, and the institution of academia in general, clearly accord materialist analysis, which

coincides with current cross-departmental trends in cultural studies, with more cultural capital than earlier, and what are often seen as more naive, movements. For those who owe the government a “small house” for funding their graduate studies, disconnecting oneself from previous generations of feminist scholars/activists has more than nominal appeal. To remember or acknowledge connections to movements deemed outdated is to risk becoming out-dated oneself. Fear of the “living dead” seemed to haunt the conference. Unexpressed and unanalyzed differences between generations and fears of joining the ranks of the “living dead,” politically and/or chronologically speaking, limited WTP discussions of the material aging body to satirical quips and theoretical metaphors.

Moira Roth makes a similar point when she suggests that the critical writing on Lacy’s *Crystal Quilt* ignores the spiritual aspects of Lacy’s work. Roth writes:

Recent discussion of Lacy’s work generally contain no reference to subjects such as the Crone and the Witch or to the kind of powerful, discomfiting ideas which they conjure up. Why the dearth of awareness and or recognition of these foundations in Lacy’s art? I suspect that they would greatly hamper the increasingly broad appeal of her spectacles—most dramatically apparent in the state-wide interest in her Minneapolis project. Lacy herself makes less reference to this material than she once did; the art writers most interested in her work now are usually concerned with its overt political aspects.³⁹

In the last of a trilogy of articles on Lacy in *TDR*, Lucy Lippard also suggests that the political aspects of Lacy’s work overshadowed the spiritual. Lippard writes: “Because of the social form and focus of her art, prevailing dualisms within the art market have categorized her as ‘political’ as though political and spiritual were mutually exclusive” (73). But it is also possible that the spiritual side of Lacy’s work is overlooked for its generational ties to an older, “out of date” cultural feminist movement. The local Minneapolis publicity certainly corroborates Lippard’s observation. Of considerable coverage, only one article made brief reference to spirituality, outside of the profiles of participants who were active in their churches. A short description of *The Crystal Quilt* project in the *Star Tribune* links Lacy to cultural feminism (without actually using the term): “The ‘Crystal Quilt’ is the brainchild of California artist Suzanne Lacy who believes older women should be appreciated for their wisdom and sensitivity, much as priestesses were revered by the ancients.”⁴⁰ The quote, taken from Lacy’s film of the California *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* performance, is the only reference made to spirituality in any of the promotional, publicity, and inter-

organizational materials to which I had access.⁴¹ Although Lacy's work has generally emerged from spiritual questions, and *The Quilt* resonates on this level as well, any discussion of the spiritual had been cleansed from support materials.

Willful amnesia of the inter-connectedness of the present and the past in feminist performance theory contributes to the myth of "post-feminism" that troubles women's studies departments and feminist scholars across the country. Post-feminism, as the term is used, suggests that the "second wave" of the women's movement is "over," its goals either accomplished or abandoned as politically naive.⁴² Post-feminist schools of thought romanticize progress at the expense of the past—a past that is still lived by women whose lives have spanned several trends in theory and activism. The concept of aging becomes devalued as such schools of thought struggle to cut the ties of time or to erase them completely. In a metaphor borrowed from Milan Kundera, the lightness of forgetting is preferred to the heavy weight of the past.⁴³

THE LIVING PAST

How might feminists envision intergenerational connections in a culture with enormous economic stakes in perpetuating a fear of aging? *The Crystal Quilt* begins to dissolve the phobia of "the living dead" by focusing on aging women, their contributions to the present along with their connections to the past; and by creating a politicized, postmodern, self-reflexive ritual that uses oral histories to establish older women as active citizens rather than simply passive recipients of Social Security and Medicare. The seductiveness of lightness in Kundera's terms, and "transparency" in Maria Lugones', produce a yearning for a disconnection with the past, while the older women in *The Crystal Quilt* stand as symbols of the complexity and potential of thickness, of imagining the present past as "thick."⁴⁴ One can trace the stages of life in each older woman's experiences, yet the women are clearly *more* than what they were at any single point in history.⁴⁵ They are the *living past*, resisting the confluence of "old age" and "out of date," of quick, easy, and tempting associations with "old fashioned" with "old-timers." By providing spectators with scarves and inviting them to join the older women's conversations, the performance interrupted the silence that can encompass those saturated with the thickness of the past and marked as "living dead." The performance's reallocation of cultural capital to older women offers a glimpse of how re-membling the living past as vital presence might begin to untangle the associations between "old age" and "old-fashioned" that continue to feed the cultural frenzy to perform youthfulness in this country.

In addition, one can also trace a variety of historically situated, feminist performance styles in *The Quilt*, yet the performance is larger than any single category. In de Certeau's sense, Lacy writes history with the living pens of older

women, simultaneously breaking and forging connections with the past. The ritual elements and universalizing symbols of motherhood and the crone stand in concert with the performance's far-reaching organizational artistry and the more "materialist" concerns for diversity. The thickness of the older performers' lives parallels a thickness of feminist performance styles. *The Quilt* blends historical forms of feminist performance that acknowledge and value the simultaneous existence of the *living, present past*, rather than conflating and eschewing old-age and old-fashioned in the name of an illusory, perpetual postmodern present. Instead of fabricating a break between the present and the past as de Certeau claims is necessitated in "the writing of history," I assert that Lacy's work *also* celebrates the living past in the form of older women, and in the overlapping lessons of contemporary feminist theatre history.

As feminism in general, and feminism within theatre studies in particular, continues to age as a movement within the context of an aging society, it will be increasingly important to recognize how discursive constructions of time and the past impact the political movement itself, the individual lives of women, and relationships across generations of all definitions; age groups, social movements, and family lineage. The increasing speed of American culture fuels the fantasy of lightness, stigmatizes the weight of the past, and encourages an amnesia of the relationship between past and present. As life expectancy increases, and social roles across the life span shift, the multiple definitions of the term generation may yield connections across age groups, but may also contribute to stereotypes about age groups that fuse political stances and social roles. Although there is debate whether generational identities and alliances, and here I refer to the simplistic and sweeping borders between "Generation X," "Baby Boomers," "the Tweeners" and the "Silver Generation," will swell into the intergenerational war that some gerontologists and political organizations predict, certainly the transformation of American culture to an aging society will demand more awareness of aging across the life span and of negotiations between age groups. Feminists need more fully explore how their methodologies, and how the unspecified use of the term generation may unwittingly contribute to the kind of amnesia that separates the past and present, in turn cementing walls between age groups that might otherwise be permeable. Despite earnest efforts not to create "two ugly feminisms" and one good one, and the strides toward self-reflexivity in materialist feminism, entanglements of political graveyards and physical aging were still evident in the discomfort with nostalgia and the hesitancy to address spirituality and ancestors that loomed behind the 1994 WTP conference, as well as in my own trepidation

Their hands gesture as they talk. Photo by Ann Marsden. *The Crystal Quilt*. ©Suzanne Lacy



at talking with past presidents of the organization. The self-reflexiveness of recent materialist analysis, which places it *within* the historical field rather than apart from it, need also acknowledge how it is constructed in terms of a generation mobilized around a political agenda, and how the construction of political and historical categories may over-determine generational boundaries, obscuring potential links between them. Hearing the shouts of the “dead” and recognizing the vital presence of the living past can help dissolve generational barriers without erasing difference.⁴⁶

In the final session of the July, 1994 conference, an active WTP member asked why the invocation of spirituality in the opening, joint session with The Black Theatre Network had been so cavalierly brushed aside. She noted that the issue seemed to generate considerable reaction in small group meetings, but had been excused as somehow not worth pursuing in the larger group. A few people responded in support of the question, in what seemed to me, as a younger scholar trained to identify and deconstruct “essentialist” forms of feminism, a brave statement of a belief marked as passé in a rapidly changing field. But the topic faded as the discussion turned to more “viable” themes for the next year’s conference. The resonance of Dickerson’s and Teer’s invocations of ancestors, the generational tensions, and the question of spirituality, however, lingered. Two years later, at the 1996 WTP conference in New York City, spirituality was spoken and explored with such ease that the term nearly lost all meaning. Back in the safety of WTP’s predominant whiteness and missing a number of critics who had driven the conversation two years earlier, the 1996 conference had a conciliatory, happy feel. I ached for a middle ground; a critical eye toward both the condemnation of certain terms linked to the past, and their almost euphoric acceptance.

Notes

1. Personal interview, 30 September 1994.
2. These italicized sections are drawn from my memories of the Women and Theatre Program (WTP) conference in Chicago, in July 1994.
3. Phone interview, 23 September 1994.
4. The mission statement evolved throughout the project. This statement was finalized in September 1985 and was used in the project proposal packet circulated to potential funders and participants. The list of aims appears on page 1 of the September 1985 draft.
5. Lacy’s collaborators in the Split Rocks Arts performances included Lief Brush, Gloria de Felips Brush, and Judy Dwyer.
6. In the essay “Experience at the Threshold” in the anthology of *Remembered Lives*, Myerhoff writes, “[. . .] it is impossible to release the elderly from all standards of reasonable behavior. That ultimately is the most degrading position of all, with the final effect of reducing old people to

nonpeople [. . .] We must not allow old people to fall into purposelessness.” (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 224. I adjust her generalization of older people here to older women for purposes of my argument.

7. I thank Carrie Sandahl for helping clarify this point. Sandahl’s writing on Modern Primitives suggests that the collapse of performance and performativity is a tool to create the authenticity of the “primitive other.” Also see Richard Dyer’s “*A Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity” in Christine Gledhill’s *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991).

8. For more on Lacy’s past performances and an extensive bibliography of writing on Lacy before 1988, see the trilogy of articles by Moira Roth, Diane Rothenberg, and Lucy R. Lippard in *TDR*, 1988.

9. “Women Raise Their Voices” by Carol Lacey. *St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch* 10 May 1987: Sec. D; 1, 4, 5.

10. Barbara Walker *The Crone* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

11. According to Roth, in Lacy’s *Ablutions* (1972), “Lacy nailed raw beef kidneys to the wall as the tape-recorded voices of rape victims recited the details of their experiences” (1988, 50). *There are Voices in the Desert* (1978), *Edna, May Victor, Mary and Me: An All Night Benediction* (1977), and *The Lady and the Lamb or The Goat and the Hag* (1978) all use full, raw lamb carcasses. In the latter, the carcass is bound in white bandages. See Roth for Lacy’s full production history.

12. As Lacy noted to me, Schapiro’s quilt design “was reminiscent of Schapiro’s own role as founding ‘mother’ of the feminist art movement.” In regard to food imagery, a potluck dinner was held as part of the overall *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* project, but neither that performance nor *The Crystal Quilt* involved food. I make the connection to food by the image of women seated at tables together, and by Lacy’s previous work in which food has a significant presence. See Lucy Lippard’s “Suzanne Lacy: Some of her own Medicine” (*TDR*, 1988) for details on the potluck.

13. See, for example, Linda Nicholson’s “Feminism and the Politics of Postmodernism” in Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke’s *Feminism and Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1994).

14. See Vern Bengtson and W. Andrew Achenbaum’s *The Changing Contract Across Generations* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993). It is important to note here that intergenerational strife is most commonly economic in orientation, and therefore targets middle- to upper-middle-class seniors. Very little of the research on intergenerational antagonism is broken down according to race and ethnicity.

15. The organization Americans for Generational Equity in the late 1980s contributed substantially to the launching of generational blame for economic troubles. See Ken Dychwald’s popular seller *The Age Wave* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1989) and Phillip Longman’s *Born to Pay* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) for more detail.

16. In the past five years, a significant amount of literature has been dedicated to defining “Generation X.” See Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), Geoffrey Holtz’s *Welcome to the Jungle* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1995), Neil Howe and Bill Strauss’ *The 13th Generation* (New York: Vintage, 1993), and Douglas Rushkoff’s *The Generation X Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), for examples.

17. W. Andrew Achenbaum describes this as the “romantic” sensibility of the American attitude toward aging. It is my contention that this mode still dominates American culture, despite more recent theories of a “post-age” culture.

18. See George Lipsitz’s *Time Passages* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) page 72; and Lawrence Grossberg’s *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

19. I came across this useful distinction between vertical and horizontal generations in “Generations: Women’s Tradition and the Handing Down of History” (*Symposium*, Summer 1995) by Silvia Evangelista, Monica Martinat, Francesa Medioli, Cristina Papa, and Carla Tonini, an essay I explore in more detail later in this essay. Bengtson makes the distinctions about generational

definition in his opening essay in *The Changing Contract Across Generations*, co-edited with W. Andrew Achenbaum (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993).

20. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 2.

21. 2.

22. 4.

23. For Bourdieu, a social agent negotiates his/her way through a structured and structuring system divided into "fields" and "habitus." The field is a dynamic social space in which social agents act *in relationship* to one another. Habitus is a structured "system of durable transposable dispositions" that subconsciously guides the practices of a social agent. "Capital" are tools used in the struggles within ones' field. Capital can refer to, but is not limited to economics—Bourdieu divides capital into *symbolic capital*, markers of one's prestige or success in a field, and *cultural capital*, an "internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts" (*The Field of Cultural Production*, New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 7.

24. In *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), Fred Davis posits that one can predict trends of nostalgia by subtracting twenty years from the current date.

25. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 31-32.

26. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 136.

27. Lecture, Center for 20th Century Studies, 9 February 1996. Also see Lock's *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).

28. McDonald's "Politics of Aging: I'm not your mother" appeared in *Ms.* (July/August, 1990: 56-8).

29. Bowling Green University, for example, held a conference in March, 1996 predicated on exploring generational relationships within feminisms.

30. This is of course a common criticism of applications of psychoanalytic theory to literary and cultural studies. Although I point to this danger in psychoanalytic theory, I also acknowledge the connections between familial roles and the formation of the self, and the valuable contributions of psychoanalytic theory to the field of age studies.

31. See Joannie Schrof's "Feminism's Daughters" in *U.S. News and World Report*.

32. I refer again here to "Generations: Women's Tradition and the Handing Down of History," by Evangelisti et. al. (*Symposium*, Summer 1995).

33. 132.

34. Jagger and Sue-Ellen Case prefer the term "radical," while Dolan opts for "cultural." See Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988) and Dolan's *Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988).

35. Case 63.

36. Dolan 10.

37. Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990) 17.

38. WTP makes consistent and concerted efforts to support the development of its graduate students, including them in the conference as presenters and planners, and assuring representations in the group's governing structure. The uneasiness with aging and generational relationships seemed coded in talks of methodology, and revolved around the changes in academic roles and physical age among middle-aged scholars. On the opening evening of the 1994 conference, for example, long-time members of WTP shared their memories of the organizations. Some made apologies for subjecting others to their nostalgia and seemed embarrassed at being identified as "old timers" in the group. At a compelling panel session two days later, a young scholar playfully labeled her elders as "old broads." Her presentation bordered on parody, but the comment clearly struck a chord.

39. Moira Roth, "Suzanne Lacy: Social Reformer and Witch," *TDR* vol. 32 no. 1 (1988) 54-55.

40. "Best Bets," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 8 May 1987, 3C. The only reference to feminism is a one-word description of Miriam Schapiro's work with Judy Chicago "in California's feminist art program." In *Mpls St. Paul Magazine*, May (1987) 59.

41. Again, Jerry Bloedow, head of the Minnesota Board on Aging during Whisper Minnesota, graciously gave me the files he had collected during the planning, staging, and analysis of the project.

42. A similar movement in gerontology asserts that the contemporary cultural moment is "post-age," a period in which life stages lose their distinct characteristics, and in which studies of aging serve mainly to construct and reify difference across time. See Bernice and Dail Neugarten's "Changing Meanings of Age in the Aging Society," in Alan Pifer and Lydia Bronte's *Our Aging Society* (New York: Norton, 1986). Also see Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth's "The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course" in their collection *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (London: Sage: 1991).

43. Sue-Ellen Case uses a similar metaphor in "Theory/History/Revolution," in Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach's *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992). Case writes: "In sum, the new historian/theorists today no longer sound the old, wheezing note of the seamless narrative style . . ." (427).

44. See Maria Lugones' "Purity, Impurity, and Separation" in *Signs* vol. 19 (1994) 458-479.

45. Lippard makes a similar observation, but projects the image of multiplicity onto Lacy. "Lacy abandoned neither the 'witch' who presided over those first years, nor her efforts to charm and control. She turned, however, to a beneficent and outreaching aspect of her collective persona" (*TDR*, 1988, 71). She later concludes that Lacy "takes her chosen diversity and forms a new hybrid: a multiple self. Thus she gets to be one woman and all-women: the maid, the bride, and the hag; the light and the dark madonna" (75). Lippard's notion of 'multiple selves' was one of the founding ideas for this chapter, yet I redirect her approach from Lacy, to the larger field of feminist performance and criticism.

46. This essay was developed during a 1995-1996 Rockefeller Fellowship in Age Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for 20th Century Studies. I thank all those at the Center, especially Kathleen Woodward and Elinor Fuchs, for the rich discussion groups that informed this essay. I also thank Michal Kobialka and Jaqueline Zita for their careful and generous readings of earlier and wobblier drafts.