

August 25, 2011

Dear

Lying in the dark, listening to the explosions of bombs being dropped over London, Virginia Woolf asked herself, "how we can think peace into existence..." In *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid* she urges women to fight without weapons, "We can fight with the mind," she writes, "There are other tables besides officers tables and conference tables." A valuable weapon available to men and women alike is "private thinking, tea-table thinking," the kind of thinking with which the suffragist movement was launched. Woolf notes that, "Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it." (Quotes are from Woolf's essay, *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid*. 1940).

This letter is from subRosa, an interdisciplinary collective of (cyber)feminist artist/researchers using participatory and situational performance in the public sphere to explore and critique the intersections of information and biotechnologies in women's bodies, lives, and work. We are currently preparing a discursive exhibition: *Feminist Matter(s): Propositions and Undoings* for the Pittsburgh Biennial (Sept. 16-Dec. 9, 2011) and we invite you to contribute your important voice and experience to our "tea-table thinking."

subRosa's exhibition of "tea-tables" combines notes and drawings from some of our scientific, gardening, or lab experiences, and shows intimate versions of lab workbenches and work spaces that evoke the often improvised and domestic spaces in which many women scientists did their first important work. With this project we are initiating a collective inquiry and thinking about different "bench-side" approaches to feminist knowledge sharing and science pedagogy. Thinkers, makers, activists, and wise women--such as Rachel Carson, Barbara McClintock, and Remedios Varo's female alchemists and scientists--hint at vital links to a hidden past and possible future(s) of feminist art and science practices across various disciplines and spaces. Activist scientist Vandana Shiva has written that we need science research in "epidemiology, ecology, evolutionary and developmental biology...and experts on taxonomic groups such as microbes, insects, and plants to respond to the crisis of biodiversity erosion.." She warns of the dangers of ignoring useful and necessary research, and concentrating only on what's profitable. (*Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, p. 17)



Book-cover Quilt, subRosa, August 2011, Regina Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University.

subRosa believes that art can often bridge gaps between disciplines in productive and unexpected ways. We have questions--not least among them the question of how best to connect to the many, often isolated, feminist science researchers, practitioners, thinkers, teachers, mothers, lab technicians, theorists, etc. who are contributing vital knowledge to the crucial scientific issues of our time--and with whom we'd like to be in conversation.

Our research shows that while women scientists are often still battling enormous odds in the workplace and the academy, many of them are also devising ways of doing their work, teaching, and making it public that are inspiring and empowering especially for young female scientists. As a first move toward connection, we are writing to you to ask you for a personal "Letter to a feminist scientist" about your work, and the conditions of your work place, in any way that you'd like to share it—it doesn't have to be lengthy. As writer Deena Metzger put it: "The letter is a form women are taking for themselves in order to write the private word (or experience) in the public space..." It would also be wonderful to have an image of your work and/or living space, and of yourself at work.

We intend to collect these letters and images and make them available to exhibition visitors. We hope to stimulate interest in a publication about feminist science pedagogy. We sincerely hope you will respond to our request.

Please send hand-written, typed, or email letters and images. We will place them in our exhibition for visitors to read. If you feel that you could say more anonymously, please let us know. As Woolf remarked "Anonymous was a woman".

With warm greetings, respect, and deep thanks for your work,
subRosa (Faith Wilding and Hyla Willis)

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